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New Currants
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Cooked Meats, Hams, Bacon, with the Home-like flavor.

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SELECTING THE CHRISTMAS TREE

Poetry.

CHRISTMAS THOUGHTS

The mistletoe hung in the castle hall;
The holly branch shone on the old oak wall.

—Hayly.

Shepards at the grange,
Where the babe was born,
Sang with many a change
Christmas carols until morn.

—Longfellow.

At Christmas I no more desire a rose
Than wish a snow in May's newfangled shows.

Shakespeare.

Be merry all, be merry all,
With holly dress the festive hall,
Prepare the song, the feast, the ball,
To welcome merry Christmas.

—W. R. Spencer.

God rest ye, little children; let nothing you affright,
For Jesus Christ, your Saviour, was born this happy night.
Along the hills of Galilee the white flocks sleeping lay
When Christ, the child of Nazareth, was born on Christmas day.

-D. M. Moirch.

Select Family Reading

An Empty Purse

By Sarah Orne Jewett

CHAPTER I

LITTLE Miss Debby Gaines was counting the days to Christmas; there were only three and the weather was bright and warm for the time of the year.

"I've got to step fast to carry out all my plans," she said to herself. "It seems to me as if it were going to be a beautiful Christmas; it won't be like any I've spent lately, either. I shouldn't wonder if it turned out for the best, my losing that money I always call my Christmas money; anyway I'll do the best I can to make up for it."

Miss Debby was sitting by the window sewing as fast as she could, while the light of the short winter day was going, mending a warm old petticoat and humming a psalm tune. Suddenly she heard a knock at the door; she lived in two upstair rooms and could not see the street.

"Come in!" she called cheerfully and dropped her lapful of work.

"Why, if it isn't Mrs. Rivers!" she said with much pleasure.

The guest was a large woman, fashionably dressed. You would have thought that a very elegant blue-jay had come to make a late afternoon call upon such a brown, chippy-sparrow as Miss Debby Gaines. Miss Debby felt much honored, and brought her best rocking chair, and Mrs. Rivers seated herself and began to rock. Her stiff, silk gown creaked as if it were a ship at sea.

"What are you doing—something pretty for Christmas?" she asked.

"It may be for Christmas but it isn't very pretty," answered Miss Debby, with a little laugh and shake of the head. "Tell you the truth I was mending up a nice warm petticoat that I don't have much use for; I though I'd give it to old Mrs. Bean at the poorhouse. She's a complaining, cold, old creature, and she's got poor eyesight and can't sew, and I thought this would make her real comfortable. It's rather more heavy than I used to wear."

"I've been down town all the afternoon and it's so tiresome trying to get at anything in the store," said Mrs. Rivers. "They push you right away from what you want time to look over. I like to consider what I buy. It's a great burden to me trying to get ready for Christmas and I thought I shouldn't do anything this year on account of my health. I've had large expenses this autumn. I had to have new carpets and a new outside garment. I do like to see the pretty things in the stores, but they were so full of people and so hot and disagreeable this afternoon."

Miss Debby had picked up her petticoat and was holding it close to the window while she sewed on the button with firm, linen stitches.

"I haven't been down the street for two or three days," she said. "You'll excuse me for goin' on with my work, it's most dark and it'll be done in a moment, then we can sit and talk."

"It does me good to come and see you once in a while," said Mrs. Rivers, plaintively. "I thought I'd stop on my way home. Last year you had so many pretty little things that you'd been making."

"There aren't any at all this year," answered Miss Debby bravely. "It wasn't convenient so I thought I'd just try having another kind of a merry Christmas."

"Sometimes I wish I had no more responsibilities than you have. My large house is such a care. Mr. Rivers is very particular about everything and so am I." She gave a great sigh and creaked louder than before, but Miss Debby did not have the right sort of consolation to offer, and kept silence. "You enjoy having your pretty house," she ventured to say after a few moments, "you wouldn't like to do with as little as some—" and Mrs. Rivers shook her head in the dusk and went on rocking.

"Presents aren't nothing unless the heart goes with them," said Miss Debby boldly at last, "and I think we can show good feeling in other ways than by bestowing little pincushions. Any way, I've got to find those ways this year. 'Tis a day when we New England folks can seem to speak right out to each other, and that does some good. Somethin' gets in the air. I expect now to enjoy this Christmas myself, though I felt dreadful bad last week, saying to myself 'twas the first time I couldn't make any presents. I didn't know how interested I was going to get; you see I've made my little plans."

Then they talked about other things and Mrs. Rivers grew more cheerful and at last went away. She always found Christmas a melancholy season. She did not like the trouble of giving them, or, in fact, at any other time; but she had her good points, as Miss Debby Gaines always insisted.

CHAPTER II

On Christmas morning early Miss Debby waked up with a feeling of happy expectation and could hardly wait to make her cup of tea and eat her little breakfast on the corner of the table before she got out her best bonnet and Sunday cloak to begin her Christmas errands. It was misty and dark but the sunlight came at last, pale and radiant into the little brown room; and Miss Debby's face matched it with a quiet smile and happy look of eagerness.

"Take neither purse nor scrip," she said to herself, as she went downstairs to the street. There was nobody else stirring in the house, but she knew that the poorhouse would be open and its early breakfast past by the time she could get there. It was a mile or so out of town. She hugged a large package under her shawl, and shivered a little at the beginning of her walk. There was no snow, but the heavy hoar-frost glittered on the sidewalks and the air was sharp.

Old Mrs. Bean was coming out of the great kitchen, and when her friend wished her a merry Christmas she shook her head.

"There ain't nobody to make it merry for me," she said.

"I wish you a happy Christmas," said Miss Debby again. "I've come on purpose to be your first caller an'. I am going to make you the only present I shall give this year. 'Tis something useful, Miss Bean; a warm petticoat. I've fixed up nice, so's you can put it right on an' feel the comfort of it."

The old woman's face brightened.

"Why, you are real kind," she said, eagerly. "It is the one thing I've been wantin'. Oh yes, dear sakes! ain't it a beautiful warm one? One of the real old-fashioned quilted kind. I always used to have 'em when I was better off. Well that *is* a present!"

"Now I'm goin' because I can come an' set an' talk with you any day, and to-day I've got Christmas work," and off Miss Debby went to the heart of the town again.

Christmas was on Tuesday that year, and she opened the door of a little house where a tired looking young woman stood by an ironing table and looked at her in surprise

"Why Miss Gaines!" she exclaimed, "where are you going to so early?"

"I wish you a happy Christmas!" said Miss Debby. "I've come to spend the day with you. Just through breakfast? No, the little girls are eatin' away yet. Why, you're late."

"I didn't mean to be," said the young mother, "but I felt so tired this morning, and pretty sad too, thinking of last year an' all. So I just let the children sleep. Nelly's got cold and was coughing most all night, and I couldn't bear to get up and begin the day. Mother sent for me to come over to spend Christmas but I couldn't get the courage to start. Should she'd have some little presents ready for the little girls, and now I'm most sorry I disappointed her."

"That's just why I'm here," said Miss Debby gayly, and with double her usual decision. "No Nelly's not fit to go out, I can see, but you leave her here with me, an' you just get ready and take Susy and go. Your mother'll think everything of it, and I'll see to things here. Ironing? Why, 'twill do me good. I feel a little chilly and Nelly and I can have a grand time. Now you go right off and get ready and catch the quarter-to-nine train. I won't hear no words about it."

So presently the pale, hard-worked young mother in her widow's bonnet started off down the street, leading bright-faced little Susy by the hand, and Miss Debby and her favorite Nellie watched them go from the window. The breakfast dishes were washed and put away in such fashion that Nelly thought it quite as good as doll's housekeeping; and then while Miss Debby ironed, she sat in a warm corner by the stove and listened to stories and to Miss Debby's old fashioned ballads, which though sung in a slightly cracked voice, were most delightful to childish ears. What a Christmas morning it was. And after the small ironing was done what pleasant things there seemed to be to do. Miss Debby rummaged until she found some little aprons cut for the children and first she basted one for Nelly to sew and then she took the other herself, and they sat down together and sewed until dinner time. The aprons were pink and added to the gayety of the occasion; and they were ready at last to surprise Nelly's mother by being put back in their place in the same roll—all done even to the buttons and buttonholes, for Miss Debby found time to finish Nelly's as well as her own. And they had bread and milk for dinner and Miss Debby told stories of when she was a little girl.

Altogether there never was a happier Christmas Day, and the spirit of Christmas peace and goodwill shone bright in Miss Debby's face. Her quick eyes saw many chances to lend a helping hand to the poor, defenceless household.

When Nelly's mother came home at night, heartened and cheered by her visit, she found the ironing and mending done, and a day or two later the pink aprons turned up all ready to be put on. And Nelly's tiresome cough which sounded like the whooping cough, was quite stilled by some good old-fashioned dose which Miss Debby mixed agreeably with molasses and put to simmer on the stove. There seemed to be no end to the kind and thoughtful things Miss Debby did that day in a neighbor's house.

She had started for home at dusk, just before it was time for young Mrs. Preller to get back, and was walking along the street, a little tired but very happy.

WATCHING FOR SANTA CLAUS

"Why, its only half-past four o'clock now!" she exclaimed as she passed the watchmaker's window. "I mean to go and see Mrs. Wallis a little while," and she quickened her steps.

Presently Miss Debby Gaines came to a fine, large house, very different from the one she had just left, and took pains to straighten her little black bonnet as she went up the long flight of handsome stone steps. An elderly man-servant opened the door.

"I wish you a happy Christmas," said Miss Debby. "Can I see Mrs. Wallis, do you suppose, Mr. Johnstone?"

"Oh, yes'm," said Johnstone, with feeling. "I was wishing somebody'd come in, Miss Gaines, now it's beginning to get dark. The young ladies was here this morning, and brought their present, but they'd made a promise to go out into the country with some young friends, so they aren't coming to dinner and Mrs. Wallis has been alone all day. She was pleased to have 'em go, though."

By this time Miss Debby had crossed the wide hall to the library where the lonely old mistress of the household usually sat. She hesitated a moment before she could speak.

"I wish you a happy Christmas," she said. "It's me, Mrs. Wallis—Debby Gaines."

"Why, Miss Debby," and there was something in the tone of this hostess which told at once that she was glad to see a friend. "Why Miss Debby! Come and sit down in this chair by me. I don't doubt you have been trotting about all day," and Mrs. Wallis held out an affectionate hand.

"No, I've been keepin' house for Mis' Preller, so she could go an' see her mother," explained Miss Debby, quite simply. "I had a nice time with her little girl that's just getting over a cold and couldn't go with the others. I was just on my way home. I thought I'd stop and see if there was anything I could do for you."

"Nothing except to stay a little while and keep me company," said Mrs. Wallis. "My grand-daughters are usually here but they had a very pleasant plan made for them, and I was very glad to have them go. A skating party and a dinner at the Ashton's country house and a dance."

"Young folks will be young folks," said Miss Debby. "I should like to hear all about it when they come home and tell. Everybody seemed to be going somewhere to-day, 'twas the nice clear weather."

"There are all my pretty presents on the table," said Mrs. Wallis. "Somehow they haven't been very good company; this is the first Christmas in all my life that I have happened to spend quite alone."

Miss Debby might not have done it with out thinking by daylight but she drew a little nearer and took hold of Mrs. Wallis's hand.

"You must have had a great many lovely things to remember," she said softly "But anybody can't help feeling lonesome, I know how 'tis. Everybody misses somebody the world over. There was all of us together once at home, and I'm kind of a sparrow on the housetops. But I've had a beautiful day so far. I own I was afraid you'd have a sight of company an' I should have to miss seeing you."

"I'm glad somebody wanted to see me," said Mrs. Wallis more cheerfully, "and one of the friends I've known longest." And they went on with much pleasant talk of both the old days and the present time and Mrs. Wallis gave Miss Debby a cup of tea, and they had a happy little feast together there in the library before the humble loving-hearted guest went away, leaving peace and good-will once more in a lonely and troubled heart.

She stopped here and there at the houses of other friends, forgetting in her happiness that she was empty-handed on Christmas day, and everywhere she left a new feeling of friendliness and pleasant kindness. At one house she comforted a crying child by mending his Christmas top and at another she knew just how to help a pretty girl to dress for her Christmas party, and sat down and took off her big woollen gloves to alter the refractory dress which it had seemed impossible to wear. She was like good angel as she sat there sewing and smiling and making everybody's mind at ease.

It was late in the evening when this was done and she had had a long day; but she stopped with great bravery, and asked to see the minister, and told him how thankful she was for his sermon on Sunday and wished him a happy Christmas. The minister had been a little discouraged for some reason as ministers often are in spite of everything, and even some great kindness in the shape of welcome presents from his friends did not cheer him half so much as the sincerity and affection of Miss Debby's visit. And he watched the little figure go down the street with tears in his eyes. So few people could forget themselves to remember others as this dear parishioner could; it was worth living for, if one could sometimes help and refresh those who are the true helpers; and so he went back to his work in the study feeling like a better and busier man than when he had left it.

So Miss Debby came back to her little home again. The fire was out and it was all dark, but she went straight to her small rocking-chair by the window and sat down to rest, and to thank the Lord for such a happy day. And though her purse was empty her heart was full, and she had left a little pleasure behind her all along the way.

Presently she lighted her lamp and she saw on the table a great package and a note beside it; and the note was from Mrs. Rivers.

"Something you said the other day," Miss Debby read, "made me feel differently about Christmas from what I ever have before, and I am going to try to make as many people happy as I can. And you must believe that my heart goes with those presents that I send to you. They are some of my own things that I liked, and wanted to share with you, and I send them with love."

Miss Debby's face shone with joy. She had always liked Mrs. Rivers, but she had pitied her a little; and now the note made her feel as if she had found a new friend and made her happy without knowing it. And so Miss Debby's Christmas came to its happy end.

THE END

THE WAR AGAINST THE SALOON

The war against the saloon has been greatly strengthened through the rigorous suppression of the liquor traffic by the nations now engaged in a life-and-death struggle. When there was need for the highest efficiency—for keen eye, and steady hand, and unclouded brain—in the service of the nation the Government of Russia took most drastic measures to prevent the sale of vodka, the manufacture of which has long been a State monopoly, bringing a great revenue to the public treasury, while the French Government unhesitatingly forbade the sale of absinthe or similar liquors containing high alcoholic contents. In Germany, for the conservation of the food supply, it was ordered that only forty per cent. of the quantity of barley devoted to the making of beer should be used, and in Great Britain the public were requested by the chiefs of the army not to "treat" men wearing the uniform. The economic waste of the liquor traffic and its destructive effect in making men unfit have never before been so unreservedly admitted as during the past three months. The "personal liberty" cry was not permitted for a moment to weigh in the balance when the national life of France and Russia were seen to be at stake. The transformation in Russia has been so great that public opinion there is almost irresistibly in favor of permanent prohibition of the manufacture and sale of vodka.

On this continent the "dry" area is increasing very rapidly. At the recent State elections Virginia, Oregon, and Colorado joined the list of commonwealths in which prohibition is Statewide. The movement in the direction of absolute prohibition was slow at first, and the Maine experiment was scoffed at as an elaborate hypocrisy, but, that stage is long past. How strong the sentiment against the liquor traffic is! Against all odds the Temperance Reformers of Ontario may be trusted to fight on till the campaign ends in victory, complete and final.—Globe.

IT WOULDN'T HIT DOWN

"You are charged with permitting your automobile to stand unattended for over an hour," chanted the Judge.

"Well, I defy anybody to touch the dare thing to sit down," protested the prisoner before the court attendant dragged him away.

BRILLIANTS

Yet, though my progress be but slow
And failure oft obscure the past,
I, too, victorious at last,
Shall reach the longed for light, I know!

—Florence Earle Coates.

The morns are meeker than they were:
The nuts are getting brown:
The berry's cheek is plumper:
The rose is out of town.

-Emily Dickinson.

Blow it now.
Make hearts happy, roses grow.
Let the friends around you know
The love you have before they go:
Blow it now.

—Charles M. Skinner.

Be noble—that is more than wealth.
Do right—that is more than place.

—George Macdonald.

TWENTY YEARS AGO

Notes from the Free Press of Thursday, December 20th, 1894

Cheyne & Cheyne have just got in a car of No. 1 Manitoba hard wheat.

Good dry beech and maple cut twenty-two inches, is selling here for $3.50 per cord.

Messrs. Laing Bros., gave a phonographic concert before 1500 Catholic children at Hull one day last week.

Sir John Thompson, Premier of Canada, died suddenly in Windsor Castle on the 12th, being taken suddenly ill while at luncheon with the Marquis of Rixon and others. He had shortly before been sworn in as a member of the Queen's Privy Council. The flag has been flying on Acton town hall at half-mast during the week out of respect to his memory.

Mr. W. L. Worden, Jr., has purchased his father's house on Church Street, next to St. Joseph's Church, and moved into it with his family.

Messrs. J. L., and J. M. Warren have received the contract for supplying Georgetown Public School with 30 cords of two foot maple for $167.70.

Rev. Wm. Bryers preached for Rev. J. W. Rae in Knox Church last Sunday while the latter was preaching Methodist anniversary sermons at Peterboro. This denominational reciprocity manifests a fellowship worthy of Christian people.

Rev. James Harris, a venerable retired minister, in Guelph, preached in the Methodist Church here on Sunday, able, earnest and impressive sermons. Rev. Mr. Howell was in Paisley.

Acton Temperance Union Parliament considered a Prohibition Bill in Committee of the Whole last Friday evening. The absence of Hon. Sir J. W. Rae, Leader of Government, handicapped considerably the supporters of the Bill. The speech of the evening was that of Hon. A. Ling, member for North York. It was able, logical and convincing, and gave evidence of careful reading and study. Hon. J. L. Charlos, acted as chairman of the committee.

Miss E. Pauline Johnson, the Indian poetess-reciter, gave a fine entertainment in the hall on Tuesday evening. All her selections were original and from her own works. In her quaint Mohawk costume she did much toward thrilling the large audience with her soul-stirring numbers.

Miss Jennie Jolliffe, of Rockwood, has successfully passed her examinations at Brampton, and is now entitled to wield the "birch."

Mr. John Pletsch was called to Alsfeld on Monday to see his mother, who is very ill.

Miss Augusta Smith, of Guelph, a granddaughter of the renowned Laura Secord, is visiting with Mrs. S. A. Secord.

Mr. J. H. Hacking, founder of the Free Press, has removed from Winnipeg to Buffalo, and is now residing with his son-in-law, Mr. Henry F. Hill in that city.

Mr. Chas. Falkner, who left for England some weeks ago, has arrived safely at the home of the youth. He will enter Oxford University, and complete his law course there.

Mrs. A. Stephenson and Mrs. James McLaus left on Saturday for Sarnia to attend the wedding of their niece. Mr and Mrs. John Cameron left yesterday morning for the same point.

SIDER MADNESS

To the Editor:

To license a man to sell intoxicants is just as rational as to license a man to spit on the sidewalk or to license a man with the smallpox to walk down the street—not a bit more. Intoxicants do far more harm than consumption and smallpox put together, and if this applies to him who sells it applies with equal force to him or her who gives. You never know where the disease may take and no one has the right to ask another to run the risk.

Some say that it is an infringement of personal liberty but is it no an infringement on our personal liberty to compel us to pay taxes to take care of the mischief that is wrought by the whiskey people in the form of crime bills, maintaining extra police, prisons, poorhouses, madhouses and in caring for neglected families.

Listen to this pathetic incident. Recently two thirds of the inmates of the Eastern State Penitentiary which has a population of 1500, petitioned the State Legislation to prohibit the use of intoxicating beverages. Poor fellows, they know that only for alcohol they would not be there. We talk about the cruelty of the Germans in this dreadful war but are we not just as cruel to compel our young men to run the gauntlet of the saloon knowing well that, while many will escape, that very many will be ruined and not a few killed by it every year? Its ravages are more insidious than war but none the less real.

Listen also to this. Prohibition went into effect in West Virginia July 1st. Before that time there was an average of twenty cases in the Wheeling Police Court every day. Since then two a day has been the average. There are now just one third as many inmates in the county jail as formerly and the Board of Control plan to do with one-half the number of policemen.

When we hear of such cases and when we think how we are burdened with taxes to keep up this dreadful business it makes one wonder if we are not a race of lunatics.

H. Arnott, M. B., M. C. P. S.