

Public Library, Mrs. Jennings Oct 7 1905

HIGHLAND PARK NEWS-LETTER

Volume 18

HIGHLAND PARK, ILLINOIS, DECEMBER 23, 1905

Number 32

The Judge's Christmas Eve

By ROSE BROWN

The judge had finished his dinner, pushed the tray aside and again taken up his work. Running rapidly over some papers, he found the desired one, and, laying it on top of the great heap of manuscripts around him, began speedily to make corrections.

His assistant, putting on his overcoat, turned to go with, "Merry Christmas; and, by the way, judge, I was told to tell you that St. Mary's Home for Girls is to have its Christmas exercises and tree in the large hall just across the passage; and if you—" but he got no further, for the judge interrupted him with, "Tush with merry Christmas, and nonsense with orphan asylums and poorhouses, and what not!"

Outside, the bustle of Christmastide was in full sway. Men, women and children were hurrying through the streets with bundles of every shape and description. The pale light of the moon shone down and seemed to increase the cold of zero weather. The brilliant light of the shops streamed through frosted window panes, that permitted a sight of only a small part of the wonders inside. The judge's assistant, with hundreds of others, had stopped in to buy toys for his little one at home. "What a dreary and lonely life a man must lead with nothing to love but his books and papers!" he thought, and murmured to himself: "A queer old chap. It's a pity he doesn't take interest in children." He pressed his parcel closer as he thought of the delight he would bring to his own little girl at home.

Meanwhile the judge, among his papers, let the happy crowds go by, and no Christmas spirit entered his soul. The fire crackled merrily on the hearth, waiting, perhaps, although in vain, for tiny stockings to be hung before its genial blaze. No thought of little stockings, no thought of the little wearers entered his mind. He hardly knew that it was Christmas Eve; he was too busy; he was a man of letters. No such truck and nonsense would he busy himself with. Judge Lindsay was a man embittered by sorrow and hardened by his long life of business. Like Scrooge, his associates were acquaintances, not friends. Hospitals, asylums, preachers and missionaries had all alike given up trying to draw from him pity and help for the poor and needy.

Presently the judge was disturbed by a great clattering of feet on the stair. He strode impatiently over to the door and closed it with such a bang that the windows rattled and his papers flew. As he saw the crowd of shabby children, he muttered: "Some fool charity organization again, for lazy people's children."

Once more the judge was bent over his papers, but not for long. With a frown—the frown that made children run and his own servants tremble—he arose and flung open the door, with: "George makes this room beastly hot." The room was no warmer than usual, but the judge was uncomfortable in it. What was the matter with him? Had he had too strenuous a day, or had his curiosity run away with him? Did his conscience give him a twinge, or was his gout worse to-day? His fire was no warmer, yet he opened the door. Perhaps it was a higher will, stronger even than that of the stubborn judge, that made him do it.

As the door swung open the clear voice of a child reached his ears from the hall opposite. It sounded like bells on a wintry night, and something in its clearness made the judge start and lean for a moment against the door. It reminded him of another voice as it used to call from the stair, "Good-night, papa, good-night," when the last kiss had been given and the sunny curls were off for bed. It was long ago—yes, long ago; so long that the judge's heart had had time since then to grow cold. So now the little voice from the great hall opposite began to read; the judge drew nearer, and this is what he heard:

"The Land of the Happy Heart.

"It was Christmas Eve, and the town bustled and rushed with the joy of Christmastide—all except old Dr. Soloman Stewart. He alone had no exciting parcels to hide at home in secret corners. He worked even later than usual over his numerous books and papers. He had long ago given up his medical practice to study and write.

"Some people whispered among themselves that Soloman Stuart had hoarded vast sums of money; others, when they saw his bent old figure leaning on a cane as he mumbled to himself along the street, touched their foreheads significantly; still others, who had read his articles on medicine, said that he was a soured old genius, wrapped up in nothing but his books. This surmise was the most correct of all. Soloman for the most of his life had bent over books and thought of no one save himself.

"Having completed reading a huge volume, he went over to the fireplace, seated himself in his armchair, stretched his feet to the fender and gazed at the burning embers. The clock in a nearby tower struck one, two, three until the eighth was reached. Suddenly, instead of the fire and the fender before him, Soloman seemed to see a glorious sunset. All was aglow with red and purple, with fainter tints of lavender and pink intermingled. It was peculiar, and he hurried to investigate it. He seemed to be running down a wide street, dodging numerous vehicles. He ran on and on, until at last he reached the golden splendor in the west. No longer did the colors seem to be clouds; he was surrounded by wonderful archways of colored marble. Continuing his course through these, he came presently upon a huge brazen portal. On it was a large handle of ivory. This he seized and pulled with all his might. A sound of chimes greeted his ear, and a tiny butler with powdered wig and colonial coat came to the door. At first the little man's mouth was wreathed in smiles, but when he saw Soloman's cold face he, too, began to frown.

"Who sent you here?" he asked, "and for what do you come? Only joyful people—good and loving people—people ready to give to others, are allowed in these realms."

"Soloman, feeling his advantage against so small a man, pushed over him and went through the door, saying: 'I am no servant or boy to be chided; I come for more learning!'

"The little old man, picking himself up, replied: 'Here you will learn what you ne'er knew before! Kindness and happiness are of more worth than all

your old books and learning. What I say to you now will be said to you more,

"Dark not our doors, get back while you can! Flee from this kingdom, you miserable man!"

"Then he disappeared. Soloman paid little attention to this. He marched straight through a long hall until he reached a staircase. Having mounted this, he walked into a large room. Bright sunlight poured through the windows and shone on the faces of hundreds of children—wee, tiny little children, all laughing and smiling. Suddenly one little mite, seeing Soloman, pointed a finger at him, and all at once the children grew grave and then angry at his intrusion; and they cast their tiny toys at him. But Soloman, paying no more attention to these pelts than he would to so many raindrops, went on hearing their little voices as they called after him:

"Dark not our doors, get back while you can! Flee from this kingdom, you miserable man!"

"Arriving at another door, he looked in. Here he saw little teachers teaching their still smaller pupils. All the scholars were nodding and smiling in the pleasantest manner possible. Tiny birds and butterflies were flitting around the room and bees hummed as they busily stored away honey in tiny cells on the window sills. Soloman frowned down on the school and said aloud to himself: 'Do they think they are learning anything?' But all at once, at the sound of his harsh voice, the room was thrown into confusion; the birds flew up and pecked at his face; the bees stung him on his hands and neck; the little teachers with all their little might struck at him with their pointers, and the scholars raised up their voices and screamed:

"Dark not our doors, get back while you can! Flee from this kingdom, you miserable man!"

"Soloman walked out slowly. The peck of the birds merely tickled him; the sting of the bees were only as the sting of nettles; the pointers of the teachers he did not feel at all through his heavy clothes; but this time the words of the children reached his ears very plainly.

"Soloman next entered a room filled with little old ladies and little old men, smiling and nodding while busily reading papers or knitting with their tiny ivory needles. All had expressions of perfect content on their faces. The scholar did not see this happiness; he only saw them as so many tiny human beings, hardly worthy of his notice. As soon as they spied him they, too, cried out, like the others:

"Dark not our doors, get back while you can! Flee from this kingdom, you miserable man!"

"He noticed in each case that all were smiling when he came in, but frowning when he left, and he wondered why this was. All at once he began to feel what he had not felt before—a sense of loneliness.

"At last he walked into a room glimmering with the soft light of candles. Here he saw the faces of children gathered happily around a Christmas