

PETER PERKINS' DREAM.

BY EMILY ARTHUR.

"Inasmuch as ye have done it unto the least of these, my children, ye have done it unto me."
 "There is that ham, it is too old to sell, and this barrel of wormy dried apples, and a barrel of meal and one of flour, which are both a little moldy, but still good enough to give to the poor, and that half barrel of sugar that the kerosene was spilled in, and those two sacks of rice that has weevils, and you might add all that stale bread. They will make a good showing, and I guess my name will head the list, for nobody else would give so much. These things you can set aside, Mark, and to-morrow I want them carried round to the society's rooms with my compliments. Aha! This will help many a poor family to enjoy a good Christmas dinner, and will help me with my customers. Everybody likes a generous man, but few of the brethren will make as good a display as I shall to-morrow. I guess I'll go home now, Mark, and, ah, here are \$2 for your Christmas. I can't afford more. You know business is slack. Well, good night."



"IT IS TOO OLD TO SELL."

And wizen old Peter Perkins got into his old overcoat and went home through the streets where the snow lay thick and heavy until he reached his comfortable looking three story house. After he rang the bell he muttered to himself:

"I might just as well have only given Mark \$1 instead of \$2. He'd been just as thankful, and I'd saved that much. And all those things there—why, I could have sold them at a discount, but then, after it all, I was losing ground in church custom by what they call my stinginess, and now, well, I guess after all I'm glad I give them. The poor who get them can't complain. Oh, here she comes at last! And she will expect a present, too! It seems as if everybody was beset Christmas time! I'm sick of it. Ha!"

At this instant Mrs. Warner, who was servant and housekeeper both, opened the door, her rather long face wreathed in smiles and her form dressed in her best black silk gown. Peter Perkins was astonished and surprised as she led the way to the dining room, where the old man's dinner was laid, for on the table smoked a splendid turkey, while several other dainties and toothsome dishes stood about, among them a noble mince pie that gave out a mellow, luscious odor that mortal could not withstand, and yet he turned, saying fiercely:

"Mary Warner! Who gave you authority to do this? Why, here is dinner enough for twenty, and such extravagance! I told you this morning I didn't believe in holiday nonsense, and I told you to cook half a mackerel and a potato, didn't I?"

"You did, sir, and I was going to do it; only this morning my sister in the country sent me a Christmas box, and these were in it, and as I couldn't eat them all myself I made bold to offer you half, sir, and no offense, I hope."

"Oh, well, that alters the case. Well, yes, I don't care if I do," and he allows himself to fall in the chair she pushed forward, and he fell to and in a short time had eaten a most excellent dinner, which he finished with a great golden doughnut and piece of cheese. He took these as a dream, one in each hand, and made alternate bites of doughnut and cheese in a reflective and even retrospective manner as he thought:

"Why don't city folks learn to make crullers like this? For love nor money you couldn't buy anything like this in all this great city. They taste just as mother used to make them. Her tin cruller box was never empty and how good they were; the older they were the mellow and better they were. I remember she used to make me a boy and a mouse every time she fried crullers, and always two P's for my letters. And Christmas and New Year's she put caraway seed candies all over mine. I wonder how she did it. That mince pie was good. I think I will take another piece. It ain't cost anything and it makes me think of old times."

And so the miserly old man sat and ate until his usual bedtime came, when he lit his candle, for he never would have gas, and went to bed.

Scarcely had he got warm and comfortable when he saw standing by his bedside a stranger whose face was carefully turned away, and who wore a long, loose garment of some unknown fashion, and instinctively Peter Perkins put his hand under his pillow after his revolver, thinking of robbers, but the stranger said in a low voice, which yet had such authority in it that the wretched man dared not disobey:

"Arise, dress yourself and follow me." As in a dream the little miser followed, but they went so swiftly that he could not see where they were going until at last the stranger said:

"Open your eyes and tell me what you see."

Peter Perkins stood and gazed with his wizen face pale and frightened. He seemed to be in a vast place, so vast that it appeared to be visible illimitable space. There was no beginning nor end to it anywhere, and yet he was there in the midst of this infinity of distance, and before him upon nothing stood great tables upon which was piled a heterogeneous collection of everything imaginable, and while he was trying to understand this confusion, he noticed that there had appeared, rank on rank and file on file, limitless, countless numbers of cherubim and seraphim, and in the midst of this throng sat upon a crystal throne Christ, the benign, the loving, the pitiful, and his features seemed to exude sweetness and mercy from every lineament, and his smile was ineffably tender.

The cherubim and seraphim sang "Glorv, glory to God in the highest and

on earth peace and good will to men," and as Peter Perkins watched this beautiful countenance he saw its expression change. Sometimes it became that of a little child, sweet and infantine, again it was tender and pitiful, then it looked as it must have done when he said, "Come to me, all ye weary and heavy laden," then it was filled full of sorrow and merciful goodness, and then it grew stern and awful.

Then Peter Perkins noticed that there was a throng ever increasing and reaching far below them so that the end of them was far out of sight, and these people came singly to the foot of the Saviour and there laid a gift which was instantly taken by the angels and laid upon a pair of scales, which did not measure by the weight of the gift itself, but the motive which lay like a living heart inside it.

Then Peter Perkins saw that all who had not yet offered their gift had a burden to carry, large or small, and he suddenly became aware that the burden fastened upon his own back was enormous and was very heavy. But he turned to the stranger and said: "When will it be my turn?"

"When all of these shall have passed," and he had to stand there with the great unknown weight upon his shoulders for long hours, or days, or years, he did not know which, while all these people came by.

He noticed a man who staggered by and laid a heavy weight of gold chalices and church candlesticks and other emblems at his feet, and Peter Perkins saw with surprise that they flew up in the balance as if of air. Another offered a church, which was as so much paper, and then a poor old woman in rags staggered along with a cup of cold water as her only offering. This sent the scales down, down, as if it weighed a ton, and then a pale, thin man came and offered only a tear. This, too, weighed heavier than gold. Sometimes an old broken toy, or some old, worn garments, or even a crust of bread was laid at his feet, and these, too, were very heavy on those wonderful scales.

Peter Perkins noticed, too, that those whose gifts were light disappeared from view, and he watched until he saw them fall into space and fade away in distance, while the angels sent pitying glances after them.

Suddenly the Saviour said: "Now, Peter Perkins, what gift have you brought to the Lord on this his birthday?"

"Oh! I am willing to give you all I have, but this bundle upon my back was not intended for you, but for the poor. If you will let me go back I will return with something more worthy of you."

"But what have you in that bundle?" "Only some flour, and meal, and sugar, and ham, and rice, which are not quite fresh—and good, but I thought they would do for the poor."

"And have you never heard of my words, when I said: 'Inasmuch as ye do it unto the least of these, my children, ye do it unto me?' Look, that cup of water was given by a sick and suffering woman to one who suffered worse. That holy tear was given from a pure heart that had nothing else to offer, but you, out of your abundance, offer only that which is unfit for food, and in offering that to the unfortunate poor you have offered it to me."

"I did not know! Oh, please let me go back and I will do differently!"

"Alas! you have lived your life, and you must, like all that throng you have seen, take your deeds with you to plead for or against you. You can return no more than they. All men bring their passports of good or evil actions with them here, and once they have come naught can change. They must bear their fate. Some of them did not know but you had a mother who taught you aright, but you forgot her words of wisdom or put them aside. So, now, go your way."

And with these words Peter Perkins felt himself falling into perdition, weighted down by the moldy flour and spoiled bread and sugar. Down, down he went, faster than many others who were on the way, and he cried out in his agony of fear, when suddenly with that cry he awoke and sat up in bed. This then had been a dream! But it had opened his eyes, and he began to see things as he never had done before. He remembered his mother's teachings, and he slept no more that night. But as soon as daylight dawned he dressed and went to the store where poor, faithful Mark, who had slaved ten years for him, was packing those wretched things into the wagon.



PETER PERKINS' DREAM.

"Mark," said he, "throw all that stuff away and take double the amount of the best, and take poultry and fruit and tea and coffee and bread and sugar and butter, yes, and anything else you fancy, and make them up into separate parcels and give one good, generous basketful to every poor family you know. Yes, Mark, and then, if your mother is able to bear it, take her in a carriage and come down to my house this evening to dinner, and we will discuss our new sign with Perkins and Hancock on it. Yes, God bless us! Oh, no, I'm not crazy! I've just come to my senses," and he hurried home and astonished Mrs. Warner by a handsome crisp note for \$50 and ordered a dinner which would have staggered her if she had not had so good a beginning from her sister's farm.

Ten years have passed since that time. Peter Perkins is a round, happy man. To see his jolly, benign face glow at you from over his counter makes you involuntarily look round for the other Cheeryble brother; and now if he was called he would not go empty handed before his Lord and Saviour.

Come, bring with a noise,
 My merry, merry boys,
 The Christmas log to the fire,
 While my good dame she
 Bids you all be free
 And drink to your hearty desire.

THE CHILDREN'S FRIEND.



"A BUNDLE OF TOYS HE HAD FLUNG ON HIS BACK, AND HE LOOKED LIKE A PEDDLER JUST OPENING HIS SACK."

THE ORIGIN OF CHRISTMAS.

The 25th of December was Originally the Roman Saturnalia.

The celebration of Christmas as the birthday of Jesus is universal among Christians of every sect, and as such it is regarded throughout Christendom as the sweetest, holiest of all holidays. And with the long mooted question, Is Dec. 25 the anniversary of Christ's birth? we have nothing to do. For it matters nothing whether it was on this particular date that the Christ Child first lay in Bethlehem's lowly manger. This is the day that has been accepted and will be celebrated to the end of time. It will be of interest to most readers, however, to note that it was not until the Third or Fourth century that the present date was agreed upon, and that Jan. 1, Jan. 6, March 29 and Sept. 29 were variously observed during the earlier centuries by various bodies of Christians. The fixing of the date seems to have been accomplished by Julius I, who presided as pope or bishop of Rome from 337 to 352 A. D.

Christmas is not alone among Christian holidays in being the follower of a somewhat similar holiday among the pagans. In Rome it was called the Saturnalia. And the observance of the winter feast, now Christmas, was not confined to the Romans. The holiday appears to have been kept by the Scandinavians, the Persians and the Phœnicians, and perhaps by many other people. All these nations worshipped the sun, under one form or other, as the giver of all life. Each gave the deity a different name. At Rome he was worshipped under one of the characters attributed to Saturn, the father of the gods; among the Scandinavians as Odin, or Woden, the father of Thor; with the Persians as Mithras, probably the same as the Irish Mithr, and with the Phœnicians his name was Baal or Bel.

All these nations chose about the same date for this feast. This is supposed to have been caused by the feelings of delight experienced shortly after Dec. 21, because the days then begin to lengthen. Then the sun begins his upward course, and spring and summer are approaching. For somewhat similar reasons the pagans of old held a great midsummer feast at or about June 21.

The midwinter festival of the Saturnalia was observed for several days in the most unrestrained manner; everybody feasted and work was quite suspended. Even the slaves were allowed complete liberty for the time being. Laurels and evergreens were everywhere displayed, the same as now, and gifts were exchanged, and there were especial greetings for the season. In the north these rejoicings were carried on in somewhat ruder fashion, but were entered into with not less hearty enthusiasm. Fires were everywhere kindled, both indoors and out, in honor of Odin and Thor; the Druids gathered the sacred mistletoe, and both men and cattle were sacrificed to the savage divinities. The ancient Persians also burned immense bonfires at this season, and between them and the Druids of western Europe some sort of relationship existed.

In the later days of the Roman empire the feast of the Saturnalia deteriorated into a gross debauch—so gross, indeed, that few historians have cared to defile their pages with its details.

It was for the purpose of counteracting the evil influences of the Saturnalia, to the celebration of which the young of both sexes were very prone, that the early Christian teachers in Rome sought to adapt the rites of heathen rejoicing and render them subservient, instead of antagonistic, to the cause of religion. Certain forms of amusement were forbidden and others not so gross were substituted, but it was a long time before the people and the clergy were of one mind regarding the observances of Christmas.

In Britain there were other modifications. To the modified Saturnalia were added first some of the Druidical rites and superstitions, and, after the arrival of the Saxons, some of the ceremonies of the ancient Germans and Scandinavians. Of these were the burning of the Yule log and the superstitions regarding the mistletoe bough.

In England the burning of the Yule log takes place Christmas eve. In feudal times the bringing in of the ponderous block and burning it on the wide hearth of the great chimney of the baronial hall was observed with the greatest rejoicings. The dragging of the Yule from the forest to the castle was an elaborate ceremony of itself; and as it passed, every wayfarer raised his hat, for well he knew that its flame would light up scenes of feasting and forgiveness of old wrongs, and that all would be welcome.

The following quaint ditty, apropos of the Yule, is supposed to have been written during the reign of Henry VI:

Welcome be thou, heavenly King;
 Welcome, born on this morning;
 Welcome, for whom we shall sing;
 Welcome Yule.
 Welcome be ye, Stephen and John;
 Welcome, innocents every one;
 Welcome, Thomas, martyr one;
 Welcome Yule.
 Welcome be ye, good New Year;
 Welcome Twelfth day, both in fere;
 Welcome, saints loved and dear;
 Welcome Yule.
 Welcome be ye, Candlemas;
 Welcome be ye, queen of bliss;
 Welcome, both to more and less;
 Welcome Yule.
 Welcome be ye that are here;
 Welcome all, and make good cheer;
 Welcome all, another year;
 Welcome Yule.

In company. Among the English the mistletoe bough is a ways hung over the center of the room on Christmas Eve, and any damsel who, either by chance or on purpose, places herself beneath it has to pay the penalty of being kissed by all the men who are present.

Of course none of the fair sex ever places herself under the mistletoe with malice aforethought.

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