

TWO LITTLE STOCKINGS.

Two little stockings hung side by side, Close to the fireplace broad and wide. "Two?" said Saint Nick, as down he came, Loaded with toys and many a game.

THE EDITOR'S CHRISTMAS.

To Farmer Brown our thanks are due for one big jug of rye; (The Sons of Temperance meet to-night—suppose they'll leave it dry.)

DEACON ALLAWATER'S BABY.

BY FLORENCE WATERS SNEDEKER. It was a stormy night. Without, the north wind howled over the waste of snow. It rattled the doors and windows of the deacon's great house, clattered the loose clapboards, shrieked down the chimneys.

It was a crisis in Deacon Allawater's life. To be sure his life had many crises—once might say, had been a series of them. It was a crisis when the deacon snatched from the wall his forefather's sword of the Revolution, and at its point chased his eldest son Albert around the breakfast table and out of the house; it was a crisis when Helen, his oldest daughter, ran away from boarding-school; and another when she came with her husband to beg forgiveness in vain; still others were when the remaining children departed in wrath; and then came one when his wife laid down her weary life, and her spirit escaped to the land that knows no tumult.

But this crisis was different, wholly different. This time it was his wealth that was gone; that wealth for which he had worked and hoarded and enslaved his wife and children and fought his neighbors and squeezed the poor and denied the church. It was gone. It had vanished in a day. The deacon clutched his straggling white locks and groaned.

Help! Help! he must have. He dropped upon his knees. Oh, he had been a master-hand at prayer, the deacon! So said the community; and so he knew. The phrases had rolled from his lips full and sounding. At his tongue's end was all the Scripture gathered from forty years of beating it into his unregenerate children. The deacon opened his mouth to pray.

Cold—cold as a stone lay his heart within his bosom. By no effort of his once all-powerful will, by no mental tension could he get life into the words. It was no use to struggle, to beat the air, to wring his hands. The conviction dawned slowly, overwhelmingly upon him, that with his wealth he had lost his religion.

He staggered to his feet, went out into the freezing hall, and by the creaking stair rail dragged himself up to his bedroom. As he entered, the moon looked in through flying clouds like a pallid face. The deacon shuddered, fled across its track, and with trembling fingers, unlocked the top drawer of his bureau.

Yes, it was there. He took it from its case. He opened it, and held it out to glitter in the moonlight. He drew it along his coat sleeve—first one side, then the other.

But Deacon Allawater's theology had always been clear and orthodox. Firmly as he had believed in God he had believed in the devil; in a personal devil, too, with horns and cloven hoofs, fit to hale impenitent sinners down to a pit whence arose flames, odor of brimstone. The deacon's hair rose upon his head. With all his strength he flung the razor from him.

about the room and about the head of the deacon as he crouched upon the bed. His teeth chattered on cold and fright. He instantly expected the grip of the fiend. The horror of expectancy grew upon him—

Clang! went the door-bell. The wretched deacon sank upon the floor.

It was not until many minutes had passed and quiet had come back that Deacon Allawater gathered his quaking limbs together, went down to the door, drew back the fastenings and cautiously turned the knob.

No one was there. As he peered out, the wild rack of the clouds alone met his wild eyes. But what was this at his feet? A common willow basket!

Was it real? Was it dangerous? Should he touch it? He poked at it and pried it, growing bolder. Then, holding it gingerly at arm's-length, he carried it into the sitting-room and set it upon the table.

He turned up the light. He raked the fire into a blaze. There had been treasures hid in baskets before this. He carefully took off the cover. Beneath was a flannel blanket. With a dawning presentiment he angrily thrust aside the wrappings, and—yes, there lay a baby.

A sleeping baby, with warm red cheeks, and rings of yellow hair moist upon its blue-veined temples, and parted lips, and sweet breath stealing through. A living, breathing baby. Now "the light upon his eyelids pricked them wide." Two blue eyes looked out in wonderment. Upright in its nest sat the baby, saw the brightness, felt the warmth, threw up its arms and laughed in the deacon's scowling face.

"Land o' Goshen!" Mrs. Harris stood rigid on the sill of the deacon's sitting room, her bonnet strings jerked to the point of strangulation, her best black shawl dropped ruthlessly to the floor.

Deacon Allawater, sitting up in his rocking-chair, began to rub his stiff knees. His companion, on the lounge as if aroused at once to the daylight and to the perils of existence, sparrowed with his pink fists, opened his mouth, and sent forth a preliminary yell.

"Where did it come from? Whose is it? What?" "Woman, you know as much about it as I do," snarled the master of the house, getting upon his feet. "Take the thing, can you? There! stop its noise some way."

When he came down to breakfast his haggard face was so unlovely that good Mrs. Harris, her eyes going back to the baby on her knee, was reminded of King Herod and the babes of Bethlehem.

"Those Jenkenses are at the bottom of this," mused the deacon over his coffee, his eyes, too, on the now crowing baby. "They always have a household of brats. Little villains! They've tormented me these ten years—racing through my grain-fields, tearing down my stone walls, stealing my fruit—and soundly have they been thrashed for it. But I'll have the law on them for this, this very day!"

"I must say, it don't appear likely," remonstrated Mrs. Harris. "They're poor enough, goodness knows. But this they wouldn't do. Such a fine-grown boy! Must be a year old at the least calculation."

But he did not go out immediately. Indeed, before the morning was over he had decided to let the Jenkenses alone until the next day. Another matter was troubling him. To-night the revival meetings were to begin at church.

It was a trying day for Mrs. Harris. While the deacon paced the house, wandered from room to room, or fell into dark reverie, she was mentally pitting her strength against his, and forecasting the issue of a hand-to-hand tussle. For, whenever his eyes fell upon the baby, when he once or twice stood still to watch it, her heart, as she afterwards related, jumped into her mouth, expecting to see the poor innocent pitched through the window, or into the clothes-biler with the ends a stirrin' and a loamin', the Lord forgive me the thought!

"That night there was a goodly gathering in the village church. "Deacon Allawater will lead in prayer," announced the young minister.

The pause was, perhaps, a trifle long. But when the deacon prayed, it was with all his usual fervor. They spoke of it as they gathered around the stove after meeting.

heard people say. How and if a man given over to the fiends—

Shamefaced, he gathered the child in his arms, and, secure in his room, laid it in his own bed. Hours passed ere he slept. Then a grisly dream came. He gasped himself awake, and tumbled about until his wretched hand found and held one like a crumpled rose.

Four long weeks the revival meetings continued. Each night saw Deacon Allawater in his place; and each night he drove home like one pursued, and slept holding the baby's hand.

Mrs. Harris's fears were gradually allayed, especially as the child threw. But what deep schemes could the deacon be laying? The day after the revival meetings closed she gathered heart of grace to speak again.

"You've no cause to lay this up against these Jenkenses, Deacon Allawater. All I can make out of it, or you either, is some poor-house affair."

"Of course you know. Women all was do," answered the deacon, aroused from watching the infant gymnast upon the floor.

He spent considerable time in the same fashion. He was very lonely, very idle; and idle and lonely Deacon Allawater had not been before in all his seventy years. A man is naturally busy who has a fortune to increase, a wife to worry, a half-dozen children to battle with, or plan revenge upon. But when these occupations vanish, why a man may even fall to watching a baby.

He may curiously scan again and again the pretty features; may furtively draw a ring of hair around a knobby forehead, wondering at the silkiness; may be surprised into a laugh, when a funny fuzzle-top lifts up unexpectedly at his knee, and little fingers catch at his watch-chain; may even envelop his old head in his handkerchief, and leer from behind it, to send a small person into a collapse of laughter. In which feat being almost surprised by Mrs. Harris, Deacon Allawater slammed his slippers across the room and the door behind his back in such a rage that that poor lady caught up the now frightened child and mingled her tears with its own, amid desperate thoughts of fleeing with it, and protestations that it "shouldn't be hurt—no, it shouldn't—by any wicked, wicked old deacon, the darling!"

Long ago one other baby had dared such liberties with Deacon Allawater—his youngest daughter, Emily. She had blue eyes too, and just such hair. Her desertion had touched him deepest, and brought down his heaviest wrath. Was the fellow so worthless, after all? The deacon had so much time for thinking, these days, that strange thoughts came. He took to driving into the village by the back road, passing a certain small house in the twilight. It looked trim; was rather a pretty picture. The baby there seemed about as big as his—that is, as the baby at his house; and that boy romping with the father—named after himself, as he had heard—must be six years old. But Emily looked looked pale—worked too hard, probably.

Another strange thought came, these days. "When a man has but a miserable pittance, how much good is there in hanging on to it?"

There was a sensation in the small house one morning. An envelope found under the door held a fifty dollar bill. Ned could not think what made his mother's face so red, when she just stood still and said, "Oh! Nor did he see any use in his having to play around by the gate, and watch for the grandfather who never noticed him on the rare occasions of his passing.

When the grandfather did come by one evening in the twilight, he looked so dreadful as he shook his whip and cried, "Ga'ap!" that Ned fled to his mother for safety.

Why Dobbs, the grocer, suddenly raised the wages of his clerk, the deacon's youngest son, Stuart, was a mystery to the clerk himself. Dobbs was good, and a kind at heart; knew too, of his clerk's struggle for an education; and that it was his determination to enter the college, instead of business, which had barred his father's door against him. But Dobbs was rather close. It was a matter that Stuart Allawater pondered as the grain ripened and the fruit waxed mellow.

Early in the autumn the deacon astonished Mrs. Harris and the community by a trip to the city. "Went off as grand as could be in his best suit, with only the word, 'Look after things till I come back, Mrs. Harris,'" reported that lady, burdened with a sense of the mysterious. How much would her burden have been increased had she been able to follow up her master's movements!

For, avoiding the city thoroughfares, stealing through back streets and alleys, hanging in the evenings about windows in a way to interest policemen, questioning these slyly politicized policemen, questioning children, picking up chance acquaintances with clerks and servants, the deacon passed the week. He came home satisfied. He had seen Albert, driven away from home at the point of the sword twenty-five years before, and returned but once since—at his mother's funeral. He had satisfied himself that rumor was right. Albert's wealth was a large one, and he had taken his unmarried sister into his house, and his younger brother Ernest into his store. For Ernest's ill-health would never let him get ahead, and he had but lately recovered from a tedious illness.

That week one fact went down in Earnest Allawater's note-book with a line of interrogation points; his doctor's bill had been sent in receipted.

When the traveler reached home a package of lately ordered papers was awaiting him—back numbers of the Chicago Eagle. "When a girl runs away from home it might, perhaps, be a satisfaction if the fellow amounted to something," reflected the deacon, as he pored over the long hated periodical. "In such a case, could a man be reasonably expected to cling quite the same to his hatred?"

For by this time Deacon Allawater was sorely puzzled over the strange alteration in himself. What had become of his anger, of his thirst for revenge? Could it be a warning? He had heard of such changes coming upon men when they stood at death's door. Yes, a warning it must surely be. And what a conviction for a man who had lost his religion, and his hope in God, and believed in nothing but the devil! Unhappy deacon! He knew his duty only too plainly: to call in the young minister, to confess all, to begin anew—he, a pillar in the church, while the neighbors with whom he had quarrelled exulted in his downfall. It was too hard. He fled from the conviction, as often as it came upon him, to his sole comforter, the baby.

The child was learning to walk now, making poor work of it with his fat legs, and had constantly to be picked up and set right, and to be so often rescued from destruction—Mrs. Harris being busy, and if the truth be told, neglectful—that a man had hard work to make sense of his paper. Then, too, he needed much entertainment at this stage of his existence, and was developing a wonderful talent for riding cock-horns, and shouting at the antics of a hoary-headed lion that prowled and growled about the floor with him. His conversational powers were still rudimentary, but his capacity for listening to rhymes and stories, when the wintry day closed in, and the firelight flickered in his drowsy eyes, was insatiable.

So Christmas day came round, and found Deacon Allawater strangely comfortable for a man at whose feet death and perdition were yawning.

The thought was in his mind as he crept out of his room that Christmas morning—crept out, shoes in hand, so as not to wake the baby. Perhaps it was that which so softened him. For, as he threw open the shutters and looked upon the tenderness of the sky, the purity of the earth, the pink smoke curling up over the solemn hemlocks, tears, were in his eyes. When he had made the fire—he made the fire himself now, Mrs. Harris coming late, and the baby being imperative on the point of an early breakfast—and the rooms were pleasantly steeped in light and warmth, the fancy took him to go into the dark parlors, throw open the barred shutters, and look at the portraits on the wall.

There they all hung in a row, first the girls, and then the boys, and the mother at the end. It was unfortunate that oil portraits have such a sameness that even frocks and trousers are not as distinctive as one could wish. Still the artist, clever fellow, had helped the matter immensely by giving all the boys hoops and sticks, and the girls baskets of flowers: His wife wasn't made good-looking enough; for in those days she had been handsome. But she changed afterwards. How she did change! what with the work and his bad temper. But now she was at rest, striking the harp and wearing the crown, where not for one moment—no, not even to ask forgiveness—would he be allowed to look upon her in her glory.

Weeping softly before his wife's portrait, a baby's voice caught the ear of Deacon Allawater. He hurried back. But what sounds were these?

They were all around him the next moment. They were laughing and crying, caressing and explaining, in a breath. Did he think he could deceive them? But they had found him out! And now they would never leave him again. While the children capered, and the babies crowded, until Mrs. Harris burst in, bearing in triumph the baby.

Well, the women presently bore it off. Then, girls at home once more, that donned their aprons and went to work, setting fires a-leaping in all the rooms, and savory odors a-waiting up the kitchen stairs. From top to bottom of the great house rang the children, not forgetting the attic. And the men, the deacon's strong sons, gathered about him, began a discussion of the times and the goings-on which made the old man rub his eyes and wonder where he had waked up.

Then they met again about a Christmas table that might have gladdened the immortals. Such glorified turkeys! Such triumphs of pastry? Such smiling faces to garland the board! Consoling in answering to consoling with explosions of unsmotherable merriment. At the deacon's right hand sat a baby; who the first thing, as though master of ceremonies, held up his face and demanded a kiss.

Bending down, his hand on the child's head, the deacon gave it.

The sight overcame Mrs. Harris. "Such a work of grace!" she sobbed behind her apron.

Work of grace? and he a castaway! Little she knew! Little they any of them knew, inwardly sorrowed the deacon.

But a change came slowly into the aged face—a light—a look of blessed understanding. Then, "Children, let us now return thanks," said Deacon Allawater.—Harper's Bazar.

Be Charitable. Again the Christmas-tide is here with its beautiful story, older than the story of the cross, and as dear to the heart of the Christian believer. The heart must be sad indeed that does not thrill anew at the thought of all that was meant by those wonderful words: "On earth peace, good will to men."

We must remember that the day commemorates the birth of Him who gave to mankind the greatest gift possible to bestow, eternal life—and not forget to give our mite from our abundance, to the poor whom we have always with us. Make glad the heart of the widow and orphan by a load of wood, a barrel of apples or a turkey or a pie, and your own heart will be glad, if done in that spirit of faith which these words signify: "Inasmuch as ye have done it to one of the least of these ye have done it to Me."

—Subscribe for the WATCHMAN.

ENVOI. 'Twas the night after Christmas, And all through the houses of death, Not a creature was sleeping— Not even a mouse.

Mince-pie, cheese and coffee Had got in a lick, And at four in the morning Were raising old Nick.

How Johnny Got A Gun. Johnny Harney stood by the gate in front of the little white farm house where he lived, and watched the twilight darken into Christmas eve. There were trees about the house; but a little ways beyond the road ran down to a great stretch of lowland that was covered in the summer by tall, warty marsh grass and by the flowers that love damp places, and where countless little green frogs hopped about among the hemlocks. Beyond this was the lake, a great field of wild rice, with here and there a silver net-work, where the twilight lingered on some open water.

Way down at the foot of the lake the lights at the club house gleamed brightly, for to-morrow was Christmas, and all the sportsmen were up from the city for a Christmas dinner on ducks of their own shooting.

John Harney was a good boy, and seldom discontented or out of sorts, but when he thought of all the nice guns that stood along the racks in the sitting room, and the great bunches of ducks and squirrels that lay in the kitchen of the club house he did feel just a little bit covetous. For that was John's greatest sorrow. He didn't have a gun.

Often when chores were done, he would take the shabby little square-ended boat, and row down into the river to watch the hunters. He would hear the guns sound way off across the lake, and a flock of ducks would come flying over, growing less at every place where some canvas-coated sportsman waited among the grass.

It was a sad sort of pleasure John got from this. But, then, a gun costs a great deal of money for a farmer's boy, and the price of Tommy's spotted wood-horse, Jimmy's trumpet and all the other presents wouldn't nearly have bought one.

It was growing colder all the time, and even through his thick mittens John's hands were beginning to feel numb; so he started to go into the warm kitchen fire.

But then—a long drawn cry came faintly across the lake; "Help!" It sends such a thrill of excitement a-ting-ling down one's nerves—that call for aid.

He knew in an instant why the call had called. "Somebody's got lost in the grass!" he thought, as he hurried down to the lake; he'd better not try to stay out all through this kind of a night!

It took a long while to reach the place from where the shouts had come from and to get the hunter to the shore, for the poor fellow's numbed and exhausted and lost among the great fields of grass, had dropped the oars and sat huddled in the stern, yielding to the drowsiness which is so often a fatal one.

But he soon came to, when John had got him to the house, and what a jolly Christmas guest he was then—almost as good as if Santa Claus himself had tied his end to the fence and staid with them all the evening.

With the little Harney's clustered about the stranger's knee, listening open-mouthed to his wondrous stories, the father leaning against the wall smoking his pipe, and the mother softly rocking baby's cradle—all lighted by the glow of the firelight, it was a pretty scene to see—one that the sprites of Christmas love to look upon. And when the Christmas guest was done, the mother told of that strange star of wondrous beauty that shone another Christmas night, above the manger where the infant King lay sleeping—so long ago, and so far away—in Bethlehem, of Judea.

And the father, looking backward to his earlier years, bethought him of a story altogether new—one that had slipped his memory until now (as things of such slight import will) about a fierce gang of monstrous size that he, Putnam-like, had slain in a cave by the light of his own eyes.

But John, of all these tales, heard not a word. What were these childish stories of bears and wolves and Indians to the sight of the beautiful gun, with its smooth round barrels and shapely stock, that belonged to the Christmas guest, and that stood in the corner by the door?

The stranger, as he gazed around at his little audience, might have noticed where the boy's eyes were wandering, but if he did he said nothing, and kept right on with his stories.

Santa Claus must have been very nearly through with his gift-giving when the little Harneys went to bed, each with a bright new silver dollar clasped in his little fat hand; and the guest turned to John. "I won't forget, my boy, what you have done for me," he said solemnly. "They would have found me there, all cold and still among the grass, like that old poor Phillips last winter, and my Christmas day would have been at the home of Him, whose birth it celebrates. I thank you now, and perhaps before long I may be able to show my gratitude in a better way." And any one could see that he meant what he said. Then the lamps were put out, and the dream-folk came to take the place of the Christmas sprites, while the wind whistled around the corners and old Jack Frost peered in through the green shutters; and all the fields and roads, and the woods and lowlands, took on a covering of snowy whiteness.

Long before the first happy day toddler had pushed to his stocking to find what Santa Claus had left, even before that merry old gentleman and his feet-footed reindeer had reached their icy northern home, the Harneys were awake and breakfast was on the table.

part; for, as he told them, his friends at the club-house would be frightened at his absence; so he and John walked down to the landing together.

"You must visit me at the house," he said, as he took the boy's hand in parting, and then, stepping into his canoe, he was soon rapidly getting out of sight.

"Oh, mister, wait; you forgot something," called a child-like voice from behind, and one of the little Harneys came running down the road as fast as his short legs could carry him, with the stranger's gun! "Come back sir; you have left your gun!" shouted John, taking the precious weapon in his hands and waving it above his head. But the Christmas guest came back not a stroke. He only rose to his feet, and placing his hands so as to form a trumpet, he shouted something back—something that made John's face radiant with delight, and his heart almost burst with gratitude.

"I didn't forget it," came faintly to the shore. "It's yours, Merry Christmas! And the little canoe and the Christmas guest were lost to sight among the grass.—Miss Annie M. Ness, in York Gazette.

Says Santa: "For the child of the North, a rose from the summer land far; For the child of the South, a snowflake a-flash like a star; For the child of the West, a lark with the glad sunburst light; For the child of the East, a whelp-poor-will song and good night!"

Billy's Santa Claus Experience. Of course I don't believe in any such person as Santa Claus, but Tommy does. Tommy is my little brother, aged six. Last Christmas I thought I'd make some fun for the young one by playing Santa Claus, but as always happens when I try to amuse anybody I jes got myself into trouble.

I went to bed pretty early on Christmas eve so as to give my parents a chance to get the presents out of the closet in mama's room, where they had been locked up since they were bought. I kept my close on except my shoes, and put my night gown over them so as I'd lock white if any of them came near me. Then I waited, pinching myself to keep awake. After awhile papa came into the room with a lot of things that he dumped on Tommy's bed. Then mama came in and put some things on mine and in our two stockings that were hung up by the chimney. Then they both went out very quiet, and soon all the lights went out too.

I kept on pinching myself and waiting for a time, and then when I was sure that everybody was asleep I got up. The first thing I went into was my sister's room, and got her white fur rug that mamma gave her on her birthday, and her seal-skin cape that was hanging on the closet door. I tied the cape on my head with shoestrings and it made a good big cap. Then I put the fur rug around me and pinned it with big safety pins what I found on Tommy's garters. Then I got mamma's new scrap basket, trimmed with roses, what Mrs. Simmons broided for the church fair, and piled all of the kid's toys into it. I fastened it to my back with papa's suspenders, and then I started for the roof.

I hurt my fingers some opening the scuttle, but kept right on. It was snowing hard and I stood and let myself get pretty well covered with flakes. Then I crawled over to the chimney that went down into our room and climbed up on top of it. I had brought my bicycle lantern with me and I lighted it so as Tommy could see me when I came down the chimney into the room.

There did not seem to be any places inside the chimney where I could hold on by my feet, but the ceiling in our room was not very high and I had often jumped most as far, so I jest let her go, and I suppose I went down. Anyway, I did not know about anything for a long time. Then I woke up all in the dark with my head feeling queer, and when I tried to turn over in bed I found I wasn't in bed at all, and then my arms and legs began to hurt terrible mostly one arm that was doubled up. I tried to get up, but I couldn't because my bones hurt so and I was terrible cold and there was nothing to stand on. I was jes stuck. Then I began to cry, and pretty soon I heard mamma's voice say in to papa:

"Those must be sparrers that are making that noise in the chimney. Jes touch a match to the wood in the boys' fire place."

I heard papa strike a light and then the wood began to crackle. Then, by jinks it began to get hot and smoky and I screamed:

"Help! Murder! Put out that fire lest you want to burn me up! Then I heard papa stamping on the wood and mamma calling out:

"Where's Billy? Where is my child?" Next Tommy woke up and began to cry and everything was terrible, specially the pains all over me. Then papa called out very stern:

"William, if you are in that chimney come down at once!" and I answered, crying, that I would if I could, but I was stuck and couldn't.

Then I heard papa gettin dressed, and pretty soon he and John from the stable went up on the roof and let down ropes what I put around me and they hauled me up.

It was jes daylight and I was all black and sooty and scratched and my arm was broken.

Everybody scolded me except mamma I had spoiled my sister's white rug, and broken all of Tommy's toys, and the snow what went in through the scuttle melted and marked the parlor ceiling, besides I guess it cost papa a good deal to get my arm mended. Nobody would believe that I had jes meant to make some fun for Tommy, and my arm and all my bruised places hurt me awful for a long time. If I live to be a million I am never going to play Santa Claus again.

—A man may not be so badly off for presents if he only has but presence of mind.