

THE TRIFLE.

(By Harry Irving Greene.)



HERE was a time when Wallington had generally been conceded to be a brand new genius in the financial world—a marvelous being who could change stones into bread and serpents into fowl; then all at once he found himself in the throes of bankruptcy.

He had exhausted his resources and was for the time being hopelessly insolvent. Day by day his little handful of remaining change vanished in steadily diminishing ratio as his meals became cheaper and further apart, until finally he had but a dime left. This coin he resolved to save for some last and most desperate extremity, and he even determined to fast for days before parting with it.

When Christmas eve came he had not tasted food for three days. He

felt that he could endure it no longer, that the last and most desperate extremity had arrived and that now he must spend his dime. He was plunged deep in meditation when he felt someone touch his arm and turned about.

Beside him there stood a gaunt man with cavernous cheeks, feverish, wildish eyes, and a stomach that curved the wrong way. The apparition addressed him in a croaking voice.

"For God's sake, stranger, buy me something to eat. I am penniless and upon the verge of committing crime. I have worn out my shoes looking for work, and while I have a job promised me it will be a week before it is open. And meanwhile I am starving, friend, starving. In the name of Christianity spare me enough for a meal out of your plenty."

Wallington stared into the evening dusk as he fingered his last and smoothly worn dime. He knew well enough what this other man was suffering, for had he not been in the same stage twenty-four hours before! And to give a man a dime in such a case was so grossly inadequate. Yet what could he do? He turned about. Close before him was a restaurant where he had spent hundreds of dollars in his palmy days and whose proprietor he knew well. Yet he owed a bill there for his last big after theater dinner party of many months ago, and he had never had the courage even in his semi-starvation to go in and ask for more credit. Yet now it must be done, for here was a human being starving upon the streets. Wallington shuddered. It was plainly his duty to fill this man's stomach, and for the last time he would exert those powers of persuasion which once up-

on a time few men had been able to resist. He took the stranger by the arm. "Come with me," he commanded.

They entered the restaurant and Wallington walked straight up to the proprietor. "Bob," said he, "I owe you a pretty stiff bill, but I am going to go to work in a week and then I will begin paying you off. Now I want you to do me a last favor. I owe you about forty dollars, and a couple of dollars more won't make much difference to you. It is Christmas eve and my friend over there is starving. Now I want you to fill him up to the chin on good, solid food and charge it to me. I will not ask you for any favor again if you will do this last thing." The proprietor looked at his old patron thoughtfully.

"All right," he announced at length. "Being's its Christmas eve I'll take a chance on you even if you are down and out. Tell your friend to order what he wants." So Wallington and the stranger sat down together and Wallington watched his companion fill himself with good things until at last with his stomach again curved the right way, the droop from his shoulders and the feverish light vanished from his eyes, the gorged one arose.

"My friend," said the stranger. "I could not have endured it another day—but of course you have never known what it is to go two days without food. And when tonight you go home and sit down to your table to your feast, remember that there is an outcast fellow being upon the streets who is blessing every mouthful that you eat. Good-by, Christian."

Wallington held out his hand. "Good-by, stranger, and good luck to you. It was a mere trifle. Happy to have been able to give you a lift." Then he went up to Frenchy's hash house and had his dime's worth of coffee and sausage.

Little Mandy's Christmas Tree



by JAMES WHITCOMB RILEY

LITTLE Mandy and her Ma 'S poorest folks you ever saw! Lived in poorest house in town. Where the fence 'uz all tore down.

And no front-door steps at all—'st 'ol' box 'g'inst the wall; And no door-knob on the door Outside.—My! but they 'uz poor! Outside.—My! but they 'uz poor!

Wuz no winder-shutters on, And some of the winders gone. And where they 'uz broke they'd pas' 'st 'ol' brown paper 'cross the place.

Tell you! when it's winter there, And the snow 'st ever'where, Little Mandy's Ma she say 'Spec' they'll freeze to death some day.

Wunst my Ma and Me—when we Be'n to church, and's goin' to be Christmas party soon,—we went There—like the Committee sent.

And Sir! When we're in the door, Wuz no carpet on the floor, And no fire — and heels—and—head Little Mandy's tucked in bed.

And her Ma telled my Ma she Got no coffee but 'st tea, And fried mush—and's all they had Sense her health broke down so bad.

Nen Ma hug and hold me where Little Mandy's layin' there; And she kiss her, too, and nen Mandy kiss my Ma again.

And my Ma she telled her we Go'n to have a Chris'mus-Tree At the Sunday School, 'at's fer All the children, and fer her.

Little Mandy think—nen she say, "What is a Chris'mus-Tree?" Nen my Ma she gived her Ma Somepin 'at I saw.

And say she must take it,—and She 'st maked her keep her hand Witte close shut, and nen she kiss Her hand—shut 'st like it is. Nen we comed away . . . And nen When its Chris'mus Eve again, And all of us children be At the Church and Chris'mus-Tree—

And all git our toys and things 'At old Santy Claus he brings And puts on the Tree;—wite where The big Tree 'us standin' there.

A Yuletide Home-Coming

By Charles McCabe

THE club looked just the very thing Gerald Mannersley was craving for—a sense of home.

A few lines read accidentally in an out-of-date newspaper had made him restless with longing for the old scenes. And so he had traveled two days and nights in a sleeper, vaguely connecting his journey's end with all the love and friendship his starved nature was demanding.

When he arrived at his old club on a chill, grey Christmas morning, it was only to find that fifteen years' silent absence had been too severe a test for friendship. The place was empty of all but servants, and they wore strange, unwelcoming faces.

He stood at the club window, looking out on the desolate, deserted street which he had always remembered as being thronged, and a great sadness swept over him.

This was not what he wanted. From his pocket he drew out the scrap of paper which had really brought him so many miles, and looked at it bitterly. It was only a death announcement cut from a paper of a year ago, and ran in the usual way—"Michael Townley, at his residence," etc.

In fancy he saw a sweet-faced maiden, who sought her happiness only in the eyes of the youth by her side. There were joy-bells there, too, as they left the church with the fragrance of mutual love about them.

The bells pealed on outside, and willing fancy led him still further into the realm of "might have been." In an instant he made up his mind to visit once more the old-fashioned cottage not many miles away, to which he had hoped fifteen years before to take a bride. He would go and see it, even if his neglected condition only added to his loneliness and pain.

Two hours later he was striding through the crisp country air along a winding path which led to a rambling, ivy-covered cottage.

As the last turn brought him in sight of the house he stopped in surprise. He had expected to see dirt, ruin, and decay, but instead he looked upon a trim, well-kept cottage, and a soft, crooning song, in a voice which reawakened the tender memories of long ago, came floating through the unlatched door.

Half believing that it must be fancy leading him still, he entered the house softly, and, following the voice, went into the inner room, and stood in the glow of the warm firelight.

The sweet, tired-faced, middle-aged singer turned as his shadow fell across the light, and then stood white and trembling.

"Gerald!" she whispered. "Gerald! have you come to reproach me? Not today! Not today!" The strong man's voice broke as he held out his arms.

"Nance!" he cried joyfully. In a moment she was crushed, sobbing, to his breast. "Oh, Gerald! is it really you? God is very good. I thought you must be dead."

For several moments they stood thus, the strong man's tears falling on her grey-tinged hair. Then he gently put her into a chair.

"You are not alone?" he asked as his eyes caught sight of a little table laid for two, daintily spread with Christmas fare.

"Yes," she answered. "I am quite alone. I have often come down here."

"But you are expecting somebody?" he said, calling attention to the table. She flushed prettily, looking almost as young as she had in his dreams of the morning, as she replied:

"I was expecting you, Gerald." He smiled happily at her; then the smile faded, and he sighed as he sank into a chair.

"This is all foolishness, Nance," he said sadly. "You could not live here in the old days, you could do so less now, and I could not live here on another man's thousands."

A smile hovered over the woman's face as she flitted here and there, busily preparing things for a meal. Then she slipped behind a chair, and leaning over whispered with burning cheeks:

"Perhaps you do not know, Gerald, that—that Mr. Townley's money goes back to his family if—I marry again."

The man sprang to his feet and took her into his strong arms again. "It is not too late," he cried. "We are still young. Will you let me try to make you happy?"

Her answer was drowned in the burst of Christmas bells that pealed from the village church close by. But he did not need her words; he could see her eyes.

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