

THE RETURN.

A CHRISTMAS STORY BY G. T. FERRELL.

[Copyright, 1897, by the Author.] Frustrated hope threw its blight on the cheery old face as Mrs. Martin read the letter from her son Paul. He had been a wanderer for eight years and now wrote from South Africa. The same feeling haunted Kate Lockwood's fine eyes, though she bit her lip at the conscious revelation. But Mrs. Martin did not see. Her eyes were blurred. And murmuring, "What could have happened to change his mind?" as if it were the presence of some greater blow, she went on with the reading: "I'd give a few 'sparklers' to be with you on Christmas, as I had planned. But a fellow can't always fulfill his own wish. It's better to have everything wound up before leaving. South Africa has treated me pretty well up here in its diamond fields, so I shouldn't kick if it keeps me in its clutch a little longer. I shan't be sorry to leave this furnace behind. When my letter reaches, Jack Frost will be abroad with you in Vermont, clad in ice and snow, but here a man will be taking at 95 in the shade. I'm burned as black as any Kaffir in the mines, so that you and Kate would scarcely know my swarthy phiz. By the way, you may tell that young woman from me that I don't half like her goings on with the Swinton man. Didn't she promise to wait for me? I shall have a word to say to her about her faithlessness." And so Paul's letter rambled on in a semichaffing tone. Kate's face had darkened to angry scarlet when Mrs. Martin looked up and said: "Why, my dear, you mustn't take Paul's jokes so hard. You know what a 'tease' he was from a boy."

That was precisely the trouble. Paul had always been joking, Kate feared. A distant cousin and reared in the family, ever since she had emerged into womanhood a more tumultuous sweetness had mingled with the calm affection she had once felt for Paul even as she had for his older brother Will. When he had gone away, she was only 17, and keenly she had quivered with the pang of parting. Year after year had slid by, and the rolling stone found no rest and the girl's sore heart had certainly found no balm in the absent Paul's jocular phrases. Yet she had sometimes fancied a thrill of sentiment and tenderness quickening his sportive allusions. At all events suitors had lacked fuel for their fire, and her friends rallied the young schoolteacher that the only men folk she liked were the lads, with whom she could be "jolly good!" in a most fascinating way. Her latest admirer, the head of a prosperous factory and much liked by the Martins, had no better luck than professors.

"There was a time," the old lady continued in reminiscent mood as she laid down the letter, "when I hoped you and Paul would come together some day; but, lackaday, that's all done with. I can't understand the girls nowadays. I s'pose you ain't afraid of being left an old maid, fer, you know, you're good looking"—and Mrs. Martin peered quizzically at Kate over her glasses—"but still you might never have such a good offer as Mr. Swinton—plenty of money, not too old, and as good as gold. As for Paul's stayin' away another year—"

"What's that about Paul's not comin' home?" Mr. Martin's jolly red face, now beginning to pucker with years and care, was filled with dismay as he suddenly entered the room. "That scapegrace of ourn oughter be thrashed if he's a-go'in to disappoint us ag'in." So Mrs. Martin again read the letter aloud, while Kate, amid the varied comment of the old couple, escaped for a hearty cry.

Farmer Martin's gloom had a deeper root than ordinary misfortune of hope. "I'd rather looked to Paul's help or the 'rust comes," said he to his wife, "fer Will's got all he can shoulder. The mortgage on the place has never been easy to meet—what with poor crops and low prices. I met Squire Barber jes' now, and I told him we expected Paul. 'Fer sure,' said he, and laughed with his 'Ho, ho,' like some danged ole henny, and then he said he hoped there wouldn't be any delay this year 'bout the mortgage money or something might turn up, and then he outs with another snicker. Confound his hide, it's as heartless as his sheepskin boots, fer I had allus reckoned him a friend afore."

Though Christmas did not promise any appetizing sauce for its turkey and mince pie, active preparation went on as usual, for Will and his children would be there, and their hearts must be gladdened with Christmas sunshine. Arlingford had indeed always kept the day with more fervor than is the wont with most New England country towns. It was the day before Christmas and the farmer was returning from the woods, whither he had gone to select the Christmas tree. The crisp, sweet air was musical with sleighbells, for the earth was shrouded in dazzling white. As he turned into the main street, his bobbed almost collided with a fast cutter spinning homeward from Chester. It was Squire Barber returning from the county seat, some eight miles distant, where his law office was located.

"Merry Christmas, if it isn't too early!" shouted the lawyer, puffing up. "What have you got there? Holly, and as I live mistletoe too. I haven't seen any before for an age."

at mistletoe, unless Swinton gets ahead of me." And he chuckled heartily to himself as he drove on. The Martins had attended the early service in the church and were now gathered in the big parlor where the Christmas tree was set loaded with presents and the children were all agog with eagerness. Mr. Swinton was a guest of the occasion, though not much to Kate's pleasure. The tree had been almost stripped of its burden amid the jubilation of the youngsters, and even Paul's absence couldn't quite quench the heartsome glow of the old folk. "Ow I 'ood like to see Santy Claus hisself 'en he comes down the chimney to-night!" said little May Martin, her mouth gorged with dripping sweets. Just then a tremendous clashing of bells rang out as if a whole caravan of sleighs were coming up the road. Louder and louder chimed the silvery music till it stopped before the door amid the pawing of horses' hoofs.

"Who can it be?" they all said to each other. "Perhaps it is Santa Claus," whispered Kate to little May. The child caught at the entrancing thought and rushed to the front door. They heard a scream of terror, and May darted back, gasping and white, to hide her face in her father's lap. Santa Claus indeed had come to the child's invocation. Framed in the doorway and seeming almost to fill it stood a great, fur clad figure, looking like a fur-helmet covered the whole face, with goggles in the eyelet holes, and on the furry arm hung a big basket with bulging contents. Amid the breathless silence and wonder the uncounted figure stalked to the Christmas tree and crowded its empty boughs with such a largess of parcels as to bend them low. As the pantomime went on Mr. Martin nodded to his wife and Kate and then toward their guest as if to say, "This little comedy is the pleasant surprise of a rich man's wooing." But Swinton's eyes were bent on Santa Claus with a queer look of dread and expectancy, could they have gauged his thought.

Not a word was uttered till the fur clad image had closed his task, when a hoarse, rumbling voice, as if it had been made raucous by shouting against polar blasts, issued from under the fur hood, calling them by name and summoning them to receive their gifts. The children's turn came first. The trembling youngsters were loaded with such gorgeous and wonderful toys as they had never dreamed could exist. Will Martin got a box containing a sealskin cap and gloves. The wonderful fur cloak which Santa Claus threw around Mrs. Martin was fit for the shoulders of a queen, as she stood there quivering with ecstasy and a dumb prayer that tamed to name itself and stammering thanks that choked in the throat. In the farmer's hands was placed a large sealed envelope, and he blinked and peered as if he would unravel some slow to the impassive mystery which faced him. He itched to tear open the envelope, but waited.

Kate Lockwood's name was called, and her trembling limbs could scarcely carry her forward. A little box was snapped open and a superb diamond ring blazed like a star. She grew dizzy, for a blinding flash of intelligence came even before that furry mask was torn off with a swift gesture and the bronzed face of Paul, twinkling with emotions of joy and tenderness, appeared to them. How the old mother cried and hugged him till her arms were weary; how the men folk wrung his hand and overwhelmed him with broken, eager questioning, and how the children made shy acquaintance with the unknown uncle Santa Claus need not be recounted.

"And has my Kate no greeting?" Paul said. She came forward with cheeks of flame from where she had stood aloof, bewildered with a rush of feelings. He gazed at her shining eyes, and her heart leaped at the lover's deep look. Then he happened to notice the twisted vine of leaf and berry that swayed over her head, the time honored symbol of a thousand sweet mysteries.

"Under the mistletoe, too," he laughed. He was the same old teasing Paul. "That is as it should be." And he took his privilege then and there, drawing her sweet face to his and kissing her on the lips before them all. "Look," he whispered, "at the inner circle of the ring," and there Kate saw engraved, "From Paul to the woman he loves," and that was Paul's proposal, answered to his satisfaction by one flashing glance, veiled as quickly by the modest eyelashes.

"I've been ringing and hammering at the outer door for five minutes, and no one came, so I walked in," said a low voice as Squire Barber entered. "I suppose you've got everything fixed to your wishes now, and that the mistletoe brought good luck." "You old fox, you know all about it," burst forth the farmer, and with a sudden thought he opened the envelope and saw it was a "mortgage satisfaction" paper. "So it was Paul and you that put up this Christmas joke." "Yes, dad," said Paul without a bit of remorse. "I think we did it in pretty good style too. I started from South Africa at the same time I posted that letter as a blind and landed more than a fortnight since. The rest was easily fixed, and I determined to shake you all up with a big surprise. And I have proved such a successful Santa Claus that a certain young woman has concluded to let me play Santa Claus to her for life."

"Where's Mr. Swinton?" said the farmer, with a keen recollection of incivility, for in the agitation of the scene all had forgotten him. Love is sometimes very selfish. Their guest of the early evening had unobtrusively slipped away. He knew he was one too many.

Christmastide. Some say that ever 'gainst that season comes wherein our Saviour's birth is celebrated, The bird of dawn singeth all night long, And then, they say, no spirits dare stir abroad; The nights are wholesome; then no planets stridle; No fairy tales or witch hath power to charm; So hallowed and so gracious is the time.—Shakespeare.

METHODS OF THE JAPANESE.

You Are Never Sure of Getting What You Pay for.

An American manufacturer, writing from Japan, says that those alarmists who would make the world believe that the Japanese can do everything don't know what they are talking about, and that the people of the Flowery Land, unless they change their entire nature, or at all events their methods, can never become formidable commercial rivals with any civilized Power. The real fact is that the Japs do nothing; they only half do it, and therein lies the cause of their failure.

The Japs think of nothing but the present; of what he can make now, and how, by making his commodities a little inferior, he can add a few more cents to his profit. There is no such thing as standard quality. You are never sure of getting the quality you are asked to pay for. So much is this so in Japan that a man seldom buys an article without unwrapping and examining it on the spot. The correspondent continues:

The Japanese mind is so small that it is difficult to weigh it with American scales; in fact, it may be said that it is made up of trifles, and it is the attention—the labored attention—the Jap gives to these trifles which makes him incapable of ever becoming anything more than a unit in whatever he may be concerned in. As an illustration of what I mean, I will give examples which are of daily occurrence. You want to buy an article, and you ask how much it is. The answer is, say, 1 cent. Then you ask how much the articles are by the dozen, fully expecting that you will get them for 10 cents. You are not a little amazed when the merchant tells you thirteen cents the dozen. You get mad, call the man a fool, and insist that you ought to get a reduction by taking a quantity. Not so with the Jap; that is not his way of doing business. It is the same with the manufacturer. You give him an order for a hundred of a kind, and then wish to make it a thousand. Immediately he demands an advance in the price. Should he, however, reluctantly, agree to take the increased order at the original price, you will probably get the first hundred articles fairly up to sample but as the delivery goes on the quality is sure to fall off. And this smallness is not confined to small people. It permeates the whole country.—Boston Transcript.

A TREE THAT SLEEPS. The Transformation Takes Place in About Twenty Minutes. Near the western border of Dupont Circle, in Washington, D. C., stands a tree that goes to sleep promptly every night at 7 o'clock. The tree is known as the Albizzia Julibrissan, having been christened so by an Italian botanist in honor of the Albizzi family in Florence. The tree, however, is an original of Japan and is known there as the Japanese silk tree, probably on account of the silky appearance of its blossoms. Soon after 7 o'clock in the evening a general motion is noticed in the foliage, a quiver or trembling of the bipinnate leaves. Each leaflet begins to stand up on edge and pairs with the one opposite. They clasp each other tightly and then close up with the other on the petiole, so that each becomes a coverlet over half of the preceding one. The entire transformation takes place in about twenty minutes, and usually at about 7.30 the respiratory organism of this tree hangs limp or droopy on the branches. Small branches kept in a dark room promptly close at 7 P. M.—New York World.

WIT AND HUMOR. "I admire the machine very much," she said, as the agent trotted out a new 97 model for her inspection. "It matches my riding costume splendidly." "Yes," responded the dealer, "our concern rather prides itself upon the enameling of its machines." "Well, I'll take it, if you will guarantee me one thing." "What is that?" "That the color won't fade." After some thought he gave the guarantee, and she gave up \$100.

The Parson—Why, Willie, don't you know that good little boys never fish on Sunday? Willie—Yes, sir; that's just the reason I'm a-fishing. I stand more show of gettin' a bite when the good folks are to Sunday-school.—St. Louis Globe-Democrat.

Mr. Pneumony—I'll have two pounds of that sage cheese, and I'll have a pound of impunity, too. Grocer—Marm? Mrs. Pneumony—One pound will be enough, I guess. Dr. Koddle says that sage cheese can be eaten with impunity.—Boston Transcript.

"Here, young fellow, I want you to keep your horse off my lawn." "Say, you're a hard-hearted old bloke." "What do you mean?" "Why, dat poor old horse is just a-practicin' de Kneipp cure, dat's what."—Cleveland Plain Dealer.

Casey—I called wan av thim doods a liar and he says to me, says he, "tu quoque." Now fwat might that mean? Walade—it means "you are another." "Fwat! An I let um get away without hittin' um. Ah, that is fwat a man gets for havin' no education."—Cincinnati Enquirer.

"There is one queer thing noticeable at all picnics." "What's that?" "The man who makes the most fuss about carrying the basket always eats more than anyone else."

A Klondike Steamer Lost.

The Cleveland Lost and Hundreds May Starve as a Result.

The Merchants' Exchange at San Francisco, has received a telegram from Nanaimo, in which the captain of the missing steamer Cleveland says that his vessel has been wrecked on the coast of Vancouver Island. No other details are given.

The Cleveland left San Francisco for Seattle about fifteen days ago, and it is known that she encountered fierce gales. She carried a crew of 30 men and about 12 passengers. The Cleveland was a large iron steamer, and had a series of misfortunes.

She was owned by Charles Nelson, and was commanded by Captain C. F. Hall. It is supposed the steamer's machinery became disabled, and that she was blown out of her course while under sail.

The steamer went ashore at Cape Beals, on the west coast of Vancouver Island. Among the passengers were W. I. Detrick, Frank Garthan and ten others.

The purser of the ship has arrived at Nanaimo, having gone across the island. He reports twenty two of the crew missing. It is supposed that they took to the boats and were blown out to sea.

MEANS STARVATION FOR HUNDREDS. The loss of the Cleveland means starvation to hundreds, of whom many cannot survive.

The Cleveland was laden with hundreds of tons of provisions for the Klondike miners. The supplies were destined for Taiya and Skaguay. They were imperatively needed to keep alive the array of miners there.

The loss means that they will be forced to go to short rations early in the winter. As the gravest fears of starvation have been expressed, even counting with the Cleveland's supplies, it is certain that the suffering will be greatly increased.

Klondike merchants have given up the Cleveland. They have telegraphed urgent messages for another shipment of provisions to be rushed through regardless of danger or expense, as it means life or death to hundreds.

PERIL OF OTHER VESSELS. Eighteen other ships and schooners bound for this port from Gars Harbor are overdue from eleven to fourteen days.

There is no question that many, if not all, of them have been lost in the December gales that have swept their course.

They Disappear. "I was afflicted with scrofula for a number of years and tried several different kinds of medicine without relief. Finally I began taking Hood's Sarsaparilla to cleanse my blood and in a short time after I began taking it the scrofula sores disappeared and I am now entirely well." JOHN M. BOYD Box 22, West Greene, Pa.

Hood's Pills are the best family cathartic and liver tonic. Gentle, reliable, sure.

Listen to this song of the editor, ye slow-paying subscribers and patron of his job printing establishment. Listen to it, and then go forth to seek him and pay up. "How dear to our heart is the old silver dollar, when some kind subscriber presents it to view; the Liberty head without necktie or collar, and all the strange things which to us seem so new; the wide-spreading eagle, the arrows below it, the stars and the words with the strange things they tell; the coin of our fathers, we're glad that we knew it, for some time or other 'twill come in right well; the star-spangled dollar, the old silver dollar we all love so well."—Ex.

Who is Out? Here is something to think about. A man owed \$1 and had but 75 cents. He went to a pawn broker and pawned the 75 cents for 50 cents. He met a friend and sold him the pawn ticket calling for 75 cents for 50 cents. He thus had two 50-cent pieces, \$1 in fact, with which he paid his debt. Was anyone out and how much?

PILES CURED IN 3 TO 5 NIGHTS. Piles, whether itching, blind or bleeding, are relieved by one application of Dr. Agnew's Ointment. 35 CENTS. And cured in 3 to 5 nights. Dr. M. Barkman, Einghampton, N. Y. writes: "Send me 12 doses more of Agnew's Ointment. I prescribe large quantities of it. It is a wonder worker in skin diseases, and a great cure for piles."—6.

Sold by C. A. Klein.

Walter Baker & Co.'s BREAKFAST COCOA. Absolutely Pure—Delicious—Nutritious. Costs Less than One Cent a Cup. DORCHESTER, MASS. By... WALTER BAKER & CO. Ltd.

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Female Footballists. Progressive girls of Belleville, Ill., are going to organize a football team, the first team in the United States. In England, as is well known, there are several football teams of women who play the game according to rules of their own making. Naturally they do not call for the "roughing" so common a feature of games played by men but the women get lots of healthful exercise. Some Foolish People. Allow a cough to run until it gets beyond the reach of medicine. They often say, "oh, it will wear away," but in most cases it will wear them away. Could they be induced to try the successful medicine called Kemp's Balsam which is sold on a positive guarantee to cure, they would immediately see the excellent effect after taking the first dose. Price 25 and 50c. TRADE MARK FREE. At all druggists.