

A Christmas Correspondence

FROM her to him:
 "Dear Jim,
 I'm so perplexed,
 So altogether tired
 out and vexed;
 I've tramped
 through miles
 and miles and
 miles of store,
 I've handled gloves and ties and trash
 galore.
 The girls are all disposed of—any stuff
 That looks expensive's always good
 enough—
 But you men, who grow humorous at a tie
 And mock us for the poor cigars we buy,
 (This wisdom isn't cribbed from out the
 paper—
 For my enlightenment, see comic papers)
 You know a smoking cap would make you
 mad;
 Please, is there anything you haven't had?
 Just mention any trifle you prefer—
 What is it that you want for Christmas, sir,
 And I will bless you with my latest breath.
 Most cordially, your friend,
 Elizabeth."

"Dear Girl," he wrote.
 "I'm sorry that you're harassed.
 Although you've made me frightfully em-
 barrassed.
 Each Christmas of my life I've been so
 haunted
 By all the awful things I haven't wanted,
 I hardly can believe the tale is true.
 That I'm at last to have a thing, I do.
 In fact, your letter really seems to say,
 You are to dictate, I am to obey.
 So poor, rash child, no longer I demur;
 These are the little trifles I prefer;
 Imprimis then: Two certain eyes of blue
 That tell unbid the hidden thoughts of you;
 Second: Your strong, young hands, alert
 to lend
 Their tender strength to help and hold a
 friend.
 And third: That laugh of yours that rings
 as gay
 As happy bells upon a holiday;
 And fourth: Your sweetness, tender-
 ness and truth.
 The glory and the gladness of your
 youth.
 Dear little Madam Santa Claus, a line
 To tell me if this present may be mine.
 Oh, child, be generous this Christmas
 day,
 And your petitioner will ever pray
 The right to sign himself, with sweet
 intent,
 Always your grateful, glad
 Recipient."
 —Theodosia Pickering Garrison, in N. Y.
 Life.

A STRANGER AND YE TOOK ME IN.

THE Auberts were taking a step up in life. From being birds of passage in a tenement house, free to flit by the midnight train to Canada whenever fancy dictated, they were evolving into landowners and had bought a house. It was a very little house on the hillside, which overlooked the village where Jean Aubert and Delia and Henri worked in the mills, but two acres of land went with it, and already the little Auberts were growing rosy and fatigued. Hitherto the gates of Paradise had been effectually closed to them, and with woods and fields no more than half a mile away and the whole street on the other side lined with green lawns to tempt their very eyes, they had never till now kicked up their heels on grass.

Peeping out of the two street windows of the yardless double tenement house which had been their home, or playing softly round the doorstep on hot summer evenings, they had looked like a family of mice, noiseless, bright-eyed and shy. Mamma Aubert was the mother mouse, a thin, dark-eyed, decent French-Canadian woman, seldom seen outdoors, but often of an afternoon by the window with a bald-headed baby in her arms and a rather hectic flush upon her cheeks. In school the little Auberts wore perennial high-necked, long-sleeved, pink calico aprons, and still maintaining their mouse-like manners did excellent work. The boys were black-eyed rogues, but like true Frenchmen took kindly to instruction in cap-doffing and excuse-me. They all had a gift for penmanship and drawing, and Robert Aubert was the artist of the school.

The year before the horse was bought the two eldest children had graduated into the woolen mill, and Delia's deft fingers earned enough money to pay her board, clothe herself tastefully and have a little margin left, which she laid by for furniture for the room which they were going to call parlor.

There was one shadow on the family happiness, and that was the mortgage; and just before Christmas this shadow began to assume alarming proportions. It had looked easy in the spring, when they first moved into the new home, to meet the payment which was due in December. Jean Aubert was carpenter and machinist in one of the factories, and a steady and capable man, but the process of evolution is never without a struggle, and, do the best he could, the interest was all he could pay. Even for that, what with the cold coming suddenly on and his nestful of young ones being uncommonly hungry and hard on their clothes after their summer out doors, the family resources were strained to the utmost. Delia and Henri contributed their savings, the parlor that was to be was shut up, and they all came down to a pretty strict diet of pudding and milk. It was a poor outlook for Christmas, far ahead of them loomed up more interest and other payments, besides the continuous outgo for their living.

"I don't know but I've undertaken too much," Jean Aubert said, soberly. "It costs more over here than it did on the street. If we don't save more this winter than we have since we came, we shall have to move back," and in the melancholy silence that followed Mamma Aubert gave up her chickens and cow, Delia saw her dream of muslin curtains and an organ vanish in air, and the children suffered that depression of spirits which is always induced by a verdict adverse to Christmas.

Fortune has a way of experimenting with full cups to see how much more they can hold after they are apparently brimming. The Auberts thought they had all the mouths they could feed and all the cares they could compass consistent with the ambition, which they were not yet prepared to relinquish, of owning their house, when the very next day after their humble door and Madame Aubert opened it on an old man, who asked if Jean Aubert lived there.

"I come to see him from Canada," said he.

It was three o'clock in the afternoon, but Madame Aubert made the visitor comfortable by the fire. He was old and poorly dressed, and had with him a shabby carpetbag.

"You know me?" he asked, as he took off his coat and prepared to make himself at home. "No? Ah, Jean remember, His father my old neighbor—frien'—up in Chateaugrand."

Madame Aubert went about her work, the little Auberts resumed their play, the older children came stamping in from school. The questions they all entertained in respectful silence about the stranger who sat dozing by their fire—Who was he? Had he come to stay? What should they do with him?—waited till Jean should come.

That evening they all sat up and listened to the fine old story of the Boy Who Went to Seek His Fortune—or was it the Prodigal Son? It was told in French, with many gestures and much dramatic effect—and Pierre Demarest, its hero and narrator, was assisted by the smiles and tears and enthusiastic applause of all the Auberts, from Jean Aubert down.

In the seignory in Canada where the Auberts lived the Demarests had been their neighbors. Old Demarest had been a father to Jean's father, and Pierre Demarest had been his dearest friend. But Pierre had chosen to wander, and while young Aubert settled and married and became a

farmer on the land adjoining old Demarest's, Pierre went west and disappeared. No word came from him, and except in Aubert's stories to his children of the friendship he and Pierre had had together in the days when Aubert was a stranger and Father Demarest had taken him in, the very memory of Pierre Demarest seemed to have died. Gone 30 years! His audience gathered that he had first drifted beyond the pale of civilization in company with a party of railroad engineers; that he had been a guide and hunter in the Rocky mountains; that he had had some experience in mining, and that he had been to Alaska. He talked of Indians and bears with a familiarity that made the Aubert boys' hearts burn within them. But he dwelt with most particularity upon his home-coming.

"I think I see my home before I die," he said. "I come to Chateaugrand. I take my bag and walk down the road—two miles—to my old home. No one know me. My father dead, my mother dead, my brother Scim say no room for me. He not care. He say he think me dead. Why not me write so many years? My brother Leonard live in Chateaugrand. I go to him. I walk back all the way to his house. He have big, good house. He woman scowl at me—so!—and say: 'You ole man, you poor, you come to live on us, you go 'way.' They give me no supper. I take my bag and think of my frien' Aubert. I go again into the country. I come to my frien' Aubert's house. He dead, too, but his son just like him. Glad to see me 'fore he knew me. Give me supper. When he find out who I am, he seize my hand, he laugh, he cry, he say: 'My father's frien'! I cry, too. I stay two weeks with him and his brother on next farm. They very kind to me. I say: 'Where your brother Jean?' He little boy when I leave home.' They say: 'He in the states, in Harwichtown, New Hampshire. He work in mills. Do well. Have wife and children.' I say: 'I go to see him. Spen' Christmas with

him, if he glad to see me.' Not see my brothers any more. They 'fraid I cost them money. I not trouble them."

Jean Aubert grasped the old man's hand.

"We are truly glad to see you," said he. "We are not so well off as we were, because we struggle hard to buy this house. The little children want the air. My woman like a cow and chickens. My girl here, Delia, want a little room—a parlor—for her beaux. We work hard all together for the pay. But we see our friends, if you'll take what we can give you, you are kindly welcome. Many times I've heard my father tell how kind your father was to him. And the children here will like to hear some more about your life."

In the days that followed the family made good Jean's welcome, and both by word and act caused their old visitor to feel at home. Their native French politeness, united with real kindness of heart, concealed the inconvenience which his presence caused them, and in truth, except for the fact that the family divisor had already seemed as big as it could well be, and that it is always a problem how to put 12 persons to sleep in five beds, Pierre was very little trouble. He sat for the most part by the fire, quiet and content. In the evening when they were all at home he told stories and talked with Jean about old times. The children ceased to be shy before him. Robert curiously drew his picture—on a shingle, as many a brother artist has been driven by stress of circumstances to do. He was a man of medium size and much weather-beaten—a study in brown, with a keen old face, little gold rings in his ears, bright eyes, and small, strong hands. He was old, but not feeble, he was silent, but not stupid, and after his own fashion seemed cheerful and at ease. Robert finished him, and after a moment's contemplation added a beard, a fur cap, and trimmed his old coat with fur; rounded his waist line up a bit and put on a belt, and then, the fancy growing, represented him as surrounded with various articles suited to the holiday ambitions of the young Auberts—for instance, a paint box and heaps of drawing paper labeled "Robert," a watch and chain such as Delia hankered after, and a bicycle for Henri.

In spite of the quietus Papa Aubert had put upon Christmas, the children could not help planning for some sort of a celebration. They could at least have a tree to look at; spruces were

from Seaforth's to hang on the tree, and I haven't got them all, either. The team's coming from Brown & Taylor's to bring the rest."

"Why," said Delia, "why—I thought he was poor! He said: 'A few little things to please the children.' Where shall we put them all? I know, here in the parlor, and oh, Robert, bring the tree in there, and we'll hang up evergreens, and nobody'll mind if there isn't any furniture; they'll be looking at the tree."

At seven o'clock that Christmas evening the parlor door was opened and the Auberts, with mingled feelings of self-denial and expectancy, were marshaled in.

"There are presents!" they gasped. Where were Robert's angel and the eggshells? "There are candles! And candy! And stars! And shining balls!" And from awe-struck surprise they mounted by rapid strides into ecstasy, and from gasping took to shouting. There were dolls and dishes and a rocking-horse. There was a paste-board village and a Noah's ark and a box of blocks. In bewildered surprise Robert saw a paint-box and a parcel of drawing paper labeled "Robert." Delia fairly turned pale at finding that a small package for her contained a little silver watch and chateleine. Henri was speechless over an order for a bicycle.

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"And now I go away," said the old fellow; "to-night, right now. I stay two weeks. I fin' my frien's. They know me when I come again—remember ol' Pierre! You pay your mortgage. Be happy."

And in spite of their remonstrances, as if he would not burden them with having to express their gratitude or did not care to see them try, he then and there, before that wonderful evening was half over, girded on the old coat, seized his faded bag and trudged off manfully in the moonlight, vanishing as suddenly as he came.

I shall not try to describe the emotions that possessed the Aubert family on that never-to-be-forgotten Christmas night and during the succeeding week. The older ones walked in a dream, doubting whether that precious piece of paper which was to set them securely on the plane of independence might not be worthless, until word came from New York that it was genuine and Jean might get \$2,000 for it any day. Which he did—2,000 one-dollar bills, and sat up all night with his wife counting it over and trying to realize the magnitude of his good fortune.

"The fact is, sir," he said next day when he went to discharge the mortgage, "my wife and I never saw so much money before in all our lives. We wanted to sort of take it in. So we kept it all by us over night. Put the rest of it in the bank? Well, no, sir. You see we feel richer to have the real money right by us. And maybe we shall use some of it to fix up the house. My girl, she set on having some parlor furniture, and my wife, she want piazza on the front."

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"And we will say," they declared, and it was a piece of philosophy worthy of older heads, "we will say, when the time comes to take off the presents, that this house is our present."

What was that? Did old Demarest chuckle, or merely cough in his sleep? They thought he was dozing, as, with six heads in a bunch, they whispered their plans in the corner on the other side of the fire. If they only could have seen what was written inside that rusty old envelope of a man! Has anybody imagined how it must feel to be Santa Claus? If it is true that it is more blessed to give than to receive, and that, whatever the joys of possession, generosity feels better than gratitude, St. Nick must be the happiest being in the universe. And Pierre Demarest was planning to be the Auberts' St. Nicholas.

The day before Christmas he buttoned on his coat and trudged over to the village.

"I buy some little things for you' young ones," he said to Mme. Aubert. That night he took Robert and Delia into his confidence. Robert was to go next day and get what he had bought and Delia was to smuggle the parcels into the house and put them on the tree.

"You not tell," he said, impressively; and then with a twinkle: "I like to see what the chil'ren say."

Delia will never forget that Christmas, not merely for what happened in the evening, but for the responsibilities which beset her during the day. If they had not all gone off to church in the morning except Robert and herself and the baby, she never could have managed it. Robert came home fairly staggering under the weight of the things the old man had bought.

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Building of an Isthmian Canal at PANAMA

The French Project in Which the Government Is Offered a Controlling Interest

SO CLOSELY has the American public connected the Panama canal enterprise with the name of De Lesseps, and so familiar are we with the circumstances surrounding the failure of that great engineer and the scandal that followed him to his grave, that we are prone to look upon any project connected with the Panama venture as a swindle. When De Lesseps began the construction of the Panama canal we dreamed of a grand reality; when he failed we awoke to find our reality but a dream.

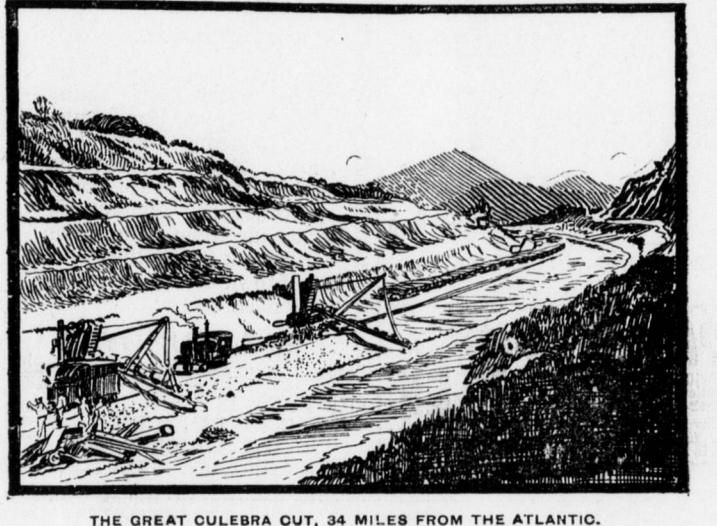
But in 1894 a new company took hold of the work where the De Lesseps company dropped it. Of that new company we have heard, or seemingly cared, but little, until now they offer to our government a controlling interest in their project if we will finish it. The first impression is that they have nothing but a concession and a vast amount of worn and antiquated machinery to dispose of, but that is wrong; they have a partially completed canal, a canal that is nearer completion than we probably realize, and, while it may not be good policy on the part of our government to buy, it would seem to be poor policy on the part of the French company to stop their work at the present time and lose the hundreds of millions that have been invested so far. The result may be two canals where we have so long wished for one.

come, the remainder of the work resolves itself into the digging of the big ditch and the building of the system of locks that will raise a vessel over the divide between the two oceans.

To accomplish this there will be a system of eight lockages, the first one in from the Atlantic side being at the outlet of the Bohio lake. The line of the canal, however, has been so selected that it will be possible to make it a tide water channel whenever conditions warrant the expense. Of the present canal the dividing reach will be about 21 meters above the mean level of the sea.

Towards the work of digging the great ditch itself great progress has been made. Not only has the canal been practically completed from Colon, on the Atlantic side, to the Bohio locks, but beyond that a great amount of work has been done. At San Pablo, 23 miles from the Atlantic, the canal is now large and deep enough to float an ordinary sized vessel, and at La Corosita, 28 miles from the Atlantic, the cut is rapidly nearing completion.

Of the work of excavating the Culebra cut presented the greatest difficulties. This cut carries the canal through the divide between the two oceans, and is some five miles in length. Some idea of the amount of



THE GREAT CULEBRA CUT, 34 MILES FROM THE ATLANTIC.

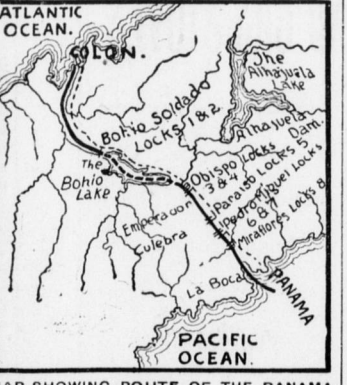
At the present time about 4,000 men are engaged in the work of separating North and South America at Panama. Work is being pushed almost entirely from the Atlantic side, and of the 48 1/2 miles that it is necessary to cut through before ships can pass from the Atlantic to the Pacific oceans 15 miles are already completed. This channel completes the tidewater section of the canal on the Atlantic side—nearly one-third of the entire cut. It has been dredged to a depth of nine meters, or more than 30 feet, and 30 meters wide at the bottom.

A glance at the accompanying map shows the route of the canal, and also shows the Charges river. The greatest engineering difficulties encountered are occasioned by the crossing of this river in several places. While during

work that has been done on it may be had from the accompanying engraving, which shows the cut as it is 34 miles from the Atlantic. The work of excavating has been carried to a point within eight miles of the Pacific, while some work has been done at Panama, the Pacific terminus of the canal.

From this brief description of the work that has already been accomplished it may be seen that the French company has something more than a plan to sell to us, even though it may not be a feasible proposition for this government to buy. At the same time, with so much accomplished it would seem to be almost a settled fact that the company behind the enterprise would push it to final completion, whether we build another waterway to connect the two oceans or not.

Of the machinery of which so much has been said, there are millions of dollars' worth of antiquated dredges, excavators and other expensive machines piled in heaps along the route of the canal just as they were left by the De Lesseps company. These are scarcely worth the expense of marketing as old metal, but many of the machines now in use by the new company are modern, and at least one-half of them are of American build. In a word, the new company has been administered with economy, and a desire to complete the work of construction with as little expense as possible.



MAP SHOWING ROUTE OF THE PANAMA CANAL.

the greater portion of the year the Charges river is but little more than a brook, there are times when it becomes a raging torrent. To control this torrent of water and store it as a supply for feeding the canal is the problem that has taxed the ingenuity of the engineers, and yet, now that they have solved the problem, it seems decidedly simple.

The Charges river rises in a series of deep ravines some miles to the northeast of the route of the canal. It is from these ravines that much of the water comes which produces the floods. To stop these floods the engineers have dammed the mouth of the ravines and by this means have formed a lake capable of holding back the greater part of the water that would carry destruction with it if permitted to go unobstructed and at the same time supply a feeder for the canal.

The Bohio lake shown in the map is another deep cut through which the river flows and which will become a part of the canal as well as a storage reservoir for the water needed to feed it. This is accomplished by damming the mouth of the cut and placing a lock at the lower end.

The difficulties of earing for the floods in the Charges river and providing a water supply for the canal over-

Queer Ice Making.
 Water in a shallow pan, in a sheltered place, will freeze even when the thermometer is above the freezing point. This is due to the rapid loss of heat of the earth after nightfall. In some hot countries ice is obtained in commercial quantities by setting shallow earthenware pans of water on the ground protected from the wind.—Science.

Incomplete Instruction.
 "Here's a sermon on 'How to Bring Men to Church.'"
 "Does it say anything about how to keep them awake in church after you get them there?"—Chicago Record.

Heard at the Club.
 Cleverton—How was the dinner last night?
 Dashaway—Fine, old man. It was the best dinner I ever drank.—Town Topics.

Got Rich Quick.
 Sara Bernhardt's long engagement in "L'Aiglon" at her Paris theater, just closed, is said to have averaged in receipts \$2,100 a performance.

Won't Work Both Ways.
 Give to a pig when it grunts and a child when it cries, and you will have a fine pig and a bad child.

to be had for the cutting on the hill that overshadowed the village. The little boys would get one. Robert should make a paper angel for the top. They would color egg shells for ornaments, and Mamma Aubert promised them a cake and snow ice-cream.

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