

A Christmas Comedy of Errors

By ELISA ARMSTRONG BENGOUGH.

HERE, now, we are all ready for Christmas," said Mrs. for Christmas," said Mrs. Slickerby, as she climbed stiffly down from the chair on which she had been standing to deck the chandelier with holly. "How surprised Josiah will be when he comes in, cold and tired, to find the place looking so like holiday times. I declare, I have a good



'It's Your New Set of Furs!"

mind to make a fire in the stove just to please him; he kept asking for it so long—though, come to think of it, he hasn't mentioned it lately, though I always told him it only made a dirt for me to clean up and the furnace heated the whole piace anyhow. He said his mother used to have a nice fire in the stove when they came in evenings. Of course, she did; his mother never saw a furnace in her life, and wouldn't have known it from a telephone if she had." She paused, with her hands on her hips, to admire the result of her labors. "Yes, I guess I will light a fire in that stove, anyhow, it will serve as a text for more remarks about the cold and a few more hints as to how I do need a new set of furs this Christmas. Josiah is a good man, but he is as close when it comes to a question of money as a potato is to its skin."

She was bustling about as she talked, making her preparations to light a fire in the brilliantly polished stove. "There, I declare," she cried, as she opened the door, "if Josiah hasn't got this stove all filled up with papers and trash, after all my talking; it does seem as if you can't teach a man to be careful about a house any more than you can teach a hen to play checkers! Never mind, I'll just lay my kindlings on top of the trash and not seedd—Christmas is not the time for scolding, anyhow—though when you've got to live with a man it's best to take every opportunity to teach him what's right."

As the fire began to crackle cheerfully, she left it and went over to the old-fashioned cupboard in the corner, reached carefully to the top shelf and took down a hundle. "I'll just take a last peep at Josiah's cheering, she said. "I't tell you, there was

object to go under the mistletoe, Miss Goit?

As the fire began to crackle cheerfully, she left it and went over to the old-fash ioned cupboard in the corner, reached carefully to the top shelf and took down a hundle.

"Til just take a last peep at Josiah's present," she said. "I tell you, there was a lot of work in the knitting of that afghan, and if he doesn't give me those furs as to save me a trip down town to find sixell two a good deal asnamed every time.

"And bless her little heart, she did tell the truth."

And bless her little heart, she did tell the truth.

the puts it over his knees in the buggy this winter—and the furs are not in the house, I know that, for I've been over every square inch of it in hopes I'd find he'd hidden 'em somewhere." She had unfolded a wonderful combination of colors in wool which would have made Joseph's coat a somber garment by comparison, and looked at it with great admiration. Then she carefully replaced it. "I don't know as it's just necessary to keep it away up there—he wouldn't see it if it was right under his nose. Dear me, I certainly smell something burning. I wonder if it can be my cake in the oven, I had almost forgotten it, with all these other things on my mind."

"There comes Josiah now!" she cried ten minutes later, as she heard the door of the sitting room open. "I'll stay out here and see what he does. Well, surely he must be pleased with the decorations and the fire in the stove. It sounds as if he was doing a jig all over the room—and him a professing Christian, too!"

Five minutes later later she opened the sitting room door and stood transitized on the threshold. "Why, Josiah Slickerby, what on earth is the matter?" she shrieked. "You are as black as a sweep and your beard is all singed, and what is that awful smell in here, and wwhat is that you have in your hand?"

"I's your new set of furs, that's what it is," retorted Josiah, grimly, "a good set of urs that cost a lot of money, too, and looking like a cat that had been sitting on a can of firecrackers when they went off!"

"But how on earth could—"

"I's your new set of furs, that's how; you said you'd never make another fire in it now we've got a furnace, and I hid 'em in the stove, that's how; you said you'd never make another fire in it now we've got a furnace, and I hid 'em in the stove, that's how; you said you'd never make another fire in it now we've got a furnace, and I hid 'em in the stove, that's how; you said you'd never make another fire in it now we've got a furnace, and I hid 'em in the stove, that's how; you said you'd never make another fire in it the puts it over his knees in the buggy this winter—and the furs are not in the house, I know that, for I've been över every square inch of it in hopes I'd find he'd hidden 'em somewhere." She had

R.M.BROWS

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Well, goodness knows, you have sur-

"Well, goodness knows, you have surprised me!"

She was much embarrased, but before I condition the prised me!"

Yes, and when I came into this room it was all full of smoke, and flames were bursting out of the stove door, it was so full, and if I hadn't kept my presence of mind and hunted out that old thing to smother the flames with, the whole place "ause—" "Because." I suggested, smiling.

"Because." I sugge



pt. Makelove—But surely you don't et to go under the mistletoe, Miss

A Whole Dinner wid Mashed Potatoes

By JESSIE LLEWELLYN.

THE holiday rush kept us late, and HE holiday rush kept us late, and although thoroughly tired in mind and body I felt no relief upon being free to leave the crowded store and return to my cheap boarding house. Slowly I made my way among chattering clerks, comfortable matrons and fashionable young women to the rear exit. I was horribly conscions of my frayed jacket, and the lean leather chatelaine at my side. "Christmas!" I smiled bitterly. "Serves you right for not staying mar-

"Serves you right for not staying mar-ried," I could hear the last harsh words of my maiden aunt as I left the sleepy village to seek independence and self-re-

spect.
"Other women?" rang the voice, "well,

men will be men; he makes a good living for you, don't he?" I heard the key turn in the great store door, but still I remained on the step, staring out at the lights tearfully reflect-



"Please, Mum, Gimme a Nickel?"

ed in the wet pavement, when there came, from somewhere below my waist line, a small whine.

"Please, mum, gimme a nickel?"
I looked down and beheld the smallest, dirtiest, most forsaken little woman I had ever seen. She could have been no more than seven, but there was endless weather tales in the hollows of her cheeks, and the over-bright black eyes bespoke knowl

"Little woman," I said presently, lapsing into the language of him who was constantly in my thoughts, "there is one dollar coming to me, all on account of a derelict laundryman. What would you

dotar coming to me, all on account of a derelict laundryman. What would you rather have than anything else that a dollar can buy?"

"Has youse got de dough, sure 'nough?"

I nodded.

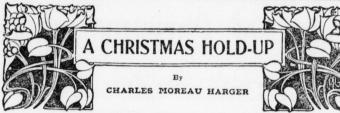
Instantly she answered me: "Say, what 'vid a whole dinner cost, wid mashed potagoes fer both of usens?"

We must have made a comical picture, my new friend and I, as we entered the quiet, down-town restaurant. There was

my new friend and I, as we entered the quiet, down-town restaurant. There was just one other person seated there on this Christmas day—a man over in the shadow of the corner.

The child had scrambled into a chair indicated by the head waiter, and I was about to take my place opposite, when the man in the corner suddenly arose.

I cannot, even now, remember how it all happened Confusedly I saw the young-ster's eyes grow round with wonder, and the head waiter stilled an exclamatory cath, for I, there in the public restaurant, I was in that stranger's arms. And this I remember distinctly—the man's most manly words:



HAT about getting through to night, driver?"

"It's all right, I guess."
"Hands up!" and their arms were ex-Drifting some on the Lit-

tle Cimarron, but that won't do much

damage."
"It's 30 miles."
"Well, that ain't much. This team's
good for it. Goin' to start right off,
ma'am?"

ma'am?"

The anxious traveler returned to the fire in the uninviting office of the Mid-Continental hotel. She was brown-haired, cheery-faced, and evidently accustomed to looking out for herself. She was bound for the Indian school at the other end of the stage line—a position awaited her.

"All ahears!!" called the driver, and

"All aboard!" called the driver, and the passengers hurried into the three-seated carryall that served for a stage. The woman sat beside John Carlin, the

The woman sat beside John Carlin, the owner of Circle Bar ranche. He tucked the robes around her and remarked: "Mighty poor day for a pleasure ride." "Slightly." remarked his seat-mate, smiling, "and you know what day it is?" "Yes, and we are likely to run over into Christmas, for the roads may keep us out until after midnight, ma'am." "Call me Miss Macon—I'm the new instructor."

"Better be prepared for whatever hap-pens, Miss Macon; this is a tough stretch of country across the territory."
"Are the Indians bad?" Her eyes grew

"Whites are a blamed sight worse than redskins. We can handle Indians."
"But some good men go west—very good men!" The eyes grew softer as she recalled a memory of the days back east. "Yes; but, blame 'em, they don't stay

The eyes flashed and she looked out over the broad prairie, stretching away in patches of brown and white to the far horizon. Nor did she renew the conversation, and the handsome ranchman was

sorry.

The day wore on. They stopped at a cabin for lunch. They climbed long slopes and toiled through sandy wastes where in springtime would be rushing rivers. They rattled down the declivities of ravines and more than once the weary horses were stalled in the drifts that had been heaped among the dead sunflowers and ragweeds in the draws. It was a tiresome cheepless journey and the was a tiresome cheepless journey and the was a tiresome, cheerless journey, and the five passengers kept mostly their own im-pressions of its discomforts. In the late afternoon Miss Macon broke

the silence, taking up the thread of the morning's discussion: "An old friend of



"What About Getting Through Tonight?"

sit's your new set of furs, that's what s," retorted Josiah, grimly, "a good set urs that cost a lot of money, too, and ting like a cat that had been sitting on in of firecrackers when they went off!"

In had hid 'em in the stove, that's how! said you'd never make another fire in the we we've got a furnace, and I hid 'em it, so's I could surprise you for Christic, so's I could surprise you for Christic.

She was much embarrassed, but before I could mel many little beggar of the night before, well and many little beggar of the night before.

She was much embarrassed, but before I could welcome her one dirty paw shot out.

She did not answer, and the stage hurded mel."

If you do not, I will tell them of to-night fiellow, but a brave one."

She turned toward the group they shad fiellow, but a brave one."

She turned toward the group they shad fiellow, but a brave one."

She turned toward the group they shad to men are its pride—if they have the right that she started and studied him noticed that she started and studied him nothing of direct application. "There is than my little beggar of the night before.

She was much embarrassed, but before I could welcome her one dirty paw shot out.

She did not answer, and the stage hur
She turned toward the group they shad fiellow, but a brave one."

"Then he is fitted for the west. Such the stage that they have the right they have the right the ways." He added the afterthought and noticed that she started and studied him nothing of direct application. "He are the order, and his revolver was pointed at the order, and his revolver was pointed. The field was a daring fellow, but a brave one."

She turned toward the group they shad the ways."

She turned toward the west.—Such the ways." If you do not, I will tell them of to-night and of—"

She turned toward the group they shad the stage hur
we'left in the moonlight beyond the ways."

She turned to

some row in the struggling moonlight.
"Hands up!" and their arms were extended toward the stars. Miss Macon, even in her terror, noticed that the constellation of Orion was nearly overhead.
And then the chief of the robbers came to how side. to her side.

"Quick, ma'am, what have you got?"
Something in the tone aroused her and he looked anxiously into the half-masked face of the handsome frontiersman bent toward her. "In New England men



"Well, It Ain't Right."

treat women with more courtesy." she re

torted.

"You're from New England? What are you doing out here?"

"I'm going to the agency—I'm Miss Macon, the new—"

The man stepped back as if he had been struck by a wailed hand. He rectioned to The man stepped back as if he had been struck by a mailed hand. He motioned to his confederates to join him, but they did not see his signal. With a quick action of impatience he swung his arm across his face and the mask was for an instant displaced. Only for an instant, but it was time for the bright moonlight to fall on his clean-shaven features and for the woman gazing intently at him to realize that this was for her a time of fate.

She gathered herself together with an effort that was worthy of a better cause, and stepping closer to the bandit whispered one word. He, startled, trembled and obeyed her swift instructions to step behind the wagon, leaving the others to guard the four remaining passengers.

"Oh, Frank, how could you?" she demanded, reaching up to the strong face and lifting the mask. It was one she knew so well in the old days.

"Well it anit right" he admitted.

and lifting the mask. It was one she knew so well in the old days.

"Well, it ain't right," he admitted, shame-facedly. "But who cares?"

"I care—everybody cares—your poor old mother sitting alone in the little farm-house at Danvers, cares. You don't know how much she cares—and Anna cares!"

The man brushed his arm across his face as if his eyes hurt him. "Yes, I suppose it's so. But things got mighty tough—I had to do something. It's the first time. What can I do now?"

"Go home, Frank," went on the woman's low voice. "Go home to your mother, and help her run the farm. Be a man sgain."

er, and help her than again."

"And Anna—your sister?"

"Frank, she has grieved for you all this time—she wants you now."

"But," bitterly, "you will tell her about

"I will do this, Frank. I will give you wo years to prove yourself. If you are sincere, the secret will be yours and mine. If you do not, I will tell them of to-night

zled ranchman, held both his hands un-

zied ranchman, held both his hands until the other had vanished in the runflower stalks. Carlin glowed under the girl's touch, and obeyed.

"Do you belong to this—company?" he asked, a little bitterly, as she loosed his arms, now that it was too late.

"No, but you remember what you said a little while ago, there is more than one kind of bravery?"

A shrill whistle sounded off to the right and suddenly stood before them the quartette so recently departed. The passengers were covered by their revolvers and they were at the landits' mercy once more.

more.

But the masked chief stepped forward, holding in his hand Carlin's watch and pocketbook; he gave to the others their belongings—their watches, jewelry and revolvers—Carlin was the only one who had hidden his gun

who who men When the last trinket had been distributed the masked chief bowed low. His fine mouth just showing beneath the fringe of black curled a little—whether in

fun or contempt none could tell.
"Merry Christmas! I am Santa Claus!"
He bowed again, stepped back, bent his eyes on Miss Macon--and the strangers had departed.

had departed.

The passengers, looking down at their watches, read the time—it was past midnight—Christmas morning.

The stage reached the end of its journey six hours late. Before it arrived Carlin had asked permission to call on Miss Macon and discuss the strange events of the ride. "I am not used to receiving gifts at that time of night," said he.

Though Carlin called and they talked over the night's happenings, she did not explain. There was a newspaper story of a crazy stage robber who gave back all he stole (you may have read it) and she did not correct that—not even when, a year later, Carlin made her his bride and claimed that he had received two Christmas presents from the chief.

chaimed that he had received two Christ-mas presents from the chief.

Years afterward they visited New Eng-land, the guests of sheir brother-in-law, the mayor of Danvers. "Do you know," remarked Carlin, to his wife, "Frank has a fine mouth—it reminds me of some one I have seen somewhere."

She did not reply.

A Similar Experience.

Reeder (looking up from his newspaper)

Great Scott! Here is a yarn about a man who spent a night in a pit with a Bengal tiger. Just imagine how he must have suffered!

Hennypeck—I can easily do that—I leave all shows it.

know all about it. For two weeks before the holidays I was obliged to face the uni-ted demands of my wife and seven grown daughters for Christmas money.—Judge.

A Sight for the Gods.

The girl you'd give the world to win To show you how she holds you dee Now fondly ties beneath your chin A necktie you can never wear.

-N. Y. Worldt

ADVANTAGE IN SIZE.



Tommy—Ain't you goin' to hang up our stocking, Nellie? His Big Sister—No, Tommy. I'm too

Tommy-Yes, but the older one gets the nore it will hold.

His Salutation. She ne'er will speak to him,
This stupid youth so bland.
She stood beneath the mistlet.
He merely shook her hand.
—Washington Star.

Great Expectations.

