A CHRISTMAS TOBOGGAN

By MANDA L. CROCKER

IN a sheltered cleft on the mountain side where the scraggy pines made polite obeisance to their bare-headed neighbors, the Half-way house had stood, a harbinger of comfort, for a score of years.

And now, though the old stage lay rotting in the valley and the traveler thundered along by rail beneath its very foundations, the friendly gables seemed beckoning to imaginary guests.

To-night, too, the pine branches crackled merrily on the wide hearth, as if the snubs of a progressive public were not worth minding, lighting up the long, low room in the gloaming of the Christmas Eve.

Two women conversed in tender monotone in the cheery illumination, and the elder was saying: "The paper cannot be found and, of course, the property goes to your Uncle Hermon."

The other rose wearily from her place before the fire and stood leaning her head against the black old-fashioned mantel.

"Then uncle really intends taking our home away from us?" she said, interrogatively, looking down into the patient mother face.

"Certainly, my daughter," came the reply in cheerful resignation, "and he expects to take possession soon, too. But your father always made much of the Christmas time and, for his sake, we will keep the day gladly, you know."

"Yes, I know," and the girl turned away toward the next room, tucking up her sleeves with little gingerly thrusts as she went.

The brace of partridges Brother Ned had snared the day before made a pretty picture as they waited, plump and round, for the last turn of the skewer. After they were ready for the morrow's roasting the tall, queenly girl went over to the open doorway a moment to contemplate the picturesque landscape she had loved all her life.

"Even the scrubby oaks are restful up here," she mused, "and I don't see how I am to bring myself to be turned out like—a beggar!"

Making a sudden dash at her eyes with her handkerchief, she resumed: "Of course, if mother is bent on having a sunny Christmas in the face of it all, why, I won't be shadowy."

Hearing a cheery whistle outside she continued: "Ned doesn't care about it—boys don't. O yes" (correcting the uncharitable thought), "he does care, but not as I do."

The mother rocked to and fro before the fragrant blaze, humming an old refrain. The dusk gathered

"Who Cares for His Charity?"

oomily in the corners of the room
ile the dancing light glinted along
e smoky rafters as if eager to dispel
thought of loneliness.

Mrs. Cameron glanced upward. In
e years agone, when the rafters were
t so smoky and the dear old rooms
t so dingy as now, the Half-way
use was the social hub of the moun-
n side. But now—

A sturdy lad of 12 years came bust-
g in with his arms full of holly and
pockets full of mail.

"The road down to the village is as smooth as glass," he said, brushing the snowflakes from his clothes on to the bright hearth. "Horses will have to be sharp shod to make the slide tomorrow, I know."

Handing some letters to his mother, he began to plan for a "jolly good time" the next day, while he separated the sprays of the glossy evergreen.

Attracted by his festive manner, his sister volunteered to help, and fell to sorting the crimson clusters for decorating the table and brightening up the rooms on the morrow.

"Of course he can't care much," she whispered, rebelliously, watching the satisfaction shining on the boyish face.

"We'll have popcorn and chestnuts, and browned birds and—everything," cried Ned, as his plans bubbled over.

"Everything," repeated his sister, bitterly, "and then by and by have nothing."

But Ned did not hear, for his mother was saying: "Here's a note from

"Mr. Fulton Gave It to Me."

Cousin Jessie," while a smile lighted up her careworn face.

Then she passed the paper to Edith, murmuring: "All winter long in the dear old house."

"Papa has concluded to let you stay in the house until spring, as he cannot find a tenant before that time. He will stop on his way to Fulton's in the morning and talk with you about the matter," was what Edith read. Then she laid the slip of paper on her brother's palm, wondering if by that time anything would happen that they would not have to go at all.

Ned tossed the note into the maternal lap contemptuously and his sunny face darkened. "Who cares for his charity extension, I'd like to know?" he exclaimed. "It's only because he can't do otherwise and make it pay."

His lip curled disdainfully and quivered into silence. He did "care," after all, poor little brother. And Edith's heart smote her as she kissed his flushed cheek in sisterly sympathy. After all, he had been braver than she.

"It's a veritable toboggan," exclaimed Hermon Cameron's wife as the fine team cantered up the treacherous "slide." "Really I am afraid of an accident."

"Fudge, Mrs. Faintheart; what can happen?" laughed her husband, gayly, as he cracked his whip over the sleek bays.

Truly, it did not seem possible for anything to happen out of harmony with the lovely holiday. Nevertheless, a few minutes later the serenity of the day was all broken up for the Camerons. Frightened at something by the roadside, the horses became unmanageable and, in a twinkling, becoming detached from the sleigh, ran wildly around the upper turning, throwing Mr. Cameron heavily to the ground.

The impetus of the accident sent the vehicle spinning down the glassy incline, its occupants perfectly helpless to stay their mad flight.

The Fultons, startled to see a runaway team dash into their grounds, ran out to recognize it as that of their friend, Cameron, and in a short time they were bending solicitously over the unlucky man who, prone on the Christmas snow, was moaning unconsciously.

"We will take him up to the widow's," said Mr. Fulton, glancing in the direction of the friendly gables, "while you go for the doctor," addressing his son, "and then we will look for the rest of them."

Prudence Cameron prepared a couch for her unfortunate brother-in-law, with a queer sensation tugging at her heartstrings. He had meant to stop, but not in this manner. Surely there was a Providence in it.

"Here are some papers we picked up," said Mr. Fulton, laying a roll in the widow's hand. "They must belong to him. Examine them and see. I haven't my glasses with me."

In her own room Mrs. Cameron looked the papers over. "Of course they're his," she mused, unrolling the grimy outer wrapper. Unfolding the inside paper she read: "I hereby give and bequeath the Half-way house to my sister-in-law, Prudence Cameron, and—"

She read no further. Down at the bottom of the instrument was the peculiar chirography of her injured brother-in-law.

"It was never lost!" she exclaimed; "but Hermon never meant that I should see this."

Putting the precious document away carefully, she went downstairs with a queer little smile triumphant on her patient face.

The physician and Hermon's family had arrived and the wife was saying: "We went right on tobogganing down to the uneven road at the lower turning. Then the cutter went to pieces against a tree and we were upset, but not hurt."

She ended with a hysterical laugh, as she looked toward the white-faced husband.

"Stunned a considerable, bruised a bit, but fairly ready for his Christmas dinner," said the doctor as he took his leave.

In the kitchen Edith surveyed the brace of partridges and wondered if there was "enough to go round." But while she cogitated the Fultons came in with a bountiful dinner.

"We planned for company," laughed jolly Mrs. Fulton, "and we're bound to have it, even if we meet them halfway." And soon the Christmas cheer filled the lonely old rooms.

In the midst of the merry Christmas dinner Prudence Cameron looked across the table at her brother-in-law who, pillowed up in an arm-chair, was munching a browned bird, and said, playfully: "Christmas gift, Brother Hermon."

"I meant to have brought something," he stammered, in confusion, "but—"

"Thank you, I know you did," interrupted Prudence, her face glowing with victory, "and it is all right. Mr. Fulton gave it to me—the will, I mean—and I thank you again."

Had the house tumbled down the mountain side Hermon Cameron could not have been more surprised. He sank back among the pillows with a suppressed groan. "My heart!" he said, faintly. "My heart!"

"You are hurt more seriously than we thought for!" cried the Fultons, in alarm.

"Oh, no," murmured Hermon. "I am just a little overcome."

And so it proved. But, although he revived and chatted with his friend, Fulton, over the toothsome plum pudding, he did not look Prudence Cameron's way again that day.

And that night Ned sat before the crackling fire on the broad hearth, while the dancing light touched his ruddy face and glinted up along the smoky rafters, and whispered between his palms: "Dear Lord, we are so thankful for the blessed Christmastide; but just now we are thankfuller for the upset of Uncle Hermon!"

MORE DANGER AHEAD.

"Well, I'm thankful Thanksgiving's past," soliloquized Mr. Gobbler, "but here comes December."

Mr. Busby's Christmas Gift

MRS. BUSBY was finishing a pair of "bootees" for her daughter's newest baby, screwing up her mouth with the intricacy of the pattern. Mrs. Griggs in the opposite rocker watched her.

"I guess I must be going," she announced, finally. "I only ran in to wish you Merry Christmas. I won't see you to-morrow. Call Christmas a holiday! I've two people to cook for usually—Christmas it's twenty!"

"And you'd not be content on other days, if you hadn' s'many then," returned Mrs. Busby. "We'll go to Tom's, as usual. He married a college girl, and I told him: 'These college girls may know a sight more about the structure of the human body than the rest of us, but they don't know half as much about making it comfortable!'"

"And now she has you come over every Christmas and see what a good housekeeper she is!" finished Mrs. Griggs, knowing the story as well as her hostess.

"M'hm. Can't you stay?"

"Thank you, no. I hoped you'd show me Mr. Busby's Christmas gift."

"It's upstairs, and I'm afraid he'll come in. He hasn't seen it, though."

"So you've got ahead of him, finally?"

"I have. It beats all the way that man finds things out and then teases. Last year I got him a set of Dickens, and kept it hidden three weeks between the mattresses of the spare room bed. The night before Christmas I was thinking how I'd surprise him when he said, smiling like: 'That's a mighty nice set of books in the spare room bed, Cynthy; it's a pity to keep 'em there, with the bookcase so handy,' he says."

"But he hasn't found out this year?"

"No; I guess he was ashamed of being so mean. I've seen my present, though."

"But I thought you said it was kind of mean to try to find out—"

"Oh, that's different. My present is the handsomest kind of a wrap, Mrs. Griggs. I was over at Parker's one

"Choose for Yourself."

day and that head clerk he called me aside and let out that Mr. Busby was going to buy me one of those nice fur-trimmed coats, and wouldn't I like to choose it, without him knowing it? So I chose—and won't I have a joke on Mr. Busby to-morrow?"

"That was real nice of that clerk."

"It was, and seeing how I could trust him, I asked him to advise me which one of those nice warm bathrobes to choose for Mr. Busby—I just couldn't decide between the red one and the green one. He said—"

"Oh, by the way, he told me a real funny story about a bath robe. He says a lady wanted to buy her husband one for Christmas and asked his advice. He told her to wait until to-morrow, as some new ones were coming in then, and—"

"Why, that must have been the very day I was in; though I didn't see any new ones when I went back the—"

"M'hm. And he just called her husband in that night and told him to choose for himself, so he wouldn't have to exchange it the day after Christmas. Her husband thought it the best joke yet to think what a laugh he'd have on her when she gave it to him. So he chose a blue one and—why, what's the matter, Mrs. Busby?"

Without a word, Mrs. Busby fled up the stairs, returning a moment later with a blue bath robe in her trembling grasp.

"Did you ever in your life know anybody as mean as that clerk?" she gasped.

ELISA ARMSTRONG BENGOUGH.

Bill That Beats 'Em All.

"You may talk of Bill Jones and Bill Walker, Bill Brown;
There's a bill that beats all of them somewhere in town;
A bill that is waiting for all of us still.
And the name of this great one is Christmas Bill!"

Not to Be Caught Again.

"My wife says she doesn't want me to give her a solitary thing for Christmas this year."

"Are you going to take her at her word?"

"Not much! I did that once. I'm an advocate of peace whenever it can be had with honor."—Chicago Record-Herald.

His Calculation.

Mamma—But these cheap toys break so easily.

Papa—Exactly. Johnny is never satisfied until he breaks his toys, so I thought I'd give him something that won't give him much trouble.—Brooklyn Life.

The Prince of Peace

At His Name Every Knee Shall Bow and Every Tongue Confess

EVERY country of earth offers an apotheosis in the person of some great man who distinguished himself in some great crisis in its affairs. Switzerland idolizes William Tell, Russia her Peter the Great, Prussia her Frederick the Great, France her Napoleon, Italy her Garibaldi, England her Alfred the Great and the United States her Washington.

It is food for reflection that in the selections of heroes and in hero worship it is an invariable rule, not a single exception being known in all history, that choice is made of one who has crowned his life with deeds done in battle. By and through the flash of the sword alone has immortality of fame been won by mortals.

The scimiter of Mohammed and not his Koran conquered Arabia, Armenia and the Balkans. Moses was a lawgiver, but he also was a mighty warrior and led his followers on from one victory to another. It is he and Joshua and David and John Hyrcanus, all intrepid soldiers, who have made glorious the history of the Jewish people. The history of Mohammedanism is written in blood and Omar and Saladin stand out prominent in its records. So with other nations. Deeds, deeds only, and these calling for great holocausts of human lives, to make imperishable some individual name.

Christmas day offers an anomaly, however, in the history of men who have lived and wrought wonders. The Christ was a man of peace, deploring war. What is yet more strange, He is glorified through His words and not through His deeds. The Heavenly voice said to the simple shepherd on the plains of Bethlehem: "Behold! I bring you glad tidings of great joy, which shall be unto all the people; for unto you is born this day in the city of David a Saviour which is Christ the Lord." And the accompanying choir with ineffable melody sang the refrain: "Glory to God in the highest and on earth peace."

The Christ-birth and the Christ-life stand forth the opposite of all other great lives that have filled pages in earth's history. Born of humble parentage in a stable, amid the lowing of kine and the raucous complaining of discontented cattle, reared in the far-away bleak hills of Galilee, engaged daily in sawing logs into boards, or planing the latter into smoothness, He steps forth suddenly, at the age of 28, as a teacher of righteousness. Not among strangers, but in the midst of His own people, He appeared, and they were astounded at the profundity of His knowledge. As though to persuade themselves that they were not mistaken as to His identity, they asked of one another: "Is not this the carpenter's son?"

His life work was brief, but four short years! Compare this with the years spent by other illuminati of earth in perpetuating their fame. Without use of money, or influence, or numbers, and without courting favor of the rich and powerful, He went about from town to town preaching His gospel of peace and love. Those who gathered to Him were poor men—fishermen, publicans, small farmers or herdsmen, rather.

The waters of the sea of Judea were but little stirred by His presence. So little was His presence felt that no contemporaneous historian of His time, outside of His immediate followers, makes any reference to His life or His works. Josephus, a voluminous and very just historian, ignores Him utterly. No record has been found at Rome of His death, so little impression did it make upon the mind of Pilate.

True it is that He healed sick men, cleansed lepers, raised the dead and cast out devils. But these were subordinate and incidental only to His life-work, which was that of proclaiming a new gospel—that men should love one another. He made no parade of miracle-working. It was only when the suffering were brought into His presence that He made exercise of His divine power in healing.

He died the most shameful, disgraceful death known to His generation. In his extremity He was deserted even by His most devoted followers. He trod the wine-press of agony alone.

Yet this Man of Sorrows has conquered the world. Other illustrious men lived out their little day and all that remains of them is the memory of their deeds. They sought to build up material kingdoms; Christ's realm is in the hearts of men. His teachings have survived the overthrow of a thousand kingdoms of earth. His words to-day are as potent to sway men as when they came burning from His lips. All the higher civilization of earth yields Him reverence and homage.

Age but serves to strengthen the might of His power and to confirm the promise of the prophecy: "At the name of Jesus every knee shall bow and every tongue confess."

WILLIAM ROSSER COBBE.

HIS CHRISTMAS HOPE.

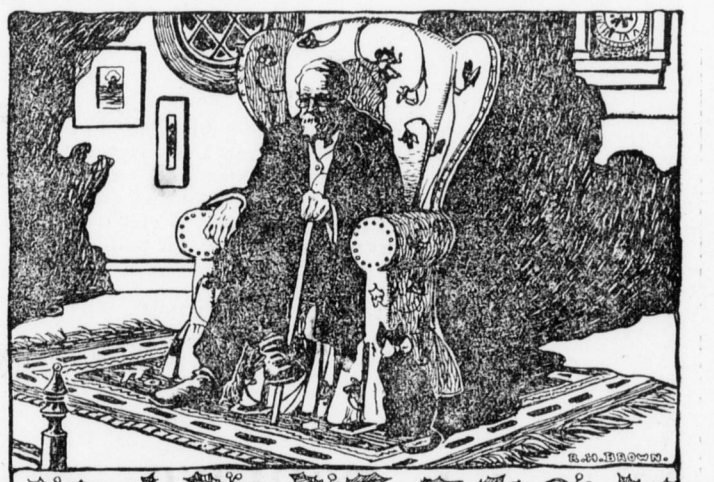
"Whatcher goin' to git for Christmas?"

"Par promised me a lickin', but I've prayed Santa Claus ter make him fergit it."

LIKED HIS LONG STOCKINGS.

"Do you want mamma to put you in long trousers, Tommy?"

"Not till after Christmas, sis."



A Dream of Christmas

I WATCH the glowing embers as the moments flit away,
For Christmas will be with us in the morning cold and gray,
The winds sleep in the valleys and the stars shine on the snow
The while I dream of Christmases that vanished long ago;
I see the tiny stockings hanging by the ruddy hearth,
In every room it is holy night is hushed the childish mirth,
For the little ones are sleeping 'neath the winter's azure dome,
A-dreaming of the happy hour when Santa Claus shall come.

WHO would not for a moment wander to the Long Ago
To see the little stockings hanging in a cozy row?
Who would not draw the coverlid from each well cherished face
And gaze upon the children in their innocence and grace?
I see them sweetly sleeping and about them all is still,
They do not hear the jingling bells upon the whitened hill;
Cheek to cheek they lie in slumber, angel guarded, as I know,
A vision of some Christmas fair that flitted long ago.

WHO plucks not from the vanished Past some Christmas like to this?
Who feels not still upon his brow some holy Christmas kiss?
The bells that ring to-night beneath the sky's star diadem
Tell more than that sweet story of the Babe of Bethlehem:
They bring to us from out the Past the loves we cherish yet,
Their tones recall the Christmases we never quite forget,
We've but to listen now to hear the bells across the snow
That ring once more deep in our hearts as in the Long Ago.

BUT in the chimes to-night I hear a music not of earth—
The star-born chorus that proclaimed the humble Christ-child's birth.
And a sweet, immortal vision comes from Judah far away
Where dawned in grandeur and in love the world's first Christmas Day;
Methinks I hear a tapping at my window framed in white,
'Tis not the bells which on the hills ring out this winter night;
Nay, surely 'tis a tapping, rising soft above the din,
And, dreaming, I the casement seek to let the Christ-child in.

T. C. HARBAUGH.