

The Christmas Fellowship of Miss Mab

BY ISABEL GORDON CURTIS
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Little Miss Mab sat staring into the radiant heart of a wood fire. It lacked only two days of Christmas. She had not yet invited anyone to share the hospitality of her small home. Never since she had been left alone in the world—and that occurred when she was 17—had she known a lonely Christmas; there were always some forsaken creatures ready to turn gratefully to the shelter of her home. All these festivities had brought a certain heart warmth and happiness which lingered for months, but it had not meant fellowship or sympathy.

"I believe I want a little bit of Christmas to myself this year," Miss Mab whispered to herself; "it's such hard work, all the fixin's! I do love to see the old women an' the starved boys an' girls fill themselves up. What they want, though, is the eatin'. They don't know nothin' about fellowship. When a woman steps over the 40 line an' has been alone all her life, there's a sort of longin' for fellowship—ain't there, Maltie?"

The gray cat arched his back and rubbed his plump body against Miss Mab's dress.

"It's a fine dinner," observed Miss Mab in her solitary musing; "it's a fine enough dinner to deserve fellowship." She rose and walked to the front window. "I might just as well out with what is on my mind," she said. "I know who I want to invite as well as can be; all that's troublin' me is the propriety of it. Now if the little thing hadn't a father, I'd take her in and keep her—longer'n Christmas, too."

She was watching a six-year-old girl who lived in the big boarding house across the street, which was "thronged and lonesome," as Miss Mab expressed it. Every afternoon about five the child lingered on the steps and watched eagerly till a man turned the corner—a tall, round-shouldered, thin, sickly-looking man. As soon as she caught sight of him she darted like a swallow down the street and fairly threw herself into his arms. He always slung his lunch box on his wrist and lifted her to his breast. They did not seem to talk. The head with its brown curls was laid contentedly on his shoulder and occasionally the father bent to rub his cheek against the child's pale face. He climbed the steps with the little girl in his arms and shut the door behind him.

"It's fellowship inside there," she whispered; then she sat down to her lonely little table.

At seven o'clock she put Maltie to his bed down cellar; afterward she dressed and started for prayer meeting. Two or three friends stopped to speak to her. They decided she was in an absent mood, for she did not seem to know what they were talking about. Miss Mab had only one thought in her mind, and it seemed to rhyme with the hymn, it mingled with the short discourse and prayer. It had only one tenor: she was longing to have the minister settle a monotonous question for her. It seemed as if all the congregation lingered to talk with him after prayer meeting. That night once or twice he held out a welcoming hand, but she evaded it; she could not seek his advice until she was alone. At last everybody was gone but herself. The young clergyman came forward genially.

"I wanted to speak to you just a minute, Mr. Pierce. I live alone, you know, an' I want to give some other folks who are kind of lonesome a bit of Christmas comfort an' fellowship an' a good dinner."

"I know nothing more befitting the spirit of Christmas," said the clergyman, cordially; "it is following the very teachings of our Master."

"I'd like to tell you, though, who it is," said Miss Mab, eagerly; "it's a little girl who lives across the street in a great, noisy, desolate boarding house. She'd have to bring her father, for he's all she has. They seem to be terrible devoted to each other. I reckon he's a widower—though I don't know. I've never spoken a word to either of 'em. I thought you'd tell me whether 'twould be proper or not?"

"There can be no question of the propriety, Miss Mab," he said earnestly. "In your kindness of heart you could make no mistake."

Miss Mab took his proffered hand warmly. "Thank you," she said; "thank you so much!"

Next day she watched for the little girl, who did not appear till about half-past four, and then she came out to hop nimbly up and down the flight of stone steps. Miss Mab threw a shawl over her head and crossed the snowy street. She had a gracious way with children which readily reached their hearts. The shyness of the child disappeared while Miss Mab delivered a nervous invitation. "You'll remember," she said gently, "what I want you to do. Jest whisper to your father when he picks you up at the street corner that a lonely old woman who lives across the street wishes a bit of Christmas fellowship, an' if you and he haven't anything else planned she invites you to come and dine with her to-morrow. I'll watch for you to come back, an' if you wave your hand I'll know you'll come. You can remember?"

"I'll remember," answered the little girl. She spoke gravely, but there was an eager light in her eyes. "I'm sure we'll come. Papa and me was talking about Christmas last night, and wishing we were back in the country, because there were homes there where

we would have been invited. We don't know anybody here yet, except boarding house folks. I've wanted so to get acquainted with your kitty, but I didn't dare come over."

"You dear little soul!" said Miss Mab, warmly; "you shan't have any more lonesome days, if I can help it." Miss Mab watched anxiously the meeting at the corner. The child did not nestle her head on her father's shoulder, as was her custom; she was talking to him eagerly and pointing across the street to the little brick house set in the midst of a wide garden. She did not wave her answer. Miss Mab's heart began to beat tumultuously, when she saw the tall man come striding across the street through the snow. She threw the door open before he knocked. He bowed courteously.

"My little girl has told me of your goodness," he said. "It is kind of you, very, very kind. I do not know how to thank you. We shall be very happy to come. I do not mind the loneliness much for myself, but for Cynthia, left alone all day in our bare little room, the thought of it stays with me constantly while I work." Cynthia hung delightedly over her father's shoulder whispering in blissful friendliness to the gray cat.

"'Twas a bold thing to do, invitin' strangers this way," said Miss Mab, apologetically. The scarlet blushes were chasing each other across her cheerful face. "I didn't say anything about the little girl's mother, because I didn't just know—" She stopped hesitatingly.

"Cynthia's mother died when she was three days old," said the man, slowly; "she has had to grow up with hardly anybody to care for her but her father. He isn't quite as good as a mother would be, is he, dearest?"

"He's pretty nearly as good," whispered the child, stroking the careworn face.

"Land sake!" cried Miss Mab, with a strange, choking sob; "land sake, it is hard lines when the father has to do the motherin', too!"

"We are very happy together, aren't we, Cynthia?" The child nodded emphatically.

"The worst is her loneliness, only she will be going to school pretty soon; and our Christmas is assured. I cannot thank you cordially enough, madam, both for Cynthia and myself. We will be delighted to come." The child waved a good-night as they crossed the street, and Miss Mab wiped her eyes furtively when she sat down in her big rocking chair. "It is more blessed to give than to receive," she said to herself; "somehow, it seems to bring such warm comfort into your own life."

After the dinner had been cleared away Miss Mab sunned herself in the joyous warmth of fellowship. The gracious wood fire wrapped the little group in its friendly glow and the very spirit of Christmas seemed to hallow the homely, cozy living room.

It was a wild, cold winter, with great snow storms whirling over the country and city streets blocked with huge drifts, but there were no more lonely days for Cynthia. The room in the desolate boarding house was almost deserted between morning and night. The radiant of gracious friendliness and blissful warmth constantly awaited the child in the house across the street. Maltie's welcome was as cordial as that of his mistress. Every morning, after he had eaten his comfortable breakfast, he jumped in the living room window to curl himself up in a gray ball with expectant half shut eyes fixed on the brick building across the street. He watched till the door was opened by a tall man, who carried a lunch box and a little clinging bundle wrapped in a fleecy brown shawl. He always chose the same path; he came striding across the street to the red brick house set in the wide yard. Then Maltie with a sudden eager leap went to find his mistress, and followed her, purring loudly, to the front door. He could scarcely wait for the little visitor to be unwrapped. Miss Mab's hunger for fellowship was no less ardent than that of the gray cat. Then what days followed. It seemed like a sudden burst of sunshine come into Cynthia's lonely life.

The careworn look seemed to be fading from her father's face. When evening came and he stopped at Miss Mab's door to gather the little girl back in his arms, there was time for a few moments' cheerful conversation. Cynthia's farewells were always tempered by the assurance of her return in the morning.

One night the child, tucked in a blanket, laid her cheek against her father's, when their bedtime talk was nearly finished. She whispered: "Don't you love Miss Mab, father?" "I do," he said in a low voice.

"She's just as good as a fairy godmother, isn't she?" questioned the child; "almost as good as the godmother who came to take care of the poor little pink princess?"

"Twice as good," laughed the father. "I couldn't have her for a really, truly, own godmother, could I?" she asked, anxiously.

"It would be very nice."

"And then she makes such good things to eat. I could have a gingerbread man for tea every night."

"And what could we offer for all of that, the home and the goodness and—"

"Why, we could love her," said the child; "and you and I could love her with all our hearts; that would make her very happy."

"Would it, really?"

"I know it would. Won't you ask her if we can come?" Cynthia pleaded.

"Only we have so little to offer," said her father.

"Loving people isn't little, is it?" insisted the child.

"No." The man's eyes were fixed on the cheerful red glow in the window of Miss Mab's living room. "No, dearest, somebody has said that love is the greatest thing in the world."

Mrs. Whittler's Strategy

By TOM MASSON

DON'T you think, dear, that it would be nice to spend our Christmas in Florida?"

Mr. and Mrs. Whittler were sitting in their cozy back parlor. As she spoke Mrs. Whittler turned to her husband with an anxious look of interrogation.

"Never," exclaimed Whittler. "Why, we couldn't afford it. What an idea! I couldn't dream of such a thing. Florida! I should say not!"

"I merely mentioned the matter," said Mrs. Whittler, seeing her error. "It is of no special consequence."

At the same time she eyed sadly a package of time tables and steamboat circulars that for the past week she had been surreptitiously collecting. To go to Florida had been the dream of months. And now it was ruthlessly shattered.

Still, Mrs. Whittler did not despair. "Well, if we don't do that," she said at last, "we must have a nice Christmas dinner, mustn't we?"

The thought of a dinner brought Whittler to himself instantly.

"You bet!" he said, rubbing his hands. "We'll have the best the country can afford."

"I sometimes wish," said Mrs. Whittler, after a moment, "that we had a houseful of children. It seems a pity to sit down to a Christmas dinner all alone."

"Well, why should we?" said Whittler. "Can't we ask some one in?"

Mrs. Whittler looked off into space with her eyebrows closely knit, as if the problem were too great for her to master on the instant. At last she said slowly:

"How would it do for you to ask Aunt Jane? She's getting along in years, and it may be our last chance to pay her any attention."

Whittler thought a moment.

"I guess you're right," he said at last. "I was looking forward to a Christmas dinner by ourselves. Still, Aunt Jane is a good old soul, and I guess we'd better ask her. But there's Cousin Emily, I suppose she'll have to come, too."

"Yes," responded Mrs. Whittler. "We shall, of course, have to ask Emily. We couldn't ask one without the other."

There was a pause. Finally Whittler spoke again.

"I suppose," he said, "if we ask Aunt Jane and Emily, that Uncle Henry and Georgiana will feel it."

"I had thought of that," replied Mrs. Whittler. "They've both been kind to us, and it would never do to offend them. Then, of course, the children—"

"Of course the children," interposed Whittler; "they'll have to come with their parents. Well, we'll have to do it, that's all. I guess we can stand it for once."

There was another pause. Mrs. Whittler at last looked meekly up.

"There's another thing, dear," she said, "that had occurred to me."

"What's that?"

"Well, you know there's my Aunt Sally. Aunt Sally is so sensitive. If she hears that your side of the family is coming, she'll feel it."

Whittler sighed. But the justice of the argument appealed to him.

"Yes," he said at last. "I suppose that's so. It's nothing more than fair, if my people come, that yours should, too. But you have a Cousin Rufus, and an Uncle William, haven't you?"

It was Mrs. Whittler's turn to sigh.

"More than that," she said. "Don't you remember Aunt and Uncle Ruby-ton and their children?"

Whittler got up nervously and paced the floor.

"Good heavens!" he exclaimed at last. "What are we going to do? It's awful to dwell upon. We simply have got to ask them all. Why, it will cost a mint to entertain all this crowd."

He grew more excited.

"It's a fearful thing," he said, "to have relatives. We're in for it, I guess. We can't lop any of 'em off. Well!" he cried, turning to Mrs. Whittler, "have you nothing to suggest? You got us into it. Can't you get us out?"

Mrs. Whittler waited a moment before she replied.

"We might go to Florida," she said finally.

Whittler slapped his hands on his knee.

"Just the thing!" he cried. "Why didn't you say so before?"—Town Topics.

Origin of the Christmas Tree.

The Christmas tree is supposed to have originated in Germany, but such is not the case. In reality the Christmas tree is from Egypt, and dates from a period long antecedent to the Christian era. The palm tree is known to put forth a shoot every month, and a spray of this tree with 12 shoots on it was used in Egypt at the time of the winter solstice as a symbol that the year was complete. Egyptian affections of an early date still linger with the Christmas tree. The first Christmas tree was introduced into England and thence into America by some German merchants who lived in Manchester.

Christmas Legend.

There is a legend in Germany that when Eve plucked the fatal apple, immediately the leaves of the tree shriveled into needle points and its bright green turned dark. It changed its nature, and became the evergreen, in all seasons preaching the story of man's fall. Only on Christmas does it bloom brightly with lights and become beautiful with love-gifts—the curse is turned into a blessing at the coming of the Christ Child, and we have our Christmas tree.

Light of a New Year

By CATHERINE EDDY CLEAVER

JUST as the clock struck the man laid down his magazine with a sigh, and glanced at the time-piece on the table before him. Ten o'clock, and to-morrow was New Year's day—to-morrow, that would end this lonely life of his and take him home. Home to the people who, with the dear faith of one's own kin, still believed in the genius he had failed to prove to the rest of the world. His face brightened as he pictured his welcome there, and with childish impulse to quicken to-morrow's coming he rose from his chair and began his preparations for the night.

As he undressed his mind reverted to the story he had been reading—a tale of a man whose family had been cursed with hereditary blindness and who had at last seized the coward's refuge rather than face the tragedy of his inheritance.

He shuddered slightly, for the story had made its peculiar appeal to him. He, too, knew the sick horror of such a heritage. His grandfather and great-grandfather had spent their last years in darkness, and, although his own father had escaped, he knew too many victims of the caprice of atavism to hold himself exempt.

The chill air of the December night struck his face as he opened his window and he shook off his momentary depression as the little refrain, with all it meant, sang once more in his brain—"to-morrow is New Year's day."

At length he fell asleep, his eyes resting on the cheerful little point of flame in the night-lamp which shone through the open door of his dressing-room full on his pillow.

Outside, the wind in the valley was blowing the clouds into a heavy pall across the sky, then, rising suddenly in a passion of destructiveness, it snapped the trees beside the man's window with a crash that roused the sleeper to a sitting posture.

Gazing, unknowing, into the blackness around him, with his first consciousness he raised his hand to his eyes to brush away the veil of sleep. The action woke him to a sudden realization of the intense darkness before him. Where was the light that always met him from the faithful little night-lamp? Where was the gray out-of-doors that meant early morning? Blackness, thick, impenetrable, closed in on him. God! could it be that the light still burned—but not for him? That the sun was rising—but to him it would always be night?

He slid from his bed and groped his way to the window, straining his eyes vainly to perceive the slightest outline in the formless darkness. Then terror gripped him close and its panic bade him scream—fly—escape from this fief of night that had folded him in her infinite embrace.

With one last effort at control he reached for the familiar match-box and struck one of the tiny torches that meant life-long night or day to him. He heard the scratch and snap, but not a spark of light rewarded his agonized effort to see. The match fell from his nerveless fingers and the cold sweat of despair soaked his night-clothes with its dank chill.

His whole future was silhouetted before him, a black shadow against the sunlight of the world. His eyesight gone, his career ruined, his great book still unwritten—only life's empty shell left to mock him. To-morrow would begin the drear, black procession of days, stretching like pall-bearers to the grave. To-morrow! Oh, God! the irony of it—to-morrow was the new year! An impotent sob rose choking in his throat. Was this to be his home-coming—led like a blind beggar, to be a burden where he had hoped to help?

All his man's courage and fierce resistance to Fate rose in him. He would never yield to that. Rather—he cried, turning to Mrs. Whittler, "have you nothing to suggest? You got us into it. Can't you get us out?"

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TOO GREAT A RESEMBLANCE

Portrait So Like the Original That It Lacked Charitable Expression.

Bishop Olmsted, of Denver, is interested in a number of charities, and obtains many generous contributions on their behalf from rich Episcopalians, says the New York Tribune.

There is in Denver, however, a millionaire who will rarely consent to help Bishop Olmsted's pet projects. He is a generous man, and in his own way he assists the poor, but to organized charity, for some reason, he heartily objects. The bishop often asks him for subscriptions, but these requests are almost invariably refused.

Recently the millionaire had his portrait painted. Bishop Olmsted met him the other day and said:

"I saw this morning your admirable portrait."

"And did you ask it for a subscription?" said the millionaire, smiling.

"No," said Bishop Olmsted. "I saw there was no use—it was so like you."

Lost.

She—That girl who just left the piano is said to be one of the finest classical performers in the country.

He—Why didn't you tell me before? I would have listened.—Brooklyn Life.

Reads Like a Miracle.

Moravia, N. Y., Dec. 12th.—(Special)—Boring on the miraculous is the case of Mrs. Benj. Wilson, of this place. Suffering from Sugar Diabetes, she wasted away till from weighing 200 lbs. she barely tipped the scales at 130 lbs. Dodd's Kidney Pills cured her. Speaking of her cure her husband says:

"My wife suffered everything from Sugar Diabetes. She was sick four years and doctored with two doctors, but received no benefit. She had so much pain all over her that she could not rest day or night. The doctor said that she could not live."

"Then an advertisement led me to try Dodd's Kidney Pills and they helped her right from the first. Five boxes of them cured her. Dodd's Kidney Pills were a God-Sent remedy to us and we recommend them to all suffering from Kidney Disease."

Dodd's Kidney Pills cure all Kidney Diseases, including Bright's Disease, and all kidney aches, including Rheumatism.

There is something fine in the bravery of a new father who carries a baby through the streets in his arms.—Acheson Globe.

TORTURING, DISFIGURING

Humors, Eczemas, Itchings, Inflammations, Burnings, Scallings and Chafings Cured by Cuticura.

The agonizing itching and burning of the skin, as in eczema; the frightful scaling, as in psoriasis; the loss of hair and crusting of the scalp, as in scalled head; the facial disfigurements, as in pimples and ringworm; the awful suffering of infants, and anxiety of worn-out parents, as in milk rot, tetter and salt rheum—all demand a remedy of almost superhuman virtues to successfully cope with them. That Cuticura Soap, Ointment and Pills are such stands proven beyond all doubt by the testimony of the civilized world.

Have you ever noticed what a lot of second-class people travel first-class?—Chicago Tribune.

Guaranteed Mining Investments.

We are the largest mine operators in the West, and cordially invite you to write for prospectus and full particulars about our nine associated companies, which have joined in forming our Investor's Guarantee Association, with \$5,000,000 capital to guarantee all our investors against loss. Write for free information and be convinced. Arbutle-Goode Commission Company, 325 Olive Street, St. Louis, Mo.

Somehow one's plain duty is usually too plain to be attractive.—Chicago Daily News.

To Cure a Cold in One Day

Take Laxative Bromo Quinine Tablets. All druggists refund the money if it fails to cure. E. W. Grove's signature is on each box. 25c.

A penny saved is a penny burned—later on.—Puck.

COMPLETELY CURED.

Mrs. P. Brunzel, wife of P. Brunzel, stock dealer, residence 3111 Grand Ave., Everett, Wash., says: "For fifteen years I suffered with terrible pain in my back. I did not know what it was and it was not to enjoy a night's rest and arose in the morning feeling tired and unrefreshed. My suffering sometimes was simply indescribable. When I finished the first box of Doan's Kidney Pills I felt like a different woman. I continued until I had taken five boxes.

Doan's Kidney Pills act very effectively, very promptly, relieve the aching pains and all other annoying difficulties."

Foster-Milburn Co., Buffalo, N. Y. For sale by all druggists. Price 50 cents per box.

With a cry of relief the man sprang to the gas-jet, and as the room was flooded with the blessed light he sank trembling to his knees, and the bells of midnight sang in his ears: "To-day is the new year."—The Wright Magazine.

Apprehensive.

"Cheer up!" said the candid friend, as they met at the dressmaker's. "For the bride of a year you look indigo blue. What's the matter?"

"It's—it's John," was the hesitating reply.

"What's the matter with him? He looked all right in church Sunday."

"Well, he kissed me when he came home to dinner last night."

"He kissed me again when he went to business this morning."

"Did you ask for an explanation?"

"He didn't give me time. But I am determined to find out what's behind it. If he means to crawl out of giving that automobile he promised me for Christmas, why—kisses don't go."

—N. Y. Times.

Too Bad.

He (tentatively)—It's too bad that mis-létoe should only be hung up on Christmas!

She (naively)—Yes! That certainly makes it a long time between kisses!—National Tribune.



Miss Hagood tells how she escaped an awful operation by using Lydia E. Pinkham's Vegetable Compound.

"DEAR MRS. PINKHAM:—I suffered for four years with what the doctors called Salpingitis (inflammation of the fallopian tubes and ovaries), which is a most distressing and painful ailment, affecting all the surrounding parts, undermining the constitution, and sapping the life forces. If you had seen me a year ago, before I began taking Lydia E. Pinkham's Vegetable Compound, and had noticed the sunken eyes, sallow complexion, and general emaciated condition, and compared that person with me as I am today, robust, hearty and well, you would not wonder that I feel thankful to you and your wonderful medicine, which restored me to new life and health in five months, and saved me from an awful operation."—MISS IRENE HAPGOOD, 1023 Sandwich St. Windsor, Ont.—\$5000 forfeit if original of above letter proving genuineness cannot be produced.

Ovaritis or inflammation of the ovaries or fallopian tubes which adjoin the ovaries may result from sudden stopping of the monthly flow, from inflammation of the womb, and many other causes. The slightest indication of trouble with the ovaries, indicated by dull throbbing pain in the side, accompanied by heat and shooting pains, should claim your instant attention. It will not cure itself, and a hospital operation, with all its terrors, may easily result from neglect.

Apply for information to SUPERINTENDENT OF INVESTIGATION, OHIO, to H. M. WILLIAMS, Law, Judge, Toledo, O., Authorized Government Agent. Please say where you saw this advertisement.

TWENTY BUSHELS OF WHEAT TO THE ACRE

is the record on the FREE HOMESTEAD LANDS of WESTERN CANADA for 1904.

The 150,000 Farmers from the United States, who during the past seven years have gone to Canada to participate in this prosperity.

The United States will soon become an importer of wheat. Get a free copy of the publication known as Circular No. 12, in which is described the best territory in this country for the growing of early strawberries and early vegetables. Every dealer in such products should address a postal card to the undersigned at Mt. Pleasant, Iowa, requesting a copy of "Circular No. 12."

J. F. McILROY, Asst. Gen'l Pass' Agent.

Apply for information to SUPERINTENDENT OF INVESTIGATION, OHIO, to H. M. WILLIAMS, Law, Judge, Toledo, O., Authorized Government Agent. Please say where you saw this advertisement.

A Cold in the Head

doesn't seem serious but it is. It gradually works down to the air passages and causes congestion and inflammation. Shiloh's Consumption Cure, the Lung Tonic, is guaranteed to cure coughs and colds. Your money back, if it doesn't.

25c., 50c. and \$1.00

YOU TRAVEL—OR WILL

If not today, then tomorrow. There is quality in railway travel as in everything else. Track, train and time are the essentials. The M. K. & T. Ry has that quality. I want you to know of it, try it and be convinced.