

NOAH STEPHENS' NEW YEAR.

Noah Stephens was a miser. The spirit of avarice, born in him, was strengthened by cultivation. From his earliest boyhood he had struggled to earn money, not to use, but to hoard.

One morning, as Noah Stephens sat in his office, Mrs. Ruth Ames came in. She was an old school-mate of Mr. Stephens, and was highly regarded by him.

After a few moments conversation, she said, smilingly: "Mr. Stephens, God has blessed you in all things; times are hard, winter is coming on, and there is a great deal of suffering in our town."

Mrs. Ames looked down upon her paper. "Do listen to me, Mr. Stephens," she said entreatingly. "Here is Joe Brintnell with a broken leg. His mother is sick, and his father, who was a carpenter, fell from the house he was building and was killed."

"How did he break his leg?" asked Mr. Stephens. "He fell from a loaded wagon," "Is David Brintnell his uncle?" "Yes, I think so."

"Then let his uncle help him; he can do it." Mrs. Ames read another name from her paper: "Mrs. Martin, paralyzed, aged seventy. She needs coal and groceries; an excellent woman, in great want; her religion alone sustains her."

"Let her go to the almshouse. Heaven is just as near her there as anywhere," said Mr. Stephens contemptuously. Mrs. Ames read on: "Mrs. David Lee, a widow with six children and no means. You know her—an industrious, hard-working woman. Don't you think she deserves help?"

"Well, perhaps so," returned Mr. Stephens coldly. "Let the church help her." "Noah Stephens," said Mrs. Ames, "you and I are old friends, and that gives me the right of plain speaking. Your hair is becoming sprinkled with gray; the signs of time are on your face; a few years more, and you will be numbered with the dead. You can carry nothing with you. What will become of all the money you will leave behind?"

"To whom much is given much will be required," continued Mrs. Ames, in a solemn tone. "You are a member of the church, Noah Stephens, and you profess to be a follower of Christ. Think of what I have said."

"The light of your earthly lamp will soon go out," she continued earnestly, with eyes fixed full upon him. "Will you let it go out in darkness? Oh, I hope God will not appoint a discipline of pain and trial to bring you to your senses in order to make you see what a worthless thing your hoarded gold is, when you might comfort and bless so many. Good morning, Mr. Stephens."

point a discipline of pain and trial to bring you to your senses, to make you see what a worthless thing your hoarded gold is, when you might comfort and bless so many."

Again and again he asked himself if he was like what Mrs. Ames had said. Was he avaricious? Was he heartless? What was to become of his money? He was worth half a million of dollars; he could not take it with him, but he must account to God for its use. Hoarded money! He began to see it in the light of a dangerous thing. It might stand in the way of his eternal happiness.

"Gold, gold, gold, gold, Bright, yellow, hard and cold." Was he a miser? He did not like the word. There was pain in his broken limb, pain in his head, and pain in his heart. He hardly knew which caused the most suffering.

Morning came; it was New Year's day, bright and sunny. Mr. Stephens sent a messenger to ask Mrs. Ames to come to him, and to bring the list of names she had read to him. She obeyed the summons immediately, and soon sat by his bedside. Mrs. Ames kindly inquired how Mr. Stephens was, and then waited for him to speak.

After a moment's pause he said: "The plain truths you told me in my office that day, have proved a blessing to me. For one month I have not been able to take a step, and have suffered intensely. My thoughts have been busy, and daily your words have returned to my mind. I have thought it over and over, and now I see how mistaken I have been. You said you hoped God would not appoint a discipline of pain and trial for me, but you see he has; and I am thankful for it, for without this suffering and your plain speaking, I should never have realized how much good I could do with my means. I made a resolve last night to do everything I can for the sick and poor. Now that I have suffered myself, I realize that others do. Will you please read that list again, and let me help you aid them?"

Once more Mrs. Ames read from her paper the name Joe Brintnell. "Joe Brintnell?" said Mr. Stephens. "Is he the one with the broken leg?" "Yes," said Mrs. Ames. "Poor fellow!" continued Mr. Stephens. "How hard it must have been for him! I have had every comfort, and it was all I could endure, but he must have lacked many things he needed. Here is some money for him, which I will give you to expend as you think best. You see how changed I am. Six weeks ago I should have considered my money thrown away; but now I know I could not make a better use of it."

A look of pleasure came over Mrs. Ames' face as she took the money, and Mr. Stephens continued: "You said there was a widow with six children who were in great destitution. You know best what she needs, and if you will give me a list, I will have the things sent to her immediately. I wish to keep my resolve. Mrs. Ames, you have spent your life in doing good; I have spent mine in making money. How much richer you are in the sight of God than I!"

Mrs. Ames put into his hand a paper containing several names and the necessities of each, and took her leave. New Year's day passed rapidly away. What a happy, useful day it was to Mr. Stephens! He sent money to individuals, and donations to his church, the relief societies, the society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals, Orphan Asylum, Home for the Destitute, etc.

Never before had his thoughts been turned so completely upon others. Strange to say, in caring for and blessing the unfortunate, his own physical suffering was almost forgotten. Several thousands of dollars were sent forth on errands of mercy.

During the next week Mr. Stephens received many calls from the people whom he had helped, and many expressions of thanks and gratitude fell from their lips. That memorable New Year's day was the birthday of a new and brighter life. When he recovered his health and returned to his place of business, his counting-room wore a different aspect. It was no longer a place where he was to invent schemes to gain money; it was to invent schemes to give money to hoard. The worth of money lay in its use, and no man during the subsequent years of health and prosperity which followed, knew better how to spend it wisely and well than Noah Stephens. May he live to enjoy many more Happy Years!

"Come, Sarah, what makes you so late this morning? We have been waiting for you this long time." Then Sarah flew around; she knew it would be a busy day. In fact all days were busy ones to her. Poor lonely little Sarah! Three years before, her father sailed away in his ship, leaving her at Mr. Smith's, to be boarded for a year, leaving money to pay for her board. The year passed, and then another year, and then another, and the father never came back! Neither did his ship; it was lost on the ocean.

Poor Sarah stayed on at Mr. Smith's; but there was no more money to pay for her board, or buy her clothes, and Mr. Smith had daughters of his own and not a very great deal of money; so, from being a boarder, Sarah had gradually become a little maid-of-all-work whose business was to run hither and thither all day long, wherever Mary, the kitchen girl, or Mamie, the grown-up daughter, or Louise, the twelve-year old daughter, or Howe, or Harry, the sons chose to send her.

child has no clock, and her old sack really do not look suitable; they will all be dressed in their best. I am sorry; I would have got her something respectable if we could have afforded it. Louise, you must bring her some of the cakes and candies, and she will have to content herself all at home."

Now Sarah had resolved on being a martyr, and wearing the ugly-looking old sack, two years so small for her, for the sake of the sleigh ride. No wonder the tears fell. Dinner was over, and Louise was fluttering upstairs and down, trying to get dressed to her satisfaction.

Sarah, with a pale, sad face was doing her bidding here and there, when the door-bell rang. "There!" said Louise, "I do believe they have come, and I'm not half ready. Sarah, why don't you hurry and button my boots? I do believe you are as slow as you can be, on purpose."

Harry went to the door, before Sarah could get down stairs. Half-way down she heard a loud, ringing voice: "Well, my beauty, do you live here? Yes, well, where is my little Sarah—do you know? She must be—Jaloo! I've got her!"

And behold little Sarah with one wild shout that was either a laugh or a cry, threw herself into the strong arms of her father, and was hugged and kissed, and carried through the hall to the dining-room.

Then what talking and exclaiming there was! "Got shipwrecked among those jaunting natives, and couldn't get word anywhere nor do anything; had a fever, too, that laid me up for a spell." This was in brief the sailor's story. In the midst of the talk, came word that the sleigh-riders would not be ready for half an hour.

"What's that?" said the sailor; and it was all explained to him. He asked more questions, and Mrs. Smith, with red cheeks, explained about the bad-looking shawl. "Oh, oh!" he said, "Guess we can fix that. Of course she must go sleigh-riding. You two boys lend a hand and let me get my box in at the kitchen door. Good thing I thought that one instead of the others. There!" as after a little tugging he drew out a heavy package. "Guess I'll get wrecked and laid up again. Rather too short that gown is and not as pretty a color as it might be, but we'll fix it all right now that father has come." Behold, in less than time it takes me to tell it, Sarah was arrayed in a long fur sack that almost covered her dress, a dainty little fur cap, to match the sack, perched on her head, and Louise, looking on, said, "As true as I live, that is seal skin!"

"It's all that," said the sailor, nodding his head in pride and pleasure over Sarah. "I didn't get wrecked and laid up in the good regions for nothing. More than that, while I was about it, I've got something else here that belongs to Sarah to do what she likes with," and he drew out another sack and cap as much like Sarah's as possible, only a trifle larger.

"Oh father!" she said, with sparkling eyes, "I think it will just fit Louise!" "All right, my beauty; if you want it to fit Louise, why, say the word." And the two seal-skin sacks and caps went sleigh-riding together that afternoon.

"But we may try, mayn't we?" pleaded Bob and Archy, and their grandmas smiled as she answered: "Certainly, you may keep awake if you can, and welcome in the New Year at midnight. Only mind that you don't set the house on fire."

"Then we may keep the lamp?" "For a while," said grandma. "The boys pranced up to bed very merry, and certain that they were wakeful enough to watch the old year out. It had been a trial that grandma would not let them sit up and stay dressed, but she said they would surely take cold, and it would not be surely."

"If we do keep awake we may have first wish, mayn't we?" asked Bob. "And I know what that will be!" added Archy. "Grand new sleds, with steel runners." "And if I get first wish it is new spectacles to replace those you tied on the cat and she lost in the barn, eh?" said grandma.

and one was very steep. Bob started, sitting on his sled with his back to the descent. He went pretty well for a little, then the sled spun round, shot out to one side, and suddenly both it and Bob seemed to disappear and sink into the ground.

"Mr. Plummer's old well!" cried Archy, in horror. "It's dry, and partly full of mud," said Bob, and all the boys ran pell-mell down the hill to rescue their comrades. They drew him up by a line made of their sled ropes. He was not much bruised, as the well was partly filled with snow, and there was no water in it. But the new sled was rather battered.

"I'm thankful New Year's day only comes once in twelve months," said grandma, when she heard the tale. "I'm not," said Bob and Archy both at once.

THE OLD AND THE NEW. "Another year has gone, to come no more; 'Tis some of joys and hours of grief are done; 'Tis gone where other years have gone before, Where all must end that ever was begun: Where gaunt and gray oblivion loves to dwell, And infant Time first lapsed the hours farewell."

We have passed over the boundary that lies between the Old and the New Year, and, looking backward, we have little left but the memories of days that are no more. Memories that are pleasant to recall; memories that are sad to reflect upon; memories that make us smile, and memories that make us weep.

The year has gone. Its tasks, its troubles, its joys, and its pleasures are all over. The work that we have done, both for good and evil, cannot be undone; the mistakes that we have made cannot be rectified; the errors that we have committed must forever remain a part of our life history.

Our lips have uttered unkind words that we would gladly recall; our hearts have entertained unpleasant feelings that we sincerely wish had never been permitted to enter them. All who are human are fallible. We make good resolutions every New Year, and then break them. We often have the best of intentions, but lack the firmness and moral courage to carry them out.

Looking backward, down the path in which we have been journeying, we find it strewn with wrecks of good intentions, and it is sad to think of.

In the life of nearly every one the past year has wrought sad changes. Many on whom fortune smiled, now groan in poverty. Many were floating gently on the bark of life, or untroubled seas of happiness a year ago, but are now wrecks of ruin. We often have the best of intentions, but lack the firmness and moral courage to carry them out.

There are graves in many a burial ground that were not made one year ago. Some are little graves, over which many a mother's tears have fallen, and many a father's heart has been bowed in anguish. There are vacant places at the table and by the fireside. Here is seen a where happy voices were heard. There are little prayers that are said no longer when bed-time comes, and when the darkness falls upon the silent world.

The New Year comes with many bright promises and possibilities. To whom will it bring joy? To whom sorrow? To whom riches? To whom poverty? To whom friends? To whom enemies? To whom love? To whom hate? To whom misery? To whom health? To whom sickness? To whom life? To whom death?

Let us never cease to be thankful that we have been spared so long and given such grand opportunities to live exalted and noble lives; and while we indulge in dreams of pleasure and prosperity, let us not forget that above all transitory things there is one unending dream whose blessed reality is heaven, the home of the soul, and looking into its pure light, so let us live.

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