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POETRY.



STRIFE OR?

Strike on—the ocean ne'er was crossed
Repeating on the shores;
A nation's freedom ne'er was won
When such the banner bore.

Strike on—'tis cowardly to shrink
When dangers rise around;
'Tis sweeter far, though linked with pain,
To gain the vantage ground.

Bright names are on the roll of Fame,
Like stars they shine on high;
They may be hid with brighter rays,
But never, never die!

And those were lighted 'mid the gloom
Of low obscurity
Struggling through years of pain and toil,
And pious poverty.

But strife—this world's not all a waste.
A wilderness of care;
Green spots are on the field of life,
And flow'rets blooming fair.

Then strive on—but, oh! let Virtue be;
The guardian of your soul;
Let pure, unclouded love illumine
The path that leads to fame!

City News.

VAL RAY PICKERS.—Yesterday morning the crew of Fourth near Market, says the Daily News, regaled with a spontaneous exhibition of billingsgate, and a most choice exhibition of two rival rag pickers, one a female, as dark as Erebus, and the other a male, who like Cassius, had a hairy look, happened to stumble on a pile of patches, old cotton, and strips of cloth. At the same time, the right of prim and possession on by Dinah, with much ado.

"Dese here's my rag," said she making a sly attack on the pile, with her pickers and tadders; "and dese here's my rag, too."

The prototype of Cassius, not being downed by the gathering, continued to chip his fingers into the crevices and extract the most choice scraps, without uttering one word in reply.

This was too much for the temper of the she bear. With her arms gestulating, and with her tongue rolling off the most harsh epithets she could master, she made a descent on the dishevelled red hair of Cassius, which threatened the loss of his shaggy top, whole crop. This too much even for a misanthrope, he ceased his attacks on the rags, and made a decent with the point of his shoe on the shin of Dinah.

"Dese fell this lovely maiden,
As false as a golden lamb,
The tears long on her colored cheeks,
As sea-waves on a beam."

"Truth crushed to earth will rise again," and so did Dinah, and nothing daunted made another rush at home. At this juncture, a policeman arrived and parted the combatants, and after making a just arbitration of the property, sent each on their way lamenting over their wrongs.

SUDDEN DEATH.—Miss DEBORAH JANE TONKA, an amiable young lady, aged about twenty-five years, of Anthony township, died very suddenly on Tuesday evening of this week. She had been visiting at a neighbor's, and upon going home, complained to her mother of extreme pain in her head and the back of her neck, and feeling very singularly. In about an hour afterwards she was dead.—*Lyonsville Gazette.*

When a lie gets into the world, you may batter it about the head until life is apparently extinct, but next day you will meet it as fresh and vigorous as ever.

THE WILMOT PROVISION.—The Wilmot Provision may now be regarded as an abstraction.—The action of the California convention lately disposed of the question of slavery, by prohibiting its introduction, and New Mexico will undoubtedly follow the example. Further agitation of this subject is now worse than useless. The Southern members of congress may attempt to reject the admission of California, and for a brief period excitement may be revived; but despite all their efforts she will come into the sisterhood at the next session, without a stain upon her escutcheon. While we rejoice that she has thus early taken a decided stand in favor of human rights, our gladness is tempered with a regret that Gen. Taylor has not been compelled, in his official capacity, to show his hand in this matter, to take ground in favor of long-cherished opinions, or progressive ideas. But perhaps it is better that the vexed question is at rest.—*Brookville Jeffersonian.*

Christmas Presents. A Story for the Holidays.

BY T. S. ARTHUR.

"Didn't he make you a present of anything, Lizzy?" asked Margaret Grainger of her cousin Lizzy Green.

"No, not even of a strawberry cushion," spoke up Lizzy's sister Jane, "that he might have bought for a sixpence. I think he's a right down mean, selfish, stingy fellow, so I did; and if he doesn't keep Lizzy on bread and water when he gets her, my name's not Jane Green."

"I wouldn't have him," said Margaret, jesting, yet half in earnest. "Let Christmas go by and not make his sweethearts or sister a present of the most trifling value! He must have a penny soul. Why, Harry Lee sent me the 'Leaflets of Memory' and a pair of the sweetest flower-vases you ever saw, and he only comes to see me as a friend. And Cousin William made me a present of a splendid copy of 'Mrs. Hall's sketches,' the most interesting book I ever read. Besides, I received lots of things. Why, my table is full of presents."

"You have been quite fortunate," said Lizzy, in a quiet voice; "much more so than Jane and I, if to receive a great many Christmas presents is to be considered fortunate."

"But don't you think Edward might have sent you some token of good-will and affection in this holiday season, when every one is giving or receiving presents?" asked Margaret.

"Nothing of that kind was needed, Cousin Maggie, as an expression of his feelings towards me," replied Lizzy. "He knew that I understood their true quality, and felt that any present would have been a useless formality."

"You can't say the same in regard to Jane. He might have passed her the usual compliment of the season."

"Certainly he might," said Jane. "Lizzy needn't try to excuse him after this lame justification. Of course, there is no cause for the omission but meanness—that's my opinion, and I speak it out boldly."

"It isn't right to say that, sister," remarked Lizzy. "Edward has other reasons for omitting the prevalent custom at this season—and good reasons, I am well assured. As to the charge of meanness, I don't think the fact you allege a sufficient ground for making it."

"Well, I do then," said Cousin Margaret. "Why, if I were a young man and engaged in marriage to a lady, I'd sell my shoes but what I'd give her something as a Christmas present."

"Yes—or borrow or beg the money," chimed in Jane.

"Every one must do as he or she thinks best," replied Lizzy. "As for me, I am content to receive no holiday gift, being well satisfied that meanness on the part of Edward has nothing to do with it."

But notwithstanding Lizzy said this, she could not help feeling a little disappointed—more, perhaps, on account of the appearance of the thing than from any suspicion that meanness, as alleged by Jane, had anything to do with the omission.

"I wish Edward had made Lizzy some kind of a present," said Mrs. Green to her husband a day or two after the holiday had passed; "if it had been only for the looks of the thing, Jane has been teasing her about it ever since, and calls it nothing but meanness in Edward. And I'm afraid he is a little close."

Better that he should be so than too free," replied Mr. Green; "though I must confess that a dollar or two, or even ten dollars, spent at Christmas in a present for his intended bride, could hardly have been set down to the score of prodigality. It does look mean, certainly."

"He is doing very well."

"He gets a salary of eight hundred dollars, and I suppose it doesn't cost him over four or five hundred dollars to live—at least it ought not to do so."

"He has bought himself a snug little house, I am told."

"If he's done that, he's done very well," said Mr. Green; "and I can forgive him for not spending his money in Christmas

presents, that are never of much use, say the best you will of them. I'd rather Edward would have a comfortable house to put his wife in than see him loading her down, before marriage, with presents of one foolish thing or another."

"True. But it would not have hurt him to have given the girl something, if it only had been a book, a purse, or some such trifle."

"For which trifles he would have been as strongly charged with meanness as he is now. Better let it go as it is. No doubt he has good reasons for his conduct."

Thus Mr. Green and Lizzy defended Edward, while the mother and Jane scolded about his meanness to their heart's content.

Edward Mayfield, the lover of Lizzy Green, was a young man of good principles, prudent habits and really generous feelings; but his generosity did not consist in wasting his earnings in order that he might be thought liberal and open-hearted, but in doing real acts of kindness where he saw that kindness was needed. He had saved from his salary, in the course of four or five years, enough to buy himself a very snug house, and had a few hundred dollars in the Savings' Bank with which to furnish it when the time came for him to get married. This time was not very far off when the Christmas, to which allusion has been made, came round. At this holiday season, Edward had intended to make both Lizzy and her sister a handsome present, and he had been thinking for some weeks as to what it should be. Many articles, both useful and merely ornamental, were thought of, but none of them exactly pleased his fancy.

A day or two before Christmas, he sat thinking about the matter, when something or other gave a new turn to his reflections.

They don't really need anything, said he to himself, and yet I propose to myself to spend twenty dollars in presents merely for appearance's sake. Is this right?

They are now.

Right if you choose to do it, he replied to himself.

I am not so sure of that, he added, after a pause. And then he sat in quite a musing mood for some minutes.

That's better, he at length said, rising up and walking about the floor. That would be money and good feelings spent to a better purpose.

But they'll expect something, he argued with himself; the family will think so strange of it. Perhaps I'd better spend half the amount in elegant books for Lizzy and Jane, and let the other go in the way I propose.

This suggestion, however, did not satisfy him.

Better let it all go in the other direction, he said, after thinking awhile longer; it will do a real good. The time will come when I can explain the whole matter if necessary, and do away with any little false impression that may have been formed.

To the conclusion at which Edward arrived, he remained firm. No present of any kind was made to his betrothed or her sister, and the reader has seen in what light the omission was viewed.

Christmas eve proved to be one of unusual inclemency. The snow had been falling all day, driven into every nook and corner, cleft and cranny, by a piercing northeaster; and now, although the wind had ceased to roar among the chimneys and to whirl the snow with blinding violence into the face of any one who ventured abroad, the broad flakes were falling slowly but more heavily than since morning, though the ground was covered already to the depth of many inches. It was a night to make the poor feel sober as they gathered more closely around their small fires, and thought of the few sticks of wood or pecks of coal that yet remained of their limited store.

On this dreary night, a small boy, who had been at work in a printing office all day, stood near the desk of his employer, waiting to receive his week's wages and go home to his mother, a poor widow, whose slender income scarcely sufficed to give food to her little household.

"You needn't come to-morrow, John," said the printer, "as he handed the last the

two dollars that were due him for the week's work: to-morrow is Christmas.

The boy took the money, and after lingering a moment, turned away and walked towards the door. He evidently expected something, and seemed disappointed. The printer noticed this, and at once comprehended its meaning.

John, he said kindly.

The boy stopped and turned round: as he did so, the printer took up a half dollar from the desk, and holding it between his fingers, said—

You've been a very good boy, John, and I think you deserve a Christmas gift.—Here's half a dollar for you.

John's countenance was lit up in an instant. As he came back to get the money the printer's eyes rested upon his feet, which were not covered with a very comfortable pair of shoes, and he said—

Which would you rather have, John, this half dollar or a pair of new shoes?

I'd rather have the new shoes, replied John, without hesitation.

Very well; I'll write you an order on a shoemaker, and you can go and fit yourself, and the printer turned to his desk and wrote the order.

As he handed to John the piece of paper on which the order was written, the lad looked earnestly into his face, and then said, with strongly-marked hesitation—

I think, sir, that my shoes will do very well if mended; they only want mending. Won't you please write shoes for my mother instead of me?

The boy's voice trembled, and his face was suffused. He felt that he had ventured too much. The printer looked at him for a moment or two, and then said—

Does your mother want shoes badly?

Oh, yes, sir. She doesn't earn much by washing and ironing when she can do it, but she sprained her wrist three weeks ago, and hasn't been able to do anything but work a little about the house since.

Are your wages all she has to live upon?

They are now.

You have a little sister, I believe?

Yes, sir.

Does she want shoes, also?

She has had nothing but old rags on her feet for a month.

Indeed!

The printer turned to his desk, and sat and mused for half a minute, while John stood with his heart beating so loud that he could hear its pulsations.

Give me that order, the man at length said to the boy, who handed him the slip of paper. He tore it up, and then took his pen and wrote a new order.

Take this, he said, presenting it to John. I have told the shoemaker to give you a pair for your mother, yourself and your little sister; and here is the half dollar, my boy, you must have that as so.

John took the order and the money, and stood for a few moments looking into the printer's face, while his lips moved as if he were trying to speak, but no sound came therefrom. Then he turned away and left the office without uttering a word.

John is very late to-night," said the poor Widow Elliot, as she got up and went to the door to look out in the hope of seeing her boy. "Supper had been ready for at least an hour, but she didn't feel like eating anything until John came home. Little Netty had fallen asleep by the fire, and was now snugly covered up in bed. As Mrs. Elliot opened the door, the cold air pressed in upon her, bearing its heavy burden of snow. She shivered like one in a sudden ague fit, and shutting the door, quickly murmured—

"My poor boy—it is a dreadful night for him to be out, and so thinly clad. I wonder why he stays so late away!"

The mother had hardly uttered these words when the door was thrown open, and John entered with a hasty step, bearing several packages in his arms, and covered with snow.

"There's your Christmas gift, mother," said he, in a delighted voice; "and here is mine, and there is Netty's!" displaying at the same time three pairs of shoes, a paper of sugar, another of tea, and another of rice.

Mrs. Elliot looked bewildered.

"Where did all these come from, John?" she asked, in a trembling voice, for she was

overcome with surprise and pleasure at this unexpected supply of articles so much needed.

John gave an artless relation of what had passed between him and the printer for whom he worked, and added—

I knew the number you wore, and I thought I would guess at Netty's size. If they don't fit the man says he will change them; and I'll go clear back to the store to-night but what she shall have her new shoes for Christmas. Won't she be glad? I wish she were awake."

And the tea, sugar and rice, you bought with the half dollar he gave you?" said the mother.

"Yes," replied John; "I bought the tea and the sugar for you. They're your Christmas gift from me. And the rice we'll all have to-morrow. Won't you make us a rice-pudding for our dinner?"

"You're a good boy, John—a very good boy," said the mother, much affected by the generous spirit her son displayed.—

"Yes, you shall have a rice-pudding.—But take off your wet shoes, my son—they are all wet—and dry your feet by the fire."

"No, not till you put Netty's shoes on to see if they fit her," replied John. "If they don't fit, I'm going back to the store for a pair that will. She shall have her new shoes for Christmas. And, mother, try yours on—may be they won't do."

To satisfy the earnest boy, Mrs. Elliot tried on Netty's shoes, although the child was sleeping.

Just the thing, she said.

"Now try on yours," urged John.

They couldn't fit me better, said the mother, as she slipped on one of the shoes.

"Now take off your wet ones, and dry your feet before the fire, while I put the supper on the table."

John, satisfied now that all was right, did as his mother wished, while she got ready their frugal repast. Both were too much excited to have very keen appetites. As they were about rising from the table, after finishing their meal, some one knocked at the door. John opened it, and a gentleman came in and said, familiarly—

How do you do, Mrs. Elliot?

Oh—how do you do, Mr. Mayfield?

Take a seat; and she handed her visitor a chair.

How has your wrist got, Mrs. Elliot?

Are you most ready to take my washing again?

It's better I thank you, but not well enough for that; and I can't tell when it will be. A sprain is so long in getting well.

How do you get along? asked Mr. Mayfield. Can you do any kind of work?

Nothing more than a little about the house.

Then you don't earn anything at all?

No sir—nothing.

How do you manage to live, Mrs. Elliot?

We have to get along the best we can on John's two dollars a week.

Two dollars a week! You can't live on two dollars a week, Mrs. Elliot; that is impossible.

It's all we have, said the widow.

Mr. Mayfield asked a good many more questions, and showed a very kind interest in the poor widow's affairs. When he arose to go away, he said—

I will send you a few things to-night, Mrs. Elliot, as a Christmas present. This is the season when friends remember each other, and tokens of good will are passing in all directions. I think I cannot do better to spend all I designed giving for this purpose, in making you a little more comfortable. So when the man comes with what I shall send, you will know that it is for you. Good night. I will drop in to see you again before long.

And ere Mrs. Elliot could express her thanks, Mr. Mayfield had retired.

No very long time passed before the voice of a man, speaking to his horse, was heard at the door. The rein was moved so noiselessly on the snow-covered street, that its approach had not been observed. The loud stroke of a whip handle on the floor raised the expectant widow and her son to start. John immediately opened it.

It is Mrs. Elliot's," asked a man, who stood with his leather hat and rough coat all covered with snow.

Yes, sir, replied John.

Very well; I've got a Christmas present for her; I rather think, and held open the door until I saw it go.

John had been trying on his new shoes, and had got them laced up about his ankles just as the man came. He had been hurried into the snow, to open the door to take care of itself, and was up into the car in a twinkling. It did not take long, with John's active assistance, to transfer the contents of the car to the widow's storeroom, which had been for a long time waiting in almost every thing.

Good night to you, madam, said the man as he was retiring, and may tomorrow be the merriest Christmas you ever spent. It isn't every one who has a friend like yours.

No, and may God reward him, said Mrs. Elliot herself, as she turned the door and left her small store for the children.

And now the timely present was more carefully examined. It consisted of many articles. First, and not the least welcome, was half a barrel of flour. Then there was a bag of oat meal, another of potatoes, with sugar, tea, rice, molasses, butter etc., some warm stockings for the children, a cheap thick shawl for herself, and a pair of gum shoes—besides a good many little things that had all been selected with strict regard to their use. A large chicken for a Christmas dinner, and some loaves of fresh Dutch cake for the children, had not been forgotten. Added to all this was a letter containing five dollars in which the generous donor said that on the next day he would send her a small store and half a ton of coal.

Edward Mayfield slept sweetly and soundly that night. On the next day, which was Christmas, he got the stove for Mrs. Elliot. It was a small cheap and economical one, designed expressly for the poor. He sent it with half a ton of coal.

Three or four days after Christmas, Mrs. Green said to Lizzy and Jane, as they sat sewing—

I believe, girls, we've entirely forgotten our washerwoman, poor Mrs. Elliot. It is some weeks since she sent us word that she had sprained her wrist, and could not do our washing until it got well. I think you had better go and see her this morning. I should not wonder if she stood in need of something. She has two children, and only one of them is old enough to earn anything—and even he can only bring home a very small sum. We have done wrong to forget Mrs. Elliot.

You go and see her, Lizzy, said Jane. I don't care about visiting poor people in distress; it makes me feel bad.

To relieve their wants, Jane ought to make you feel good, said Mrs. Green.

I know it ought; but I had rather not go.

Oh, yes, Jane said Lizzy, you must go with me. I want you to go. Poor Mrs. Elliot! who knows how much she may have suffered?

Yes, Jane, go with Lizzy; I want you to go. Jane did not like her to go positively, so she got ready and went, though with a good deal of reluctance. Like a great many others, she had no taste for scenes of distress. If she could relieve a wretch by putting her hand behind her, and not seeing the object of pity, she had no objection to doing so; but to look suffering in the face was too repulsive to her sensitive feeling.

When Lizzy and Jane entered the humble home of the widow, they found everything comfortable, neat and clean. A small stove was upon the hearth, and though the day was very cold, it furnished a genial warmth throughout the room. Mrs. Elliot sat knitting; she appeared extremely glad to see the girls. Lizzy inquired how her wrist was, how she had been getting along, and if she stood in need of anything. To the last question she replied—

I should have wanted almost everything to make me comfortable, had not Mr. Mayfield, one of the gentlemen I washed for before I lost my wits, remembered me at Christmas. He sent me this nice little stove and a load of coal, a half barrel of flour, meal, potatoes, tea, sugar, and I can't now tell you what all—besides a chicken for our Christmas dinner, and five dollars in money. I'm sure he couldn't have spent less than twenty dollars. Heaven knows I shall never forget him!—He came on Christmas eve, and inquired so kindly how I was getting along; and then told me that he would send me a little present to cheer up the wretched little wretch I was, and who was so lonely and who might well have longed for me for missing the good compliments of the season. Since then he was gone, a man brought us a sort of flour, and on Christmas day the stove and the coal came.

Jane looked at Lizzy, now whose face was a warm glow and in whose eyes shone bright light.

Then you can not need anything, said Lizzy.

No, I thank you kindly, not now. I am very comfortable. Long before my coal, flour, meal and potatoes are out, I hope to be able to take in washing again, and then I shall not need any assistance.

Forget me, sister, for my light words about Edward, Jane said, the moment she and Lizzy left the widow's home. These generous and noble-hearted. I would rather be done than made me a present of the most costly remembrance he could find, for it stamps his character. Lizzy, you may well be proud of him.

Lizzy did not trust herself to reply, for she could think of no words adequate to the expression of her feelings. When Jane told her father about the widow—Lizzy was modestly silent on the subject—Mr. Green said—

That was nobly done! There is the ring of the genuine coin! I am proud of him!

Tears came into Lizzy's eyes as she heard her father speak so warmly and approvingly of her lover.

Next year, added Mr. Green, we must take a lesson of Edward, and improve our system of household presents. How many hundreds and thousands of dollars are wasted in useless revenues and pretty trifles, that might do a better good if the stream of kind feelings were turned into a better channel!