

In Aunt Haly's Log Cabin.

I'M hungry, what do you give me now? 'Sho' 'bout eat?' The questioner swallowed a bit of ginger bread and arose from the crowded bench in front of Mr. Kelley's store...

"Come to study 'bout dat, dar two folks I ain't hear tell er takin' no swing er buyin' no Christmas, nuther, er dey Beer Primus er Sis Haly. Enny you all see em?" inquired Uaker Poliam...

"Lard, no!" declared Sis Tempy, taking her souf brush from behind her ear, and reaching into a capacious pocket for the little tin souf box. "Las' time I laid eyes on Beer Primus he was all ricketed up wid takin' turkentine for de rheumatiz, on a lupon hoid, right den, 'Bee Primus, you done collapsed now—"

"En dat place er dern," commented another of the group, "hit de numbes, norkin' place in creashin, na' er chicken, nor pig, nor nothin' to make it homesome. Dey po' Job's turkey, yit dey hol deyse! gyaated up same like dey was quality niggers!"

"Dat don't fool nobody," asserted Uaker Poliam, taking his cornish pie from his lips to rearrange its glowing contents with a cautious forefinger. "Hit don't require no turble lot er sence to spectsit dat dey done reach de eend er dey row, sho' you born, en I knowz pittedit dat dey has not got de necessary cash to hit dat moggie, de which gwine sell 'em out fast day er Jincerry."

"Bless Gaud!" interjected Sis Tempy, gazing down the street. "Talk 'bout de eon, en dar you gwine fine de tracks Er you'er ain't Beer Primus en Sis Haly wid all de greenhillen piled up in de convenience, samer en millions in a watermill wagon!"

The conveyance sighted advanced with squeaks and groans, as if bewailing its own approaching dissolution or that of the work worn Mustang which Uaker Primus found a difficulty in hauling on to the outskirts of a crowd of vehicles that blocked the thoroughfare. Aunt Haly, proudly resolved to hide her misfortunes from prying acquaintances, briskly alighted, and, wending her way among the stubborn-looking mules, ancient nags and heavy yoked oxen, was soon engaged in greeting the side walk assemblage with all the broad bonhomie and quiet ebriety of the true Southern negro.

"Howdy, Beer Poliam?" called she to the patriarch, who by reason of his age and ecclesiastical prominence merited first notice. "How you comin' on?" "Wull, Sis Haly," answered he, "I think Gaud I'm so's to be here. I ain't never been right smart sence I taken wid dat cowbunker on my naik, yistiddy was a most' ago. How yo' folks, Sis Haly?" "Sarter slow, Beer Poliam, sarter slow."

Christmas cheer which the old couple's depleted exchequer could not provide. Consequently, there followed no stowing away of mysterious brown bundles under the wagon seat, as had been the custom at previous Christmas times, yet so exuberant is youthful hope that even this fact failed to check the little darlies' happy anticipations of the holiday.

Great, then, was the dismay when Aunt Haly announced next day that such expectations were vain. She was seated on the doorstep in workaday home-spun and plaid "headban kercher," and her hands, shining with the brass rings which she wore as preventives of cramp, industriously twined holly and cedar into wreaths. These were for decking the graves of her "white folks," according to a yule custom prevailing in many families and now maintained by this quondam retainer.

"Yes, chillen," she confessed as she wrought, "granny mighty sorry, but hit jus' like I tell you, Sandy Claws don't 'low off no time foolin' longer dirt po' folks like we all, ner nobody else don't, nuther. I done had de sp'ince er dat. En us wassen dirt po'—dey ain't no cof-fee, dey ain't no meat, dey ain't skeezy nuthin' 'tall to eat in de house, en Gaud knows dey ain't na'er dollar really ginst dat moggie ju de fast day er Jincerry, de which gwine turn us outen dis house er erna."

The old woman turned sorrowfully toward the rude cabin, built with such hopeful toil, and set with the humble treasures of a lifetime. Failed lithographs, magazine cuts and installment-bought chromos decorated the walls; a loud-voiced clock towered above several very precious china pieces on a shelf, and a small table upheld the large family Bible, the spiritual comfort of which probably emanated from its mere presence, since none of the household could read. A four post bedstead, furnished with a puffy feather "rick" and adorned with a bright-hued patchwork quilt occupied half the room, and beyond, through an open doorway, was visible a stout pine table, a lofty shelf sustaining a water bucket and drinking gourd, an ironing board, a spinning wheel, and in the yawning fire place, a pot and three-legged skillet, hobnobbing among the ashes.

"Tain't much, Gaud knows," acknowledged Aunt Haly pathetically, "but hit's all cum, what us done sweat en wrastle far, en look like hit jes' 'tear out de nachel heart strings, to gin hit up. Lard! Lard!" And big tears fell among the crimson holly berries, as Aunt Haly gathered up her wreathe and started for the lonely curial plot.

After a while the children, who had remained at home, decided to build a fire. "Ginst gran' p'we come from lookin' 'taller de traps, den granny must make some coffee, bein' es how dis here Christmas Eve," Palmyre, the second girl, suggested.

"I'm sustinshed at you, Pellmy, well es you done heard granny say us ain't got no coffee 'tall," corrected Jincy, the eldest.

"Wull, den, a hoe cake," said Palmyre retreatingly; "dat's fillin', anyhow, en I'm des huller es a gods, I sho' is!"

"By this time Jincy, Palmyre, phonetically, "Pellmy" and their brother Tom, nicknamed "Bad Chug" as a contraction of "bugat," had sprawled before the hearth, where the newly lighted pine knot blazes threw wild glints upon their pudgy, good natured features; but Patsy, the youngest, sat silently in the shadow.

"Nigger, you sho' is got sence like a mule," declared Palmyre admiringly, upon the story's conclusion. "Cose us kin 'pen on de Lawd, but us dun' know how to lit' no prayer."

"I does," cried Patsy eagerly and plumping upon her knees, she began. "Lawd, sen' Sandy Claws to—"

"You ain't go to be hodiously into prayer like dat," interrupted Bad Chug authoritatively. This young person, with an aim for future ministerial honors, had devoted much thought to such matters, and had stored his memory with choice callings from the negro pastor's perorations.

"You commences, 'Mussy! Father en glorable Gaud, us po' sinners is 'sembled here dis night to ax en explore yo' probingsness for our back-slidin' en unchristianness. Dat de way Beer Brown make a start over to Mt. Zion."

So instructed, Patsy began anew, and progressed smoothly until she entered the graves of her "white folks," according to "Shucks!" broke in Bad Chug, "you can't come at de Lawd so familiar like I done told you. You oughter say, 'Gressious Gaud, turns yo' incommence onto dis po' sinner, Pellmy, in de low grounds er sorrow!"

Along this line the prayer continued down to the final clause, when Patsy, having set forth the family needs to her perfect satisfaction, suddenly ended.

"Dat a turble onspersful way to send," remonstrated Bad Chug severely. "Ax for whatsomsoever you wants, mighty pefitte, en den drap off wid plain 'Amen.' You hatter slope 'long sarter easy, like Beer Brown does. Dey say, 'En now homin' presents Father, us have ax yo' attention to dese humble words of sence, dough us ain't crackin' ourselves up to serve nothin' of dese, 'cept'n' tho de blood of de Lamb. Dat kin' of send sarter like hit ought to be."

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