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A New Year at Cote Blanche

... By... Frank H. Sweet.

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EVERY one who is familiar with the customs of the creoles and Acadians of Louisiana knows that New Year's is the most eagerly anticipated and the most important of their festivals.

A religious significance is attached also to the New Year's anniversary. They believe that from day dawn to dark an angel, "Tange de paix," broods over each household, striving to destroy hatred, malice and all uncharitableness in the heart and to substitute love and forgiveness. If his promptings are obeyed, enemies forgiven and the hand opened wide in charity, that man's sins are wiped off the record, and he starts on a new year with a clean conscience.

For a week before New Year's day the preparations of the "habitant" begin. The house undergoes a thorough scrubbing and cleaning from garret to basement and is whitewashed inside and out. I have an idea the Acadian housekeeper fancies that "Tange de paix" is going to make a close scrutiny into all her dust corners and hidden receptacles and would be disgusted with a rusty pot or dirty pan.

The hunters go out on a grand "bat-tue" to provide game. If a new dress is possible during the year, it is certain to be made up and worn then.

But in two houses in Cote Blanche these cheerful notes of preparation were unheard. To look at them you would not be likely to perceive a connection between the largest and most comfortable farmhouse in Cote Blanche, the property of rich old Jacques Lefebvre, and the miserable and daubed cabin which stood at the edge of Lavigne woods—a cabin with dirt floor and unglazed windows, a home of poverty and illness, where the father and breadwinner, a helpless invalid, watched his pale wife and three children with despairing eyes.

He knew that bread was lacking that New Year's eve, and there seemed no means short of begging it.

Six years before that Harry Wood, a handsome young fellow and a skilled mechanic, had come to Cote Blanche. He easily found work on the large plantations in the neighborhood and seemed to have a career of prosperity before him when he formed an attachment for pretty Laure Lefebvre, the only daughter of the old farmer. But when he asked the father's consent a terrific storm was raised in that household.

"Ah!" cried the old man furiously, "You 'ink I give my Laure to you, a stranger, a 'raider American, no farm, no cattle, no money, no nothing, you want to 'make' a Protestant of her? You want her 'dot', her land, her cattle, and you get dem, den you run away and leave her. Maybe you got two wives where you come from. Non, monsieur, you touch not se money of old Jacques Lefebvre. Laure shall spik to you no more."

But Laure, being a willful, spoiled young dame, did see him and speak to him again and refused positively to give him up.

Had her father been kind in his refusal it is probable the child, for she was only sixteen, would have been obedient. But he was harsh and abusive and from having been foolishly indulgent became so stern that her home was not a pleasant one. The poor mother, weary of the strife between the two, one day after an outburst said to her daughter:

"Laur, he is getting worse and worse. I think he is going crazy, and you must either give up Harry or marry him and go off."

Taking that for a word of consent, Laure left her father's house on New Year's eve and became Harry Wood's wife the next day.

For the first four years all went well with the young couple. Wood had plenty of work, and their home was full of comfort, besides the fact that Laure was a good wife. She was fully expected to be a good wife, and she became what this New Year's eve she found him—a helpless invalid.

Their money had all been spent, and at last the day arrived when they had to give up their comfortable home and move to a cabin at the edge of the woods.

SEEING THE NEW YEAR IN



MR. UPSIDE DOWN ON PARADE

It is Jacques, that is Helene, and this little one at the foot of the bed is Elsie.

"You named the two eldest after your father and me?" the grandmother said, with a stifled sob.

"Yes. Are they not handsome? And so bright! Jacques is beginning to read, and Pere Joseph teaches him when his father is too ill, and they say he is going to be a great scholar."

The grandmother pressed a kiss on each round cheek and stood looking at them, lost in thought.

"If he could only see them!" she murmured. "He loves children so much, even now!"

"I must go now, Laure," she said at last, "but I will come back again before long. I have a thought. I will talk it over with Pere Joseph tonight as I go home. Whatever he tells you to do tomorrow, you must obey him."

The next morning Pere Joseph entered the room where old Lefebvre was sitting, leading two children. No one, not even that moody man, thought of barring out the good cure who had lived from youth to old age among his people at Cote Blanche.

"Happy New Year!" he called out cheerily. "Aha, in the sulks still, mon ami! Six years in the sulks! Too long, too long, for a man over sixty who hasn't many more New Years to be sorry or glad in. I'm afraid 'Tange de paix' is tired of standing on your threshold. Happy New Year!"

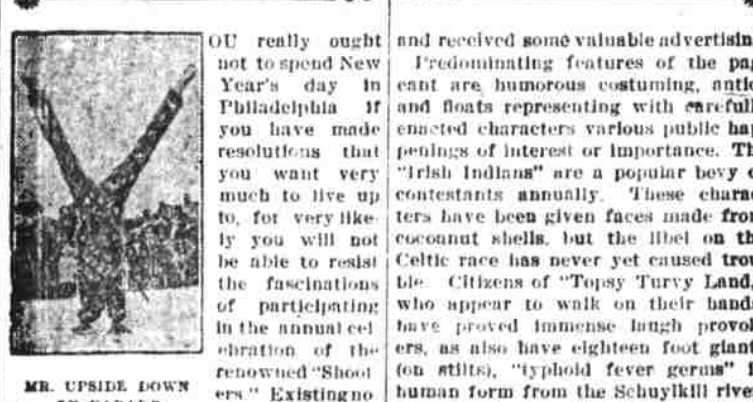
"I hear you, and nobody knows New Year better than I do. Who are these children, Pere Joseph?"

"Two I picked up out of a wretched hotel, where there was nothing to eat, and brought them to see how gay and happy a rich man can be on New Year's day. You know, poor people always think where there is money there is happiness. Go to monsieur, my children, and kiss him and wish him a happy New Year."

The two pretty children did it, a little frightened at the stern old face which bent to receive their caresses, but it softened wonderfully as he lifted them by his knee and stroked their soft brown curls.

The New Year in Philadelphia

Wonderful Parade of Knights of Misrule. By Frederick R. Toombs. Copyright, 1903, by American Press Association.



MR. UPSIDE DOWN ON PARADE

YOU really ought not to spend New Year's day in Philadelphia if you have made resolutions that you want very much to live up to, for very likely you will not be able to resist the fascinations of participating in the annual celebration of the renowned "Shooters."

Existing no where else in the world, the Shooters are latter day prototypes of the Mummers that flourished for scores of years in England and France. Their watchword could well be "Death to sorrow. Joy is the one fit companion of mankind."

Preaching continually the doctrines of happiness and popularity, the Shooters open each New Year with a rousing feast day to the memory of the shade of King Momo, the accredited inspirer of the cult, which dearly loves to have its members known as Knights of Misrule.

Such a riot of color and gaiety as marks the gigantic parade of the Shooters, which is the particular feature of their celebration, is certainly not seen anywhere else in America. From six to ten thousand paraders in extravagant costumes have appeared in their pageants of recent years. As many as a half million people have gathered along the line of march. The prizes offered are the most valuable ever put up for elaborateness or originality in costume and accoutrement.

The city of Philadelphia always appropriates \$5,000 yearly to swell the prize fund, which is largely made up of contributions from merchants, clubs, interested individuals and organizations taking part in the pageant.

Prizes are offered for the best dressed paraders, the most elaborate, the most humorous, the most unique, etc., and it is possible for an individual to capture prizes enough offered for the same specialty to amount to \$3,000. How is that for a prize for a masquerade ball (outdoors) costume?

Lamb For the Greeks. The unique Greek dish on New Year's eve is the roast lamb, set up in Greek style, of which each son of Hellas must partake. The roasting of the lamb is attended with a great deal of pomp.

The entire carcass of a lamb is set up on a pole, and this is held over a fire until it is duly roasted. Then it is sliced and apportioned among the various persons present at the feast, and the roast is eaten along with the other strictly Greek dishes and washed down with Greek wine.

Good and Bad Luck. It was supposed to bring bad luck to a house to take anything out of it on New Year's day before you brought something into it.

Take out, then take in. Bad luck will begin; Take in, then take out. Good luck comes about.

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