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Richmond, Va.

THE UNEXPECTED GUEST.

An Odd Christmas Story of Twin Houses.

RUDOLPH BOULONGER was very eccentric, very peculiar. He was learned and rich but conspicuously lacked commonsense. Nevertheless he was lucky to an extent passing belief. Other men toiled faithfully for years and used the best judgment, but their ventures failed. Fate was their relentless enemy. Boulonger would do something which in the eyes of the wise stamped him as a fool, and yet his seemingly brainless act would bring him a small fortune.

His boyhood was one of ease, his father being in good circumstances and requiring nothing more of his son than that he should go to school and college and learn from books all that he could. Rudolph had a splendid memory, and absorbed printed knowledge as readily as a sponge sucks up water. He gave no attention to anything except books until the death of his father compelled him to think how he should live and pay his bills. The fortune left him was modest, and his friends, knowing what a lamentably impractical person he was, advised him to put his money in a saving bank, not to country, and to live economically. He rejected their advice with scorn. He wished to travel abroad and enjoy luxuries. He invested nearly all of his fortune in a gold mine. His friends were horror-stricken. They said his money would surely be lost in the wildest scheme, and that, as he was utterly incapable of making a living, he would be obliged to go to the poorhouse and eventually, perhaps, to the penitentiary for indebtedness. But to the surprise of the fair-weather friends the mine soon proved to be one of the richest on earth, and in a few years Rudolph possessed a half million dollars. His position in society was marked by a succession of lucky blunders. He would buy real estate in a wilderness where only the remains of Indian tribes could long enough to dwell, and in a year's time a railroad would be run through his land and he would sell building lots [illegible] College. He did other things [illegible] and made money every [illegible]

[illegible] of his many eccentricities he married a beautiful and accomplished lady. How she ever allowed herself to be married to him was a marvel to those who knew them. But they were married, and lived together. [illegible] two children, a son named James and Edith, who took after their mother.

The family resided in a fine country mansion about a mile from the outskirts of Boston. Their nearest neighbor was a well-to-do farmer whose son, John Hendrickson, a sturdy and practical young man, fell in love with Edith Boulonger when she was eighteen years old. But Mr. Boulonger wished his daughter to marry a college-bred man who was the descendant of an old and cultured family. Another requirement was that the suitor should either be rich enough to lead a life of elegant leisure or else should be a professional man; doctor or lawyer admissible, but minister preferred. That Edith should marry a mere farmer was preposterous. Moreover, Mr. Boulonger did not like Hendrickson for a reason that will late appear.

"YOU CAN NEVER MARRY MY DAUGHTER."

"It will be useless to speak to father," said Edith to John one Christmas eve. "He will never give his consent to my marrying you."

"Nevertheless I will speak to him," replied the lead lover. "He shall know that I dare to face him."

Mr. Boulonger sat in his library when the young man was ushered into his presence. The eccentric gentleman assumed an air of dignity and clothed his countenance with an ominous frown. He believed that his demeanor alone would dishearten his intended victim. But Hendrickson was not awed at all. Aristocratic pretensions had no effect upon the independent American except to make him despise them.

"You can never marry my daughter," said Mr. Boulonger, in weighty tones.

"Why?"

"For various reasons. The most important one is that you do not belong to a cultured family and are not college bred. You are neither an *Artium Baccalaureus* nor an *Artium Magister*. Moreover, you deceived me when I bought that Jersey cow of you. As soon as she was in my stable I ordered my hired man to milk her. He reported that he could not obtain any milk. Thinking the pail might leak, I ordered him to go to a tin shop and buy a new, tight pail. He at once obeyed. He placed the new pail under the cow and again manipulated the udders. There was no flow whatever. The cow's bag was small and shrunken. It was a clear case of desiccation. For lacteal purposes the animal was useless. I sold her that very day."

Hendrickson could scarcely restrain a shout of laughter.

"There was nothing the matter with the cow," he exclaimed. "I had milked her just before sending her to your place and of course her bag was empty."

Rudolph was not astonished. Evidences of his stupidity were too frequently brought to his attention to cause him any uneasiness. Moreover he was too pigheaded to acknowledge an unwelcome truth while he could think of any pretext with which to combat it.

"OH, FATHER! SPARE HIM!"

"An ingenious excuse on your part," he replied, stiffly, "but it will not answer. You must recollect that I have studied the genus bovine scientifically. I have one hundred books relating to the breeding and nurture of cattle and to the diseases to which they are liable. I have read every one of these books through and can speak with an authority unknown to the empirical farmers in this neighborhood. I know when a cow is in a normal condition; and I say that the Jersey that you sold me was a farrow cow that had long ceased to yield any lacteal fluid."

Hendrickson soon left in disgust. Had he not loved the daughter deeply, he would have objected to marrying into a family the head of which was so great a fool.

It was a sad Christmas eve for the lovers. John bade Edith farewell with the knowledge that a long time would probably elapse before they could meet again.

As for Mr. Boulonger, he made up his mind that his children were being vulgarized by too much contact with rural influences, and the family moved into the city, where they boarded at a hotel during the greater part of the next year. In conformity with his eccentric tendencies Mr. Boulonger, when spring arrived, set about carrying into effect a long cherished plan. He purchased two adjoining building lots in the suburbs of Boston and erected upon them two large square houses that were built and painted just alike. He also furnished the houses so carefully and arranged their contents so systematically that the interiors of the structures were exactly similar. His son and daughter were twins, he said, and ought to live in twin houses, his design being to have James live in one house and Edith in the other after each had succeeded in getting married. He selected a minister for Edith; but the young lady did not favor her father's plan, and the dominie made as poor progress in his courtship as he did in writing sermons that contained original and interesting ideas.

Finding that his children would not marry immediately, Mr. Boulonger moved with his family into one of the furnished houses and rented the other house to a Mr. Belnap, a friend who also knew John Hendrickson and liked him well.

Meanwhile James Boulonger had acted as a confidential messenger between his sister and her lover; and the three, with Mr. Belnap and Mrs. Boulonger as confederates, devised an artful plan by which it was hoped the elder Boulonger might be persuaded to accept Hendrickson as a son in-law.

At the approach of the holiday season the young farmer came to Boston and became the guest of Mr. Belnap, much to the annoyance of Rudolph Boulonger.

Nothing of interest occurred until Christmas eve. Then in the midst of a blinding snowstorm James Boulonger returned home at midnight. The rest of the family were abed and asleep and James retired to his couch without delay.

An hour later the household were startled from their slumbers by the cry: "Robbers, robbers!"

James Boulonger dashed out of his bedroom and fired his pistol. Old Rudolph was aroused, and with a rifle in his hand ran out of his sleeping apartment on the first floor. Father and son met in the dining-room where much expensive silverware, which it had been hoped would grace the Christmas dinner the next day, had been stored in a sideboard. The silver had not been disturbed.

"We are just in time," cried Rudolph. "The rascals would soon have secured all of our silver had they not been frightened. I do not hear them, but they have probably not gone from the house. They are undoubtedly armed and may fight desperately."

His order was not so great as it was at first. But James was full of prowess and his father reluctantly followed him to the kitchen.

"There he is!" cried Rudolph, as he saw a man dart into an entry that led to the cellar. With hands that trembled violently the old man raised his rifle and fired at random. The room was filled with smoke, and Rudolph was at the same moment filled with confidence. He was not afraid of a robber who retreated as if he were unarmed. Rudolph put another cartridge in his gun and quite boldly opened the door connecting the entry with the cellar.

"For God's sake!" cried a voice in the darkness, "do not shoot again. I am John Hendrickson."

"Ha! it is you, you rascal. Just what I've expected; you've become a robber. I'll dispose of you so that you'll never sell another dried up cow," shouted Rudolph; and again he blazed away, although he could not see Hendrickson.

"Father, oh, father, spare him! It is all a dreadful mistake!" cried Edith, as she pinioned her infuriated parent's arms with her own.

"Listen to me just a moment," said Hendrickson in excited tones as he appeared from behind a barrel when he saw that there was to be a cessation in the hostilities. "You know that I have been visiting Mr. Belnap, and that this house and the one in which he lives are just alike outside and in. I approached this house in the midst of blinding snow, thinking it was the right one. I found the door unlocked, but supposed Mr. Belnap had forgotten to secure it after him. I entered and locked the door. Every object about me was familiar. I descended to the kitchen and left my coat and rubbers there. I then returned to the parlor and lighted a lamp. Not feeling sleepy I read for about an hour, having found a copy of the same book which I had been reading at Mr. Belnap's. About one o'clock I went to the bedroom which I supposed was mine, and to my intense surprise found your son in it. He was awake and was after me with a pistol in an instant. You know the rest."

"Did you leave the door unlocked?" asked Mr. Boulonger, turning toward his son.

"I declare, I believe I did," said James.

He did not add, however, that he had left the door unlocked purposely and was not surprised by what had subsequently occurred.

Rudolph Boulonger shuddered, not knowing that he had been firing blank cartridges that had thoughtfully been provided for his use, and was glad that he had not killed an innocent man. He felt that he had greatly wronged John Hendrickson; he observed with alarm the highly-wrought feelings of his daughter; his nerves were too much shaken for him to deny that the twin houses which his eccentricity had caused him to erect and furnish alike were responsible for the unwelcome occurrence, and he was glad to make peace by giving the intruder permission to marry Edith.

The next day the family sat down to a splendid Christmas dinner in their home, and John Hendrickson, the unexpected guest, was entertained by them in a very pleasant manner.

"It is a fitting occasion for a reconciliation," said Rudolph Boulonger, whose recent experience had made him unusually regardful of religion. "I for one am glad to feel the influences of a day that has brought 'peace on earth and good-will to men.'"

"PEACE ON EARTH."

The others acquiesced in the worthy sentiment.

Mr. and Mrs. John Hendrickson and Mrs. and Mrs. James Boulonger now reside in the twin houses, and every Christmas the two families and Mr. and Mrs. Rudolph Boulonger dine together in one of the peculiar dwellings.

It is said that on one of the happy occasions Rudolph Boulonger was gently told of the ruse by which he had been deceived, Edith and her husband excusing themselves by saying that there had been love and war and that all tactics were fair in both. It is further reported that the old gentleman forgave the couple, having in the meantime learned from the owner of the Jersey cow that that animal had given a good mess of milk eight hours after she had left the Boulonger farm.

J. A. BOLLES.

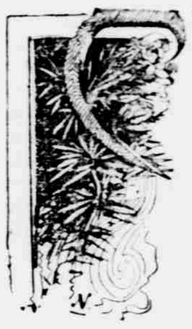
More Ravaging Than Time.

Mrs. Cobwigger—Now, my dear, if you will cook the plum pudding just as I tell you, it will keep a year.

Mrs. Brown—Ah! You don't know Johnnie.—Life.

SOME CHRISTMAS THOUGHTS.

How a Humorist Secured a Useful Present for His Wife.



CHRISTMAS, as has been said, I think by some great writer, comes but once a year.

It is a mighty fortunate thing for some of us that it doesn't come twice.

Perhaps it doesn't crowd every one to the verge of penury as it does me, but then every one hasn't such a penchant for keeping always in the neighborhood of penury as I have.

Awhile ago my father took it into his head that there was money in raising hogs, so he paid $40 for some squealers, fed them $60 worth of corn and sold $78.60 worth of pork. A drifting toward a sort of pig penury, he says.

One Christmas followeth so closely upon the heels of another that the space of time, after it is past, is but as a tale that is told or a Waterbury watch in the night. A Christmas past delighteth us not, but a Christmas present is a joy to our soul. And it is the Christmas present, Heaven strengthen us, that we all have to deal with.

For my part I never know what to buy. Only once have I had things all cut and dried for me. A little while before last Christmas I gave my celebrated funny lecture in a New England village, doing a one night stand for the benefit of the L. S. R. G. S. S. H. society of the brick church with shingle roof situate on the west side of the street as you leave the town. The name of the organization I found was the Ladies Sewing, Reaping, Gossiping and Sending Socks to the Heathen society. Which Heathen society they sent them to I never learned.

"GOING AT FIVE!"

Quite a good many people listened to my remarks, without more signs of pain than I have noticed everywhere. As one of the committeewomen remarked, facetiously, afterward, "there was more in the audience than there was in the lecture."

I noticed that no one seemed to be putting on overshoes, while I was slowly running down, or letting the cat die, as you might say, and after I had got off my final bon mot and didn't have a single bong mo' to get off, I sat down, but everybody stayed. Then the president of the society came to me and said: "Mr. Hood, our society has been making a autograph quilt. Ten cents to put your name on a block, you know. It's got over 400 blocks into it, and we've raised pretty near $50 for the heathen now. We thought, while everybody was here and it was so near Christmas, we'd have you auction the quilt off."

So I got up and held up the quilt and stepped on the edge of it and fell down, and everybody applauded and seemed to think it was a real clever thing to do. Mr. Hood then spoke in substance as follows:

"How much am I offered for this quilt? It is a well-made quilt and is strictly non-partisan. The names, you will notice, are in blocks of five; it is designed for protection; it won't tariff you're careful of it, will keep Silver Bill or any other man warm, and how much am I offered for it?"

Then everybody laughed quite a lot and nobody bid. I thought that they were afraid to speak up, so I said: "Well, now, I'll just start it at five dollars. Who'll make it six? Going at five—at five. Give me the half. Five I have; six will you give me? Going at five-five-fi-fi-fi-fi-fi-fi-fi—do I hear the six? Five I'm bid; are you all done? Going at five, fi-fi-fi-fi-fi-fi-fi-fi-five. Give me a quarter somebody. Five I have; do I hear the quarter? Five I have—going at five. Must I knock it down for such a paltry sum? Five I have; make it five dollars and ten cents. Five I have. Are you all done? Going, once—going, twice—going, twice—going, three times. Won't some one please bid?—and sold to a poor, misguided fool of a funny-lecture man for five dollars."

And then the society all crowded around me and thanked me, and said that I was such a clever auctioneer, and if I hadn't been there to run the auction they wouldn't have got half so much. So they deducted a fiver from my fee, said they didn't understand about the "locals," so I'd have to pay my own hotel bill, and then they left me alone with my quilt.

I tried to give it to the landlord, but he said: "Oh, hades, I wouldn't have the damb thing around the house!"

So a bright idea struck me, and I sent it home to my wife for a Christmas present. She keeps it up on the spare bed, and I notice that folks that come to see us nowadays, expecting to stay several months, always begin to weaken along about the third night, and we never had a guest yet who could stand that quilt with four hundred names on it for more than a week without going stark mad.

CHARLES NEWTON HOOD.

The Alsatian "Christ-child."

In France it is the *Jour Jésus*, Christ-child, who comes. Among the Alsatians a beautiful young girl personates this character, and, with a bell in one hand and sweetmeats in the other, she goes about the village distributing the coveted gifts among the children.

Wooden Shoes for Kris Kringle.

All over Germany Christmas is celebrated with much ceremony, and hundreds of little wooden shoes wait for Kris Kringle's coming. There is nothing that clings so tenaciously to the childish mind as the advent of Christmas.

IN THE YEAR OF GRACE, 1891.

"How foolish it is, Aunt Sadie, for mamma to try and make me believe that 'Santa Claus' comes down the chimney and fills my stockings. I suppose it worked all right when you were a little girl, but it is such a chestnut now! However, it pleases mamma, so I don't let on that I know."—Life.

Sober Second Thought.

Head of Firm (to office boy)—Here, take this box of cigars and distribute them around the office for Christmas.

Office Boy—Yes sir. (Hurries off).

Head of Firm—Hold on. I guess you'd better wait until after I go home.—Life.

Quite Surprising.

Mr. Green—No, my dear, I will not tell you what I'm going to give you for Christmas. Why can't you women be content to wait and be surprised?

Mrs. Green—Oh, tell me now. If you keep your word, I'll be surprised enough.—Puck.

The Boston Girl's Christmas.

She tossed her Christmas toys aside,
Her face with disappointment frowning.
"Oh, dear!" the little maiden sighed,
"I did so want another Browning!"
—Jury.

Everything Is Lovely, and—

Mr. Kanoodle—And now wouldn't you like *me* for a Christmas present?

Miss Alert—Certainly, if you'll hang yourself on the Christmas tree.—Puck.

ROUGH ON SANTA CLAUS.

Ivy—Say, Dolph, I hope Santa Claus is honest.

Dolph—Why?

Ivy—Cos them's my new stockings, and I don't want them stole.—Once a Week.

THE NIGHT BEFORE CHRISTMAS.

"I don't expect ter git nothin', gents; in it; but I jest hang it up because I think it's de proper thing ter encourage and keep up dese old and time-honored customs."—Puck.

ST. NICK SOLILOQUIZES.

St. Nick—Great reindeers! Have I struck the week's washing?—Texas Siftings.

HURRAH FOR CHRISTMAS.

HURRAH for merry Christmas with its jollities and joys!
And royal feasts of good old cheer with wassailing in bowls!
Hurrah for good King Kringle, who brings his things at midnight
To fill the children's stockings with toys and dainty [illegible]

Of all the days we love to praise is Christmas best and brightest.
Then faces shine with joy divine and then are hearts the lightest.
Then gifts abound and pleasure crowned are those who love bestowing
But gladder yet are those who know the sweeter blessed giving.

The girls and boys hail Christmas joys with eagerness excited
The babe in arms at Christmas charms claps little hands delighted
But old folks yet will wish the treat recall every childhood's memories cheering
Have thrice the joy of anyone which Christmas bells are ringing

When cold winds blow and bring the snow and woods are bleak and dreary
The Christmas tree—ah, see it be—its homes all warm and cheery
And faces or and rosy its light and merry voices ringing
While from above look down with love glad angels and Kris Kringle

Hurrah for merry Christmas when we all are O, so jolly
And yule logs blaze with brightest rays on hearths and hills
And pie and cake and puddings make the feasters [illegible]
And good Saint Nick fills stockings quick with treasures excelling

H. C. DOBBS.

The preparatory of Christmas has been formed by processions moving from many countries and from remote ages.

The old heathen Greeks were wont, at this time of the year, to bear the evergreen, the holly and the mistletoe from the forests, to decorate their temples, long before the grasses and the corn leaves rustled about the head of that marvelous child in Bethlehem's stable.

Grave and dignified men, during the Saturnalian days of southern climes, at our Christmas period indulged in the "feast of fools" when there was free way to all of a boy's abundant hilarity, agos anterior to that era, when the wise men from the east bent in wrapt contemplation over the Baby Boy, who lay in sweet unconsciousness in the manger midst Judea's hills.

Out of the twilight of heathen countries has come the children's custom of hanging the stocking near the fireplace for the good fairy to fill with knick-knacks so dear to the child's heart.

It is an evidence of the real character of our Christmas spirit that it could secure to its service, for the illustration of its own spirit, these and other customs, as it is also an evidence of the generous breath of Christianity's spirit to receive, employ and honor every good custom of men.

Adapted to celebrate the truth of Christmas, all these customs were relieved of many evil features and exalted in their whole tone.

A light heart, a merry countenance, an elated spirit only are in harmony with the day.

It is a day of generosity, too. The best gift of Heaven was bestowed upon the earth.

They tell us that the angels came floating down from the heights of Heaven with rapturous songs of joy, congratulating humanity in its great good fortune. We know that the only proper mood which a human being should indulge upon the reception of such news, and the commemoration of such an occasion, is a joyous one—so great as to surpass his power to utterly play it. A tender, loving, vital alliance has been formed by the Creator with our natures. Finite are we? But Christmas tells us that we are in bonds with the Infinite. Poor are we, limited to a little earth? But Christmas tells us that we are heirs of the unbounded universe.

But the true spirit of Christmas will not be recognized if the favors bestowed, at least some of them, are not for some more unfortunate person. The poor, the sick, the outcast, the degraded, the weak and defenceless are the properones to receive our generosity.

It is a day above all others. "Peace on earth and good will to men," sang the angels.

Old grudges are to be buried on this day. Every human being is to be met in a kindly spirit. A cessation of hostilities is to be announced, and a general amnesty should be proclaimed. The pipe of peace, if any pipe is to be smoked—should be smoked first, and reconciliations be effected.

It is a cosmopolitan day. In celebrating Christmas we are not Americans, or Englishmen, or Germans, but citizens of the world, for this is the only festival in which the civilized world joins. Peace on all the wide earth, good will to every man in every land, is the sentiment of the day.

Then it is the children's day. What immense significance is contained in that statement! But we pause, unable for space, to utter the thoughts which rise and the emotions which crowd within our hearts at the mention of the children. May everyone of them have a merry Christmas!

FLAVIUS J. BROOKS.

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