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Negro Tales
, by Joseph S. Cotter**

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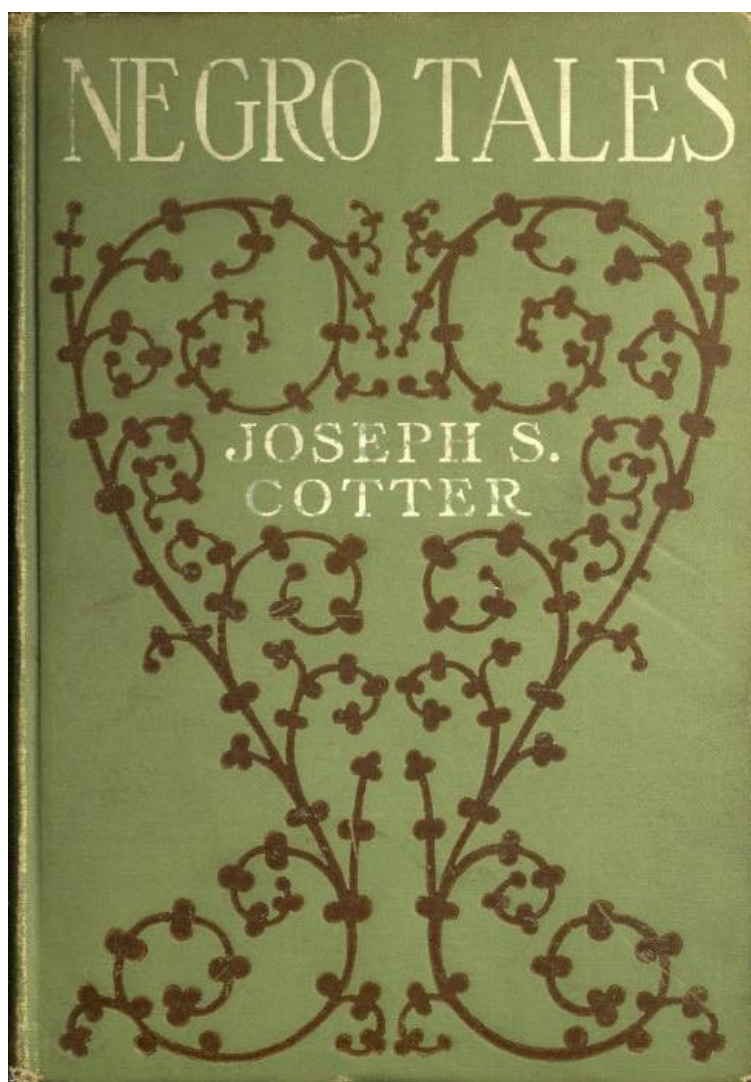
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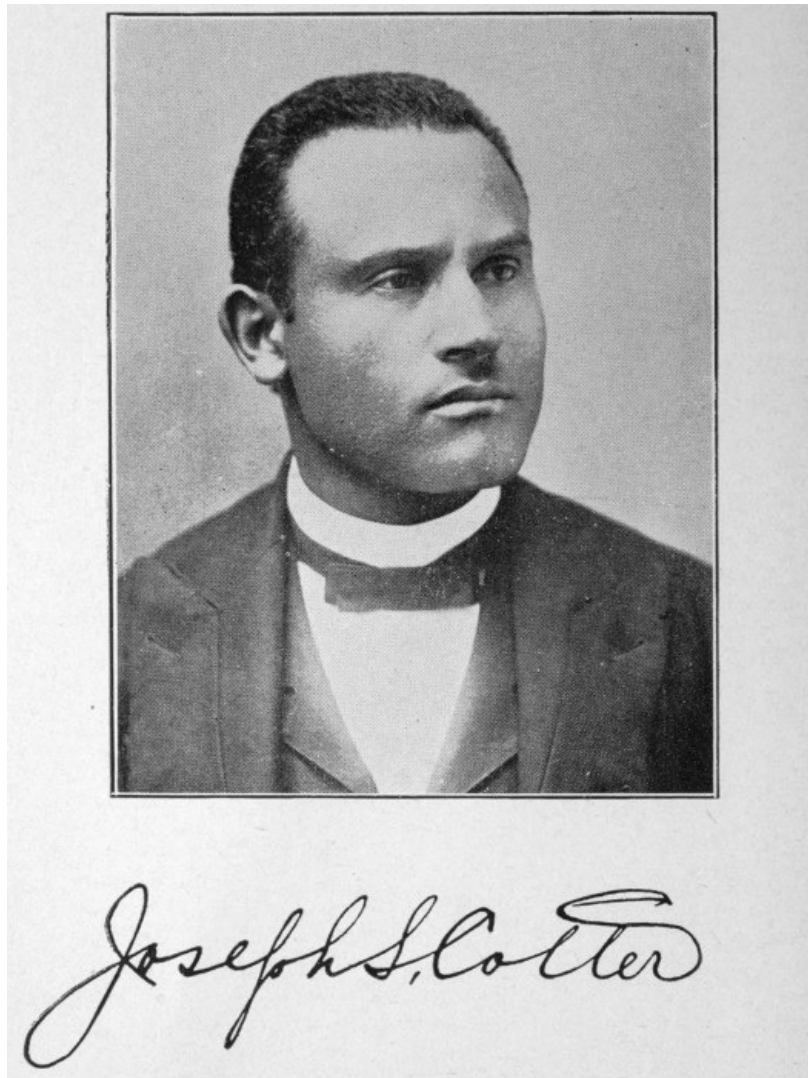
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Frontispiece.

NEGRO TALES

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By
JOSEPH S. COTTER

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THE AUTHOR

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The Author is one of a race that has given scarcely anything of literature to the world. His modest tender of some Christmas verses to me led to an inquiry which revealed his story of unpretentious but earnest and conscientious toil. He is wholly self-taught in English literature and composition. The obstacles which he has surmounted were undreamed of by Burns and other sons of song who struggled up from poverty, obscurity, and ignorance to glory.

Joseph Seamon Cotter was born in Nelson County, Kentucky, in 1861, but has spent practically all his life in Louisville. He had the scantiest opportunity for schooling in childhood, though he could read before he was four years old. He was put to work early, and from his eighth to his twenty-fourth year earned his living by the roughest and hardest labor, first in a brick yard, then in a distillery, and finally as a teamster. At twenty-two his scholarship was so limited that when he entered the first one of Louisville's night schools for colored pupils he had to begin in the primary department. His industry and capacity were so great that at the end of two sessions of five months each he began to teach. He has persevered in his calling, educating himself while at work, and is now Principal of the Tenth Ward Colored School, at Thirteenth and Green streets. The man whose advice and encouragement at the beginning chiefly enabled him to accomplish this was Prof. W. T. Peyton, a well-known colored educator of this city, whom he regards as his greatest benefactor.—THOMAS G. WATKINS, *Financial Editor Louisville Courier-Journal*.

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NEGRO TALES

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CALEB

Patsy and Benjamin, her husband, were talking about their first and second weddings, and of Caleb, their son. They were also thinking of Rahab, Caleb's teacher.

"We have been blessed in the number of our weddings," said she.

"Yes; but cursed in Caleb," he replied.

"Our last wedding, as free people, was not equal to the first as slaves."

"That was because Caleb came in between."

"How many ex-slaves have considered the significance of these second weddings?"

"How many fathers and mothers have been cursed by only sons?"

Caleb entered the room as his father uttered these words, and struck him violently over the heart. The old man straightened up, gasped spasmodically, clutched at his breast wildly, and then fell heavily to the floor. Caleb, with a parting sneer, left the room, while Patsy ran to the aid of her husband. She turned him on his back, opened his shirt at the neck, but her efforts were of no avail. Benjamin was dead.

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Patsy did not report Caleb for the murder of his father, but went on thinking her own theology and asking Rahab to explain.

"A thirty-dollar coffin? No, no, undertaker! A five-dollar robe? No, no, undertaker! Four carriages? No, no, undertaker! Think you the living have no rights? Cold, rigid dignity will suffice the dead, but the living must have money. He was my father, and I am his heir; therefore, speedy forgetfulness for the one and luxury for the other. Five hundred dollars are upon his life. As four hundred and fifty slip through my fingers I'll remember I owe him something for dying a pauper. Twenty dollars will keep Patsy chewing starch; and you, undertaker, may have the rest, and the thanks of science for your services. Why gaze upon the dead? Think you how you can make it

twenty? At twenty? At twenty, you say? Cigars, cigars, ten dollars for cigars. You can't? Out! Out! Out! Offend not the living by pitying the dead."

Caleb thus addressed the undertaker while gazing upon the dead body of his father.

As the undertaker left the room Patsy hobbled in upon her crutches, sat close to the corpse and sobbed aloud. [Pg 11]

"Why those tears, old woman?" asked Caleb.

"Where is your heart, Caleb, my boy?"

"In the twenty dollars you hold in your hand. Disgrace, and disgrace, and ever disgrace! The old man was a boaster in life and a pauper in death. Now you would spend for starch what I should spend for cigars. No more disgrace for the family, old woman. Eschew starch, bless your son, and hie you to the washtub."

He took the money and arranged it in the shape of a cigar.

Patsy looked lovingly at Caleb, and considered Rahab's offer to preach Benjamin's funeral sermon.

On the day of Benjamin's funeral Rahab was present. Patsy gave him a chair close to the coffin. The people were so seated that egress was impossible.

Leaning upon her crutches and gazing straight into Rahab's face, Patsy gave out, and the people sang: "A charge to keep I have, a God to glorify."

Rahab looked at the corpse; and, seeing a sermon in the cold, rigid form, turned and looked at Patsy. "Beware of the immediate future," said she.

Rahab trembled, stammered something, and looked at the ceiling. Patsy brought her crutch in close proximity to his head. [Pg 12]

Said she, keeping her crutch in motion and her eye in Rahab's: "Words of the dead to the dead avail little. Were it not for your presence there would be no funeral sermon. The man in the coffin is not dead, but sleeping. Why should we disturb his slumbers? You have just life enough to hear your doom. Why should we not pronounce it?"

Rahab started to rise. Patsy moved her crutch, and the people sang: "That awful day will surely come."

Rahab dropped back into his seat and looked wildly around the room.

Patsy laid her hand gently upon his shoulder and said: "Rahab, Benjamin's blood is in part upon your hands. Caleb believed you when you said that God would curse him. After seeing your crimes he believed that God had cursed both. To be cursed, he thinks, gives the right to curse. Rahab, the Master is waiting and calling."

"He is waiting," said Rahab; "but not to bless."

The people sang: "While the lamp holds out to burn the vilest sinner may return."

Rahab raised himself up with difficulty and pitched forward upon the floor.

"Rahab, what do you see?" asked Patsy.

"I see Caleb's undoing between me and the New Jerusalem. Fool was I. I won his confidence, and led him to believe false doctrine. God, pardon Caleb. I sinned in his sight and laughed at his virtue. Damn not Caleb, O God, but me." [Pg 13]

Rahab ceased to speak and was carried out. His last words were: "Damn not Caleb, O God, but me."

Some said he died of excitement; others said it was of pure consciousness of guilt.

A few weeks passed. The night was cold, and Patsy was dying. Caleb sat in a corner of the room. In his mouth was a lighted cigar. At his feet was a split-covered box, from which came a sound that was music to his ears.

On a similar night about a year before Patsy cried out pitifully: "My baby, my Caleb, perdition, perdition!" She had sprung forward, as though about to clutch something, and had struck her head against the stove, inflicting an ugly wound.

"It was all a dream," she afterwards said. "Methought my Caleb was a babe again. I pressed him to my heart and crooned one of those nonsensical baby ditties so old, yet so sweet to the mother's heart. When he said 'Dad,' 'Dad,' I held him up and kissed his chin, mouth, nose, eyes, and forehead. I looked five years ahead and saw him clinging to my dress while I gathered roses for his brow. I looked ten years ahead and saw him among his schoolmates, contending for the mastery in sports and studies. Again I looked and saw him a man of thirty, I, bent and gray, leaning upon his arm, receiving the confidence of the wise, the respect of the just. Time, the robber, would steal my angel. I held him up and kissed his hands and feet over and over. I fell asleep. When I awoke my baby was lying upon the floor. Thinking it was hurt, I screamed: 'My baby.' Straightway it turned into Caleb, the man, and I called: 'My Caleb!' A flame of fire sprang [Pg 14]

up and began to circle him round. Then it was I cried: 'Perdition, perdition!' and sprang to help him. This ugly wound on my head will be my death; but Caleb, Caleb!"

The night was cold, and Patsy was dying. Caleb sat in a corner of the room. In one hand was the stump of a cigar. In the other was a chicken, still making the sound that was music to his ears. When Patsy's groans disturbed him he moved the empty box with his feet.

"Old woman," said he, "I have stolen a chicken. Will you be my guest?"

"Caleb," groaned Patsy, "you should not steal."

His answer was: "Old woman, you should not meddle."

"Caleb, have you seen my chicken?" asked a voice without.

"Would you disgrace your mother in death?" asked Patsy, with great effort.

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"Would you starve me in life?" was Caleb's reply.

"My chicken, my chicken!" roared the voice without.

"It is fat and tender," chuckled Caleb.

Patsy's last words on earth were: "May the Lord forgive my Caleb."

Caleb fell asleep and left his mother to die alone. Her death-struggle covered several hours. She raised herself upon her pillow, so that her last glance might rest upon Caleb. His loud snoring was music to her dying ears. She clapped her hands feebly to awaken him, but he snored the more, and mumbled something about chicken. The end came with a little choking in the throat and a slight movement of the head to the left.

As Patsy lay cold in death Caleb had a pleasant dream. He dreamed that she was well and at the washtub. He thought he held in his hand money she had drawn in advance for him. When he awoke the next morning and found it was but a dream he lighted the stump of a cigar; and, between puffs, mumbled something about starch-eating mothers and dignified sons. When a neighbor called to see what Patsy would have for breakfast, he said: "Ask the old woman."

"She is dead," cried the neighbor.

"Then bury her," said he.

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The next day Noah, the father of Melviny, the grave-digger for the poor, said: "Melviny, my child, I go to dig poor Patsy's grave."

"Poor Caleb!" said Melviny, and covered her face with her apron.

Noah's hands fell to his side, leaving the spade dangling about his neck.

"Melviny!" he shouted fiercely.

"Father?" she answered soberly.

"Why your thought of Caleb?"

"Why your interest in Patsy?"

"She is dead, child."

"So is Caleb, father." Melviny dropped her apron and began to toy with the spade. "Dear father, you are kind to the neighbors."

"Dear child, you are making your own perdition."

"Where go you, father?"

"I go to bury Patsy in the potter's field."

"I go to bury Caleb in my affections, that he may be resurrected a man."

Noah kissed his daughter three times.

"The first," said he, "is for your mother, who was a wise woman."

"In marrying you, father? I never heard her say so in her curtain lectures. Why didn't you say she was a brave woman?"

"Don't be frivolous, child."

"Cling to facts, father. Remember, you will soon be on the brink of the grave."

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"The second is for your innocence," said he, kissing her again. "The third—the third——"

"Is for what, father? Say it's to encourage Caleb in his wooing. Say it, father."

"'Tis my dying kiss—my curse. Go! When he drags you to want and death, you will see how foolish you have been."

"When I lift him to honor and life the world will see how wise and heroic I have been. That extra

kiss, father?"

Noah looked puzzled.

"I see it now, father. That's to commend my heroism. You would say so in words, but you are a bit too human at present. Poor Patsy is to be buried in a pauper's grave; poor Caleb in my affections. Your task is noble. No parting word for me? None? I go not alone."

"You go not alone, for the fires of tribulation go with you," said Noah, and shouldered his spade.

As Noah crossed the bridge leading to the potter's field he met Caleb.

"Hello, old graybeard!" This was Caleb's salutation. "I jilted the cobbler's Mary for your Melviny. A mess of perdition she is. You have the honor of burying my mother; I would have the pleasure of marrying your daughter. 'Tis a fair exchange. Speak the word; the magistrate is waiting for his fee. You won't? Your beard is a foot long."

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"I go to dig your mother's grave."

"I detain you to pleasure my mother's son."

"She must be buried."

"I must be married."

"Oh! Oh! Oh!"

"Speak the word."

"My beard is being wasted."

"Speak the word, or I'll pull out another handful."

"Y-e-e-s," stammered Noah.

Caleb stroked what beard was left, evened it up with his penknife, and said: "Go! You are adorned for your task."

What Noah felt and thought while digging Patsy's grave would make a serious, instructive volume. A like record of Caleb and Melviny, as they stood before the magistrate, would show the brute in man, the folly in woman. So long as woman is sure she has mastered man, so long is man sure to degrade woman. 'Tis the equation of the fall. The rib that gave woman life ever waits to give her temptation and death.

Caleb had been away from Melviny six months when their child was born.

Fancy a man, dirty, ragged, and lousy, sitting beside a post. Notice the convenience of the post. Look well at the grin that is indicative of a bite; forget not the smile that means one intruder less. Why those dice? He shakes them in his hand, throws them out, and says seven. Any money at stake? No! Any fellow-players? No! See the point? Look closely! When he grins he shakes the dice. Know you what that means? There is a bite. When he smiles he throws out the dice and says seven. Understand that? The post and a movement of his back have done the work, and there is one intruder less. He is actually gambling with the lice on his back.

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A fellow-gambler comes up and says: "Caleb, you have an heir in your family. Happy dog you should be."

"Let's celebrate it with a game," says Caleb.

He throws down a ten-dollar bill; the other lays down five silver dollars.

Caleb shakes the dice, grins fiercely, throws them out, smiles a double smile, and says seven twice. This means a double victory. More lice have been killed, and five dollars are won.

"Five more! Will you have it?" asks Caleb.

"I'm a gambling man and never flinch," says the other. He lays down five more silver dollars. Caleb rises and uses the post vigorously. His face is a solid grin. The dice are shaken and leap from his hand. The broad grin relaxes into a little smile that spreads so as to almost hide his nose. His left hand assists the post, while with the right he picks up the silver dollars.

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"A gambling man are you?" twits Caleb.

"Yes," nods the other.

"Then a generous man am I," continues Caleb. "Take the ten-dollar bill and remember you have met Caleb."

"Caleb," replies the other, "I am a more generous man than you. Take back the counterfeit bill and keep the silver dollars you have stolen. I will assist you further by inventing a new way of killing lice."

"Lice, sir?" roared Caleb. "Where are they? Do you mean—?"

"I mean a post is a good louse-killer, but a little oil and a match are better."

Caleb, as you know by this time, was a coward. He outran fire-and-oil justice, and was caught in the mesh of circumstances. He leaped over a beehive and alighted between two lines of barbed-wire fence. After spending the night with barbed-wire and bees he was very properly removed to the hospital.

"His legs must be amputated," said the physicians.

"That means what?" asked Caleb, arousing himself as from a dream.

"Death, perchance," said they.

"That means the morgue?" asked he, with a grunt.

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"For such as you, yes," replied one.

"My legs, gentlemen, my legs! The morgue! The morgue! I see it. How cold it is! Gentlemen, are you gentlemen? My legs! My legs!"

The next day he learned that his legs had been taken off. The following day he roared about the morgue and fought with both hands. He cried out at intervals:

"Off! Off, you doctors! My legs are here to carry me from the morgue, but you are waiting to cut them off again. Off, you butchers! Come, my right leg! Come, my left! On, my right leg! On my left! Yes! Yes! Welcome, tried friends! Down the steps now! Halfway down are we! Back! Back, you butchers! You shall not! My right foot—you shall not turn around. 'Tis done. The toes are where the heel should be. I go a step forward and fall back a step. Your knives are sharp, you butchers. My right leg is off and hops upstairs. My left leg is off and hops downstairs. My body falls and is carried to the morgue. The morgue, gentlemen, is so cold—so cold!"

After this there were several hours of indistinct raving. The next day his legless body was upon a marble slab in the morgue.

His fellow-gamblers, hearing of his fate, begged his body that they might give it a "decent" burial. They removed it to an old out-house and sat up with it the first night. Why do they gaze upon it so often? Why do their hands touch his face and hands? Would they learn a lesson from the cold, deathly touch? The next night, the next, the next, and the next it is alone.

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You searchers of the city's offal, you living buzzards who remove the dead and rotten of your kind, fling open the doors! Is that Caleb you find? 'Tis a part of him. His legs are buried somewhere. His ears and fingers are in the pockets of his fellow-gamblers. Now carry out Caleb minus Caleb. Stop up your nose—stop up your nose!

RODNEY

[Pg 23]

Rodney was an illegitimate child. He knew not what this meant, but the sting of it embittered his young life.

The Negro has as much prejudice as the white man. Under like conditions the negro would make the same laws against the white. This crept out in the treatment of Rodney. His worst enemies were always negroes. The Anglo-Saxon blood in his veins made scoffers of some and demons of others.

To be pitied is the boy who has never framed the word "father" upon his lips. Rodney attempted it once, but failed, and never tried it again. He stood before his father bareheaded and with the coveted word upon his lips.

"You have a fine head of hair," said his father.

"That's what people say," replied Rodney.

"Are you proud of it?"

"Should I not be, sir?"

"Well, my little man, it's a disgrace to you."

This was the first and last meeting of Rodney and his father.

Once two fine ladies of ebony hue visited his mother, to show their silk dresses and to take dinner. A large dish of parched horse-corn was placed in the center of the table. His mother said a solemn blessing, and the ladies looked vexed.

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"My dear people," she said, after looking them into a smile, "if you are good, this is good enough. If you are not good, it is too good. In either case, help yourselves."

Rodney learned from this and similar incidents to make the most of a bad case.

"A little corn, if you please," said one. She was helped plentifully by Rodney's mother.

"Give me a part of yours," said the second to the first. She received about four-fifths of it.

"You are too generous," said Rodney's mother, and refilled the plate.

Rodney sat on the floor, stroked his cat, and eyed the fine dresses. The ladies munched with dignity, or fingered the laces on their sleeves.

"I see Rodney has had the smallpox," said one.

"Yes," replied his mother.

"My boy had it, too."

"How did it serve him?"

"It killed him. All the good children die. It was a sad stroke to me. Well, since his death I have been able to dress like a lady."

"Like a lady!" said the other. "How my old mistress used to say that word. I caught the inspiration then. It lingered in my bones a long time before it crept out thus." [Pg 25]

Here she surveyed her clothing with satisfaction.

"I see that parched horse-corn and fine dresses go well together," said Rodney's mother, as she helped their empty plates.

"You see we are considerate," said one.

"Yes, and ladylike," said the second.

"Yes, and patched with the blue and the gray," said Rodney's mother.

They looked at their clothes, but saw not the point.

"Mother," said Rodney, lying flat on his back, hugging the cat, and beating his heels upon the floor, "what is fine lace worth a yard?"

"What is it worth, ladies?" said she.

They looked at each other and frowned.

"Rodney has begun, ladies. Be prepared," said his mother.

Here she emptied the last of the corn into her visitors' plates.

"When I washed for Mrs. Rodman a few months ago she had beautiful lace on her pillow slips."

"Yes, she did, mother," said Rodney. Then, turning to the two women: "You ladies work for her now. You cook, and you wash. She and her daughter, General Bradford's wife, have gone to the springs. Did it take all the pillow-slip lace for your sleeves?" [Pg 26]

"Don't be too plain, Rodney," said his mother.

"Mother, that's the dress General Bradford gave his wife. You know she told you about it. Mother, mother, what did you mean when you said that the ladies are patched with the blue and the gray?"

"Mrs. Rodman is of the North. General Bradford is of the South. One means the blue, the other the gray."

"If we are wearing things that belong to the blue and the gray, we are not patched," said one, as she arose from the table and put on her hat.

"No," said the other, "we are ladies when we are dressed so."

"That hat!" said Rodney.

The other one put her hat behind her.

"That one, too!" roared Rodney.

"Look after your half-white brat," said they.

"Look after your bare heads when Mrs. Rodman and her daughter return," said Rodney's mother.

"Now," said one, "I believe what the fortune-teller said."

"Tell it," said the other.

"I lost some money."

"Yes, you did," said the other.

"I went to the fortune-teller."

"I went with you."

"She pointed out a half-white brat."

"She then pointed out his mother."

"She said we would all meet some day."

"Now we have met."

"What did she say about parched corn?" asked Rodney's mother.

"She said a half-white brat stole the money."

"She said he would die, too," joined in the other.

"That's all plain enough," said Rodney's mother.

"Your boy is dead, and you know about his father."

"Now," said the one with the hat behind her, "I don't blame Uncle Jack for choking your brat."

"Nor Aunt Sally for throwing hot soup on him," said the other.

"Uncle Jack and Aunt Sally," said Rodney's mother, "will be important witnesses when Mrs. Rodman and her daughter return. They know all, and will tell more."

One of the ladies picked up a glass.

"How's your cat, my son?"

"My cat's nice and good and sweet."

Here both ladies spat into the glass.

"Cats are respectable and worth talking about, my son."

"This we leave with you," said the one with the hat behind her, as she set the glass upon the table. [Pg 28]

"What do you take with you?" asked Rodney's mother.

Both looked around a second. "Corn in our stomachs," said they.

"Are the ladies insulted, mother?"

"They are dull and nasty, my boy."

The ladies hurried out, one knocking over a chair, the other deliberately pulling down a picture.

"Here, mother," said Rodney, bringing her a comb and brush, "tidy up my cat. Mary's coming with her doll." The mother combed and brushed the cat, while Rodney jumped on and off the table for joy. In the meantime Professor Brandon was conversing with the ladies on the outside.

"Ladies! ladies!" said he.

"Ha! ha!" was the response.

"Let it flow right along," continued the professor.

"We'll be generous enough," said they.

"Ladies, those poses are superb."

"Professor, you can judge."

"No one doubts it, ladies."

"Professor, I need words just now," said one of them.

"Professor, I need a professor," said the other. [Pg 29]

"That's epidemic, ladies."

Little Mary entered the room and ran around holding her doll by one foot. "Oh! oh! oh!" said she.

"Is your doll hurt?" asked Rodney, following her around the room with his cat in his arms.

"No, no, no," replied she.

"A cat for a doll," said Rodney.

"I must tell it first," gasped Mary.

"Go on, while I fan you with my cat, Mary!"

"The professor and the ladies—are drinking—from—a big black bottle."

"Let's see," said Rodney, as he ran to the door and peeped. Mary followed and stood behind him.

"Ha! ha! let it flow right along," came from without.

Rodney held up his cat for a bottle and made a gurgling sound. Mary held up her doll and imitated him.

The professor now parted from the ladies and approached Rodney's home. As he walked into the room Rodney and Mary sat upon the floor and exchanged the cat and doll.

"I am Professor Brandon," said he, pulling his mustache.

Rodney went through the motion of pulling his, and Mary pulled the cat's.

"'Tis delightful to meet ladies," said he.

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Rodney's mother nodded.

"Schoolteaching would be unbearable were it not for meeting ladies."

"Must you have the big black bottle every time?" asked Mary.

Here Rodney held up the doll and made a drinking noise.

"These young ones need curbing," said the professor.

"So do appetites, sir," replied Rodney's mother.

"I am a schoolteacher, madam," roared he.

"I am a washerwoman, sir," was her reply.

"Very well, I'll give you a job. What can you wash?"

"Shirts."

"What else?"

"Drawers."

"What else?"

"Socks."

"What else?"

"Diapers, sir."

"You are brutally plain, madam."

"You are devilishly inconsiderate and inquisitive, sir."

Both children emphasized the remark by beating upon the floor.

"To my business," said the professor. "This boy should be at school. Where is his father?"

"I ask you the same question, sir."

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"Madam, that leads me to suspect."

"What does 'suspect' mean, professor?" asked Mary.

"It means—the Latin of it is—let's see——"

The professor stopped to pull his mustache.

"It means to dream out something and swear it's true," spoke up Rodney's mother.

"Madam, I want to talk to you about this boy's schooling. Have you any drinking water?"

"No. Rodney, a bucket of water."

"A bucket of water, Rodney. Go fast and return slowly," put in the professor.

Rodney started briskly, but Mary held him back and looked saucily at the professor.

"Let's bring back the bottle," laughed she, as both ran out.

"First, madam, I am a professor. I hold a diploma from a college."

"You carry it with you?"

"Sometimes."

"You have shown it to leading white men?"

"Yes."

"Well, many a good-meaning white man has been deceived by a college diploma in the hands of a negro."

"You presume too far on your limited knowledge."

"You travel too far on your flimsy diploma."

"Secondly, madam, I would elevate the morals of the race."

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"Very good, sir. How?"

"I would begin by cutting off from society every illegitimate negro child."

"You would, in so doing, train your thumb and finger to pinch your own nose."

"My mother and father were married, madam."

"Your mother and her husband were married."

"Madam, I came in the interest of your child's education."

"You are a liar from the roots of your hair to your toe-nails. You came to pry into my private life and to take note of my mental stock. You may proceed, sir."

"I haven't time to stay."

"You have a sufficient supply with which to go."

"If you were a lady, I would say prate on."

"If you were a merchant, I would say speak tersely, weigh justly, and keep ever in mind a marble monument."

"If you were a poet I would say tear out and fling to the crowd as much of your heart as you would have the crowd return. If you were a philosopher I would say weaken not your philosophy with wit, nor weigh down your wit with philosophy. Philosophy and wit are good neighbors, but indifferent twins. Since you are a fool, I will simply say all remedies have failed, and you are happy and safe in your ancient calling."

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Professor Brandon pulled his mustache a few seconds. He then said: "For your peace of mind, I will go."

Rodney entered with a pitcher of water, and Mary with a big black bottle.

"Have water, professor?" asked Rodney. Here Mary pretended to drink from the bottle. The professor took the pitcher and poured some of the water into the glass into which the ladies had spat some time before. He held it at some distance from him and said: "Woman's tedious, but pure water is wholesome."

"Professor!" roared Rodney's mother.

"You are just and polite, at last," calmly observed he.

"What's in the glass, sir? Examine the glass."

"That is best done in the dish-water."

The professor was about to drink it when he saw the spittle.

"You did this, boy?"

"I was holding Mary's doll, professor," gasped Rodney.

"Was it you, girl?"

"I was holding Rodney's cat and your big black bottle, professor," slyly replied Mary.

"You, madam?"

"Be calm, professor. That is the compliments of your fine ladies, without whom schoolteaching would be unbearable."

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"They spat into this glass?"

"No, professor," retorted Mary. "Rodney said they puked into it."

"They had a mighty big stomach full of corn, anyway," put in Rodney.

The professor dropped the glass and stepped out of the door, seemingly very uneasy about the stomach.

"Professor," called Rodney's mother.

He stopped and grunted.

"Your attitude is undignified, sir."

He started to answer, but his mouth was too full. Rodney's mother walked to the door backwards and closed it.

"You did that, Mary," said Rodney.

"How?" retorted Mary.

"I didn't say they puked into the glass. I said they spat into it."

"It's all one, Master Rodney, and give me my doll."

"I won't. Give me my cat."

"I won't. My doll."

"My cat."

They tugged at the doll and cat. Rodney's mother threw her arms around them, and said soothingly: "My Rodney and his little sweetheart, Mary!"

TESNEY, THE DECEIVED

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Tesney, the frail, the good, the beautiful mulatto, was known of child, man, woman, and beast.

"Wait, Tesney! We have something good for you and a secret to tell." Daily such invitations came from the white children of the neighborhood. Daily Tesney ate "good things" and listened to talks about dolls, playmates, stories, and so on. The dogs that accompanied the children pulled Tesney's apron strings and seemed to enjoy her good nature and the confidence of her little white friends.

"What a servant she is!" said white family men, as they passed. "She fondles the babies, and they do not cry. She talks, and older children listen. She moves, and they follow her. She does not command, but they do her bidding. There should be a million such as she."

"She is a lady born," said white women. "May no ill befall her."

Tesney was servant to Mrs. Wakely, a wealthy Southern white woman. Tesney's presence was energy to the other young negro servants. They thought of her, and put thought into their work. They looked at her and dignified their persons. "There may be queens of the kitchen as well as queens of the parlor," said they. "We belong to the first. Let us glory in the honor."

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The lace curtains at the windows, the pictures on the wall, the lint on the carpet, the china in the closet, the wearing apparel of Mrs. Wakely, and the food on the table, all knew the touch of Tesney's delicate yellow hand. The washerwoman followed her instructions, and the clothes lasted months longer.

The other servants learned through her that honesty in a servant is a greater virtue than dignity in a parlor queen, and the grocery bill was reduced ten per cent. She studied the needs of the family, and expenses were reduced ten per cent. more. Her forethought for the family and her genius in arranging games and work for the children gave Mrs. Wakely many hours of leisure and comfort.

"The house can do without me for hours," said Mrs. Wakely to her guests, "but it cannot do without Tesney for a minute."

Tesney's mother was a mulatto, with the hair and features of that type. She died when Tesney was too young to know anything about her. Tesney never knew her father, but she had a suspicion. Her suspicion was wrong, and it caused all her trouble. She heard Agnes, who knew her mother, talk, and it was upon Agnes' talk that Tesney had founded her suspicion.

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"He is my father," she often said to herself, as a certain rich man of another race passed by. "He will give me something some day."

On her twenty-third birthday she saw Mrs. Wakely in company with this man. After leaving the man, Mrs. Wakely said: "Tesney, here is a ring your father sent to you. Look on the inside of it."

Tesney looked, and read: "To my daughter, Tesney."

"The man, Mrs. Wakely?" asked Tesney.

"Your father."

"His name, please?"

"Do you not know? Has not Agnes told you all about it? She said she would."

Tesney wore the ring, and renewed her hopes of getting something from the man whom she considered her father.

That very afternoon a pony, hitched to a dogcart and driven by Tesney, became frightened and ran. To keep the two children behind her from jumping from the cart and receiving unnecessary bruises Tesney held them with one hand and gripped the lines with the other. However, the animal's wild flight was of short duration, for the man of Tesney's suspicion stopped the pony and led the now docile beast back to Mrs. Wakely's gate. As Tesney lifted the crying children from the cart he said:

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"Tesney, you are a good, brave girl. I was talking to Mrs. Wakely this morning about you. I gave her a ring for you. How do you like the present?"

"Well, sir, well," answered Tesney.

There were tears in her eyes, but the man did not see them.

"Tesney," continued the man, "how would you like to live with me?"

"Well, sir, well," answered Tesney.

Mrs. Wakely now hurried from the house, having witnessed the misadventure of the ponycart.

"Oh, thank you, Mr. Bankner, thank you!" she cried. "The children are all right, are they not? Tesney is a good, brave girl, isn't she?"

"She is that, and more," replied the man, as he bowed and departed.

Tesney wore the ring, remembered the invitation, and renewed her hopes.

Three months from that day Tesney stood behind Aunt Agnes combing her hair while Agnes examined the ring. Agnes was about sixty years old, an ex-slave, a meddler, and liar. Her three hundred and fifty pounds kept her in her big arm-chair. There she made the coffee, beat the biscuits, abused the cook, lied to Mrs. Wakely, said the blessing, and urged all to live good Christian lives. She had nursed Tesney and knew her ancestry.

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She called Tesney her daughter, and wished her for a daughter-in-law. Tesney was fond of Agnes, but scorned her son, who was unfit for any woman.

"Read, Aunt Agnes," said Tesney, "while I comb."

"No; you jes' stop combin' an' read."

Tesney read the inscription, and dropped a word about her suspicion.

"Now, comb on, chile. Me! My! Whew! Stop, chile, stop! Dat comb's mighty fine. Whut dat you say 'bout dem ring-wuds an' dat big white man?"

Tesney repeated the inscription and emphasized her suspicion.

"Is dat so?" asked Agnes doubtfully.

"Didn't you as good as say so, Aunt Agnes?"

"Maybe I did, chile. Now, look heah, chile, is you gwine ter be my daughter-in-law?"

"Aunt Agnes, it cannot be. You know your son is a bad man."

"Yes, chile; but er bad man needs er good wife."

"Thanks, Aunt Agnes; but it cannot be."

"George, you triflin' rascal, come heah," Agnes called to her son.

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George entered and smiled at Tesney, who frowned and turned her back upon him.

"Son," continued Agnes, "daughter says no. It's good 'nough. Go, you triflin' rascal, go."

George went.

"Chile," said Agnes, with a great show of kindness, "you is right. You knows dat you is good-blooded stock. Fine stylish white blood runs in yo' veins. You is right, chile. Look up! Look up! You knows whut de yeast does fur de bread. White dignity does dat fur yo' blood. You knows whut de skerecrow does fur de cornfield. White wisdom does dat fur yo' womanhood. Whut de steam does fur de steam-cyar white go-er-head does fur you. You is right, chile. Look up! Now you mus' be feelin' mighty good. Ain't you? George is er little no-er-count, but Agnes'll wuk fur Tesney, an' George'll wuk fur Tesney, an' won't dat be er good bargain? Honey chile, say dat it will, an' please de heart ob po' ole Agnes."

"Aunt Agnes, it cannot be."

"Does you mean dat, chile?"

"I mean it, Aunt Agnes."

"Does you mean eb'ry wud ob it?"

"I mean every word of it."

"Now, I'se gwine ter make you er speech, you ha'f-white nigger. You thinks bekase yo' face ain't whut you calls raal black, an' bekase yo' haih ain't smack-dab ter yo' haid, an' bekase— Oh, Tesney, honey chile, don't cry dat way. Aunt Agnes wus jes' er foolin'. I takes it all back. Let me kiss you all ober de face. Dere now. I knows dat you's in good humor. You sees, chile, how Aunt Agnes kin hurt yo' feelin's. You better be George's wife den hab yo' feelin's hurt all de time."

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"It cannot be, Aunt Agnes. Don't ask me any more."

"Now, I'll say de res' ob my speech. It'll not be er speech ob wuds, nuther. It'll be one ob acts. It'll hit you hard. It'll make you 'shamed ob yo-self. It'll dribe yo' friends ter turn dey backs erpon you. It'll put you out ob doors. It'll make you say: 'I'se er fool—er fool.' It'll hit you hard—hard."

Agnes stopped to breathe. Mrs. Wakely entered the kitchen. Tesney was looking at the ring.

"Tesney," said Agnes, "yo' mother wus er ooman nearly white, an' yo' father wus er nigger man."

"My father!" gasped Tesney. "I have always learned that my father was——"

"Yo' father wus whut I tells you, chile."

"What have you always told me?"

"Listen! I tells you de facts. I tells you de facts."

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"Aunt Agnes!" screamed Tesney.

"Tesney," said Mrs. Wakely; "that information seems to trouble you."

"Ha! ha! De chile! Ha! ha!" Agnes stopped to hold her sides.

"Why, Agnes, what is the matter?" asked Mrs. Wakely.

"Ha! ha! De chile thinks de man whut gibed you dat ring fur her is her father."

"Do you, Tesney?" asked Mrs. Wakely sharply.

Tesney put the ring on her finger and remained silent.

"Speak, Tesney! The matter is serious," demanded Mrs. Wakely.

"I do," answered Tesney. "Did not Mr. Bankner give you the ring for me?"

"He did."

"Did you not say that the ring was sent to me by my father?"

"Your father sent it to you; but another brought it to me."

"Is you sma't 'nough ter see de differunce between de sendin' an' de bringin' ob er thing, chile?"

Tesney looked at Mrs. Wakely and nodded.

"Have you not deceived yourself?"

"I have in part. Aunt Agnes, here——"

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"De chile lies! De chile lies! Mrs. Wakely, de chile——!"

"Be quiet, Agnes," demanded Mrs. Wakely. "You are too fat to become eloquent with ease and safety."

"She better be," said the washerwoman, who happened to stop at the window a few seconds. "All de coffins erbout heah is fur heabenly-sized people."

Agnes, in a rage at this interruption, turned and threw the rolling-pin at the washerwoman, but she was at a safe distance.

"Tesney, Agnes said that she would explain this whole affair to you."

"Missus Wakely, you has knowed ole Agnes er long, long time, an' jes' as sho' as you an' me is gwine ter de same heaben, jes' so sho' I wus gwine ter tell dis chile de whole truth, but she kep' on makin' de lookin'-glass talk erbout her face an' her haih dat I jes' thought I'd fling out er little hint an' lay low."

"I knew your father, Tesney; and, as Agnes says, he was a negro."

"I reckons you'll beliebe now," shouted Agnes. "De white folks done said so."

"Heah is yo' rollin'-pin," said the washerwoman, as she paused at the window on her return.

"Hand it heah," demanded Agnes.

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"I will when you is ob er sweet temper," answered the washerwoman.

"Please to explain about my father and the ring."

"Your father, Tesney," Mrs. Wakely went on, "was reared in Mr. Bankner's family. He married a woman whom none of us, save Agnes, ever knew. Shortly after the death of your mother, he killed a man in self-defense. Mr. Bankner's people, knowing the circumstances, furnished your father money with which to escape. Mr. Bankner, a few weeks before he gave me the ring, saw your father and told him of you. Your father bought the ring, had the inscription put in it, and intended to bring it to you himself. However, at the request of Mr. Bankner he had returned to the scene of the killing for trial, and was mobbed. Mr. Bankner secured the ring before his death, and gave it to me for you. Now, as we are to leave for the West within a year, Mr. Bankner would like to have you serve in his family. He holds himself somewhat responsible for your father's death, and would like to help you. I would have told you this before, but Agnes asked me to leave it to her."

Mrs. Wakely now left the room, giving Agnes a stern look on her way out.

"Aunt Agnes," sobbed Tesney, "I have been deceived as to my father, and maybe as to my mother."

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"Has you bin deceived in me too, chile?"

"Yes."

"Den ma'ry George, an' be deceived in him."

"It cannot be, Aunt Agnes."

"Now I'll say de res' ob dat speech I tol' you erbout. You may ma'ry George yit. Mr. Bankner may heah from dis. He *shall* heah from it. Do you think he'd ever let you stay in his house den?"

Tesney left the room in silence.

"George, you triflin' rascal, come heah. I got things started, son. Listen! Watch me! You don't desarbe it, but watch me. Tell Mr. Bankner dat Tesney says dat he is her father. Go! You good as got Tesney now. Go!" As George went out the door, Agnes added: "Dat's er triflin' rascal, but he's my George." Agnes began to grind the coffee, but stopped to abuse the cook.

George contrived to have the message of Agnes reach Mr. Bankner's ears. Agnes, in turn, told Tesney that the rich white man knew of her suspicion. Tesney looked at the ring, and said: "I am Tesney the deceived."

A few months after this Mr. Bankner sent his wife and children to Europe, and came to board with Mrs. Wakely. Tesney, knowing that George had had his mother's message delivered, feared the result. She worried until she was a mere skeleton of her former self.

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"I cannot face my blunder," she said. "I must leave."

She accordingly rented a room and lived alone. In a short time she took to her bed as the result of isolation and worry.

When Agnes heard of Tesney's illness she said: "Dis is our chance, son."

Her three hundred and fifty pounds were soon at Tesney's bedside. Tesney was flighty. George and the preacher came. George held her hand while the preacher asked questions. George answered for himself, and Agnes answered for Tesney.

A week passed. Tesney arose from her pillow and said to Agnes: "Are you here?"

"Yes, chile," answered Agnes; "an' George, yo' husban', is heah, too."

"George, my husband!" ejaculated Tesney.

"Yes, child," said the preacher, who happened to be present, "I married you to him a week ago."

Tesney swooned, and fell back upon her pillow. When next conscious of her surroundings, Tesney found herself in bed in a log cabin, with her three-hundred-and-fifty-pound tormentor still at her side.

From that time until her death she was a prisoner. Not more than a dozen times did she seem sane. She would stand before the glass and ask for her old self. Sometimes she called Agnes a girl. Then she would call her a woman.

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"Agnes," said she, on one occasion, "here is a rope. Let us skip."

When Tesney's baby boy was between three and four weeks old George was killed in a drunken brawl. Two days afterward he was buried, a short distance from the house. Tesney was in bed. Agnes did not go to the grave. She dragged her three hundred and fifty pounds out doors to cool, cry, and repent.

Tesney took a looking-glass from under her pillow and looked at herself.

"Tesney has come back again," she said. "This is her face. This is her hair. Tesney has come back again." Then turning to the wasting child at her side, she said: "Don't cry, little rascal. You are a George, like your father. Little fool, don't cry. Night will soon come. You may go then. Cry, cry, little George! Stop! Stop!"

Tesney fell asleep. After several hours she was awakened by the crying of her baby. It was night. She took the baby in her arms and stole softly out of the house in her bare feet. She went straight to George's grave and sat down upon it.

"Little rascal," said she to the baby, "your father is in the ground and can't steal me any more. Agnes can't follow me. You must not be a big George. How you are growing! Stop! I'll hold your legs and arms. Stop! You won't? You must!"

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She dug a hole in the top of the grave with her hands. She placed the baby in it, and covered it as well as she could. She then sat on a stump nearby and said not a word for several minutes. Tesney, sitting there, paid no heed to the rising wind, nor the distant flash of the lightning. Presently it thundered. She arose, put her hand to her ear, like one at a telephone, and waited. It thundered again. She leaned to listen. There was more lightning.

"My name?" asked she. "It is Tesney." There were renewed thunder and lightning. "My baby?" asked she. "I sent it up. Is it there?" Again it thundered, again the lightning flashed. "It is not there?" she asked. "I must come with it? All right! Welcome!" She ran to the grave and uncovered

the baby. It kicked feebly and gave a faint cry. "I knew you were still here," she said. "The Voice of the Clouds said so." A terrible storm was breaking. "Listen, little rascal: We go together. Listen! The Voice is coming. We go! We go!"

These were her last words. She embraced the baby and sat calmly down upon the grave amid the raging elements. The storm's fury lasted an hour or more. The next morning Tesney and the baby were lying dead on George's grave. [Pg 49]

Agnes had Tesney and the baby buried in the same grave with George. After ten years of terrible mental and bodily suffering Agnes died. A certain part of each day during this time she spent looking at Tesney's ring and praying aloud. Some said that her intense agony and earnest prayer thoroughly purged her soul of guilt. Others said not so. God knows.

REGNAN'S ANNIVERSARY

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"I'll be up afore day to-morrow morning, Regnan."

"I'll sleep an hour longer, Kitty."

"That may bring bad luck, Regnan. Remember Nordad, the tinker."

"He mended a pot and married a woman the same hour."

"That was well enough. He always had a bit of bacon for the pot and a faithful wife."

"What of his bad luck, Kitty?"

"He fell asleep on the day of his anniversary, was kidnapped, gagged and locked up in his garret. On payment of a neat little sum his wife was informed where he was, just in time for the ceremony."

"Anything may befall me, Kitty, just so we stand before the preacher again to-morrow night."

Thus spoke Regnan and Kitty, his wife, the night before their twenty-fifth anniversary.

Kitty arose early the next morning, fed Posey, the mare, chatted with a neighbor, and returned to find Regnan still snoring.

"Regnan," cried she, "will you remember Nordad, the tinker?"

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"Kitty," rejoined Regnan, "will you always remember to bring bad news?"

"Out with you, Regnan."

"Be lovely to-day, Kitty."

"The bottom of your foot is clean."

"That tickles! That tickles, Kitty!"

"Your big toe is a good door-knob."

"Oh, Kitty."

"Out, Regnan!"

"'Tis better to stand on two feet than to lose one big toe. I love you, Kitty."

"The way you stand such treatment shows it. A true lover is the old man who enjoys the whims of an old wife."

"You are a young wife to-day."

"A good breakfast, a hard day's work and the ceremony to-night! I'll warrant that you'll outshine the preacher, Regnan."

Regnan and Kitty were good, religious people. They took pride in the fact that they divided their religious duties. He prayed night and morning. She said the blessing at all times. She gathered the moral and religious news of the neighborhood, and he discussed it for their own benefit. At these functions Kitty was Kitty and Regnan was Regnan. Joking and arguing always found other means of outlet.

"Let us be serious, Kitty." She looked at him and nodded her head. "Let us pray." They knelt and prayed. He prayed aloud, and she silently. His "amen" seemed to be a link connecting the past and the present. So much for a beautiful human picture. [Pg 52]

Regnan, his wife, and friends were negroes. He dealt in rags, old iron, and second-hand furniture. Kitty was a plain housewife.

"I'll have a breakfast like the one we ate twenty-five years ago, husband."

"Do, wife! I'll give Posey a good currying-ing."

"Do, husband!"

Kitty set about getting breakfast, and Regnan carried Posey. Kitty talked to the pancakes, and Regnan talked to Posey.

"I would not burn a pancake on my husband's wedding day. Now, cakes, turn well!"

"I would not slight you, Posey, on my wife's wedding day. Now, Posey, shining Posey, see yourself!"

When Regnan and Kitty sat down to breakfast, Posey, hitched to the wagon, was standing with her head partly in the window. A pancake was passed to the plates of Regnan and Kitty, and one to the mouth of Posey. When breakfast was over Regnan kissed Kitty, patted Posey, and drove off, saying: "Nordad the tinker comes ever to my mind. I wonder what to-day will bring. I will prepare for to-night."

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Regnan had a district where he bought and sold. He was regular, honest, and good-natured; and therefore popular. His "rag-cry" was his own. It always brought trade. It ran something like this: "*R-a-g-s*, rags, rags, *r-a-g-s*! Any *r-a-g-s*, *o-l-d iron*? Come up, Posey! *R-a-g-s*, old iron!" This cry had brought a little fortune. As this was his anniversary he thought he would not buy any rags, but deal in other things.

A newly married man, whose wife had made kindling wood of the furniture, sold Regnan a cooking stove. "Beware of the first wedding day," said the man. Regnan thought him unwise, and drove on. He knew of another newly married couple who were living in hopes of many anniversaries. To these he would sell the stove. He could fancy the good wife cooking pancakes for her husband. Ere he could reach them he exchanged the stove for a sofa. "All good wives need rest," said he. "The sofa will therefore serve as well as the stove. I can see the good man and his wife resting upon it now."

Later in the afternoon an old friend stopped Regnan.

"Now, listen," said he, "to an anniversary march. While I play you think of the days ago." The friend played, and the tears stole down Regnan's cheeks.

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"How much for the fiddle?" asked Regnan. "Take the fiddle for the sofa." The exchange was made. "The newly married couple are loving and patient. They can wait," said Regnan. "I will stop here and get my beaver hat, white vest, and swallow-tailed coat." He went into the tailor's shop and got them. He had had them cleaned for the anniversary.

Regnan was now very tired. He had been in the hot sun all day. He had had nothing to eat since morning. Besides, the malaria made him drowsy.

So he stopped under a tree to rest. The clothes and fiddle were tempting. He spread the coat upon some newspapers in the wagon and put the vest in the proper place. He then placed the beaver at the head. "Kitty," said he, as though she was present, "look at your husband." He became more and more drowsy. He played. He nodded and closed his eyes. He stopped playing with his fingers on the bow and the bow on the strings.

Several boys were watching Regnan. They thought it would be nice to put the vest, coat, and hat on the biggest boy and dance around him while Regnan "played in his dreams." It was done. The boy so dressed stood in a clear place and held out the tails of the coat. The others circled around him.

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In every neighborhood there are at least two factions among the boys. Fight is born in a boy. Letting it out occasionally will help to tame him. It was so in this case. It happened that the opposing faction had business that way. When they saw what was going on, they cried: "Fun, boys, fun!" A dozen pebbles fell among the dancers, who fled from the attack, and the fun began. The beaver hat and swallow-tailed coat were kept in the lead. The opposing faction followed, threw pebbles, and laughed.

Regnan awoke and began to play. "There must be fun in it," said he. "That reminds me of my young days." He looked into the wagon. The playing was cut short. He looked at the boys again. The beaver hat and swallow-tailed coat were kept in the lead. He called a spectator and paid him to take Posey and the wagon home. With fiddle in hand and thoughts on anniversary he followed the boys. The opposing faction stopped and scattered. It was growing dark. Regnan caught one of the boys and began to scold him.

"The boy with the beaver hat and swallow-tailed coat is the one you want. We were trying to catch him," gasped the boy.

This was the truth, but it misled Regnan. The boy escaped. Regnan gained on the others. The boy followed.

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"Mister," said the other boys, as Regnan overtook them, "we just can't catch him. There he goes. Mister do you care much for such old things?"

As Regnan pursued his moving anniversary suit the boys fell in behind and shouted: "Run, partner, run! The sum that's after you is an old head plus young legs. Run, partner, run!" Here the boys left their partner and Regnan to finish the race.

"Stop, thief!" cried Regnan. The boy looked back, and, thinking the fiddle a club, turned and ran

into a pond. They were now on the edge of the town. Regnan called to the boy to come out, and raised the fiddle involuntarily.

"If you throw," said the boy, "I will dip up water in your hat."

Regnan called again, and up went the fiddle.

"If you throw," cried the boy, "I will lie down in the water."

It was growing darker. The boy was going farther into the pond.

"It is the fiddle that frightens him," said Regnan to himself. He laid it beside a tree. "See, my boy, see! My hands are empty. I will come to you." He plunged into the pond and followed the boy.

"I will wait on this side. The club is over there," rejoined the boy, going all the while.

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In trying to increase his pace, and watch at the same time, he stumbled and fell up to his neck in the water. The beaver upset and floated.

Regnan caught it and pushed on. When the boy reached the bank his wits came to him. He pulled off the coat and vest, left them and disappeared in the darkness. Regnan embraced the hat, vest, and coat as he walked around the pond to get his fiddle. He was wet and felt a chill coming upon him. He sat down beside the fiddle. For an hour he shivered and thought of his wife, the neighbors, and the anniversary. All at once he thought of Nordad the tinker.

Just then someone rode a horse up to the pond a short distance from him and let the reins fall for it to drink.

"Am I to be kidnapped like Nordad the tinker?" whispered Regnan to himself. "I will crawl off." In dragging the fiddle one of the strings was broken. The noise frightened the horse. It plunged through the pond. The rider, in trying to reach the reins, fell into the water, but quickly rose to his feet and started in pursuit of the fleeing horse. Soon both horse and rider were out of sight and hearing.

Regnan breathed freely and said: "My fiddle, it may be you have saved me from being kidnapped." He then arose and started homeward. An hour later he was on the lawn before his house. Posey, arrived home some time since, came up to him.

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"Posey, my girl," said he, "I wonder if your mistress is as patient as you are. Oh, how could she be?"

He then crept up to a corner of the house where he could see and hear. Everything showed that Kitty had done her duty. She was sitting in the center of some twenty women. Some were fanning her; some were crying. Others were at her back conducting a mock marriage. The men and women at the window were discussing Regnan aloud.

"He should never marry *me* again," said one woman.

"I would never let the first marriage stand," said another.

"Don't be too hard on Regnan," spoke up one on the inside. "Remember his widow is listening."

"What think you of his case?" asked a young man of an old one.

"Well," answered the old man, "old Welby, who was a wiser man than Regnan, killed himself upon a similar occasion."

"Gentlemen," asked the woman from within, "do you think that Kitty would look well in mourning?"

The women on the outside laughed. Some of those on the inside cried aloud. Kitty buried her head in her hands.

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Regnan, now understanding the state of affairs, ran into the room and cried: "My Kitty!" His breeches were wet and muddy and he had on the wet, muddy swallow-tailed coat and vest. He held the wet, bedraggled hat in one hand and the broken fiddle in the other. At his call Kitty made no motion, but kept her face hidden. The women formed a close circle around her. Those on the outside sneered: "My Kitty!" while the men yelled: "Scat, old tom, scat!" and "Is he drunk?" "Is he crazy?" "Is he going to kill Kitty?" "Help! Help! Call an officer!"

These were some of the cries that came from different parts of the room. Regnan ran around the circle, crying: "My Kitty! Am I drunk? Am I crazy? Am I going to kill you, Kitty?" Now two men seized Regnan and dragged him toward the door.

Just then the preacher entered the other door, wet and muddy from head to foot. He raised his hand, and Regnan was released. Kitty, noting the hush, peeped through her fingers, first at Regnan and then at the preacher. There was a tense silence. The preacher now spoke. He told of Regnan's trouble with the fiddle, clothes, and pond.

"How do you know?" asked Regnan.

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"It was my boy who kept the vest, coat, and beaver in the lead. Tell the adventure yourself."

"Not here! I will tell it to Kitty."

"What about yourself, parson?" asked Kitty.

"While on my way here," said the preacher, "I stopped my horse at the pond to drink. There was a noise like the breaking of a fiddle string."

"The fiddle again," interrupted Regnan, and held it up.

"My horse became frightened and ran through the pond. I fell off, waded out, and have not seen the horse since."

"That's true, ladies and gentlemen."

"How do you know?" asked the preacher.

"I was there, parson." Regnan then told of the chill, the broken string, and the accident to the rider.

By this time the people were around the edges of the room, leaving Kitty, Regnan, and the preacher in the middle.

Regnan kissed his wife, and said: "Are you my Kitty?"

"Since you and the parson are so much alike in dress and story, he may answer for me."

"I will, my good woman." He said a few solemn words, and the important business of the night was over.

For many days the town was alive with the story of Regnan's anniversary. Thereafter, whenever Regnan wished to tell Kitty the story he always played a march on the fiddle first. [Pg 61]

The preacher later turned his boy over to Regnan to be punished for his mischief.

It was decided that he should go on the wagon with Regnan for three months and cry out: "Rags, old iron." The lad did so willingly. During his enforced apprenticeship his father died, leaving him homeless, as his mother had died in his infancy, and Regnan adopted the boy, who became a valuable assistant to the old man in his business. Before the lad was of age Regnan and Kitty both died, and left the preacher's son a snug little fortune. He kept the fiddle to remind him of the ways of Providence.

"KOTCHIN' DE NINES" **(A NEGRO TALE CURRENT IN LOUISVILLE)**

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"Git up from dar. Whut's you dreamin' erbout? No need ter ask, fer I knows. You's dreamin' right now 'bout kotchin' dem nines. I bounds you dun had er dream last night. I knows it by dat smile in de corner of your mouth. You kin smile outen both corners, ef you wants ter, but you don't git dis fifty cents I got."

"Old woman, I got er new dream."

"Whut's it erbout?"

"Dem nines."

"Look heah, old man, you take dat dream and yourself an' go out ter dat woodpile so's I kin git some breakfast. You's got er dream, an' I'se got fifty cents, an' we's gwine ter keep whut we has."

"I'se gwine ter tell you dis dream, ef I has ter pay you ter listen. Take dis dime."

"Make your story mighty short. I wonder ef dis heah dime is tainted money. Ef it is— Well, I reckons it ain't."

"I wuz in er great big parlor, an' you an' de chillens wuz dar. An' it wuz in er great big house, an' you owns it." [Pg 63]

"Wuz I bossin' it?"

"Oh, yes!"

"Go on wid your dream, old man."

"Dat parlor wuz so fine dat when you sneezed you asked de pictures on de wall ter 'scuse you."

"Go on wid your dream, old man. We kin habe breakfast at dinner time."

"When you walked on de cyarpet you fairly bounced up an' down, an' when de chillens played on de payano you said: 'Dis ain't heaven, but we's heah, and dat's de same thing.' De spoons an' knives an' forks was silver, an'—"

"An' you's still got more ter say?"

"Yes, an' everything else wuz jes' like whut de white folks has."

"Whut bringed erbout all dat in your dream?"

"It wuz kotchin' de nines in de lottery."

"Is you sho you kin kotch 'em wid your eyes open?"

"Dey's bound ter come wid dat dream back of 'em."

"Old man, you's jes' fishin' 'round ter borrow dis fifty cents I'se got."

"Never lend money when you's got er soft snap like dis, old woman. Jes' 'vest your sixty cents in de nines, an' I'll do all de rest. De nines is comin', an' when dey comes we'll be jes' like de white folks."

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"Heah's de sixty cents. I'll 'vest it."

"Old woman, de nines is yourn now. I'se goin' erway on foot, but I'se comin' back in one of dese kerridges on top. When you sees me comin', fling oil on de cabin an' burn it down. I'll be on top de kerridge in all my dignity. Habe de chillens out heah, an' let 'em be er singin' an' er dancin'. Keep your eye on de road, an' when you sees er little speck on de road, why dat's me. When I gits back we'll all git into de kerridge an' drive off ter er new home, and leave de cabin in ashes. Good-by, old woman, till I comes again."

The old man walked into the city to play the lottery. He thought fifty cents would be enough to invest in "de nines," so he bought ten cents' worth of bananas to give him strength to stand his new fortune.

"When I'se through eatin'," said he, "I'll play de nines."

He stood on a stone wall that overlooked a row of public carriages, so that as he ate he could be thinking of his ride back home. He did not think of the harm in the banana peels he dropped upon the wall, until he stepped upon one. He fell between two horses hitched to a carriage, was kicked by them, and left with both legs broken.

When the hackman discovered where the old man lived, and that he had fifty cents on his person, he had the injured man placed on top of the carriage, took a seat by his side, and drove him home.

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The old man was now thinking of the bananas and the cabin, and his wife was thinking of "de nines an' de kerridge." She was watching the road. When the old man saw his wife in the road, and remembering his parting words to her, he cried out: "Old woman, old woman, don't burn de cabin."

She, recalling what her husband had told her, and thinking he was calling to her to hurry up and fulfill his instructions, called to the children: "Fling on de oil, chillens! Light er match an' let de cabin go up in smoke, fer your daddy is er-comin' on his own kerridge wid all his dignity on him. Look how proper his legs looks. Dey is straight out before him an' his arms is er-wavin'. He's kotched de nines, sho'. Sing an' dance, fer he's kotched de nines!" When the carriage stopped the old woman was still instructing the children in their work of destruction, and the cabin was ablaze.

"Old woman!" called the old man.

"Stop, chillens!" screamed she; "dey's sumpin' wrong wid your daddy's voice."

"Yes," replied he, "an' dey's sumpin' wrong wid my legs. I bought a dime's worth of bananas, an' dis man charge me fifty cents ter bring me home wid both legs broke, an' dere wuz no money left ter play de nines."

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"Husban'," said she, "your little speech don't 'zackly 'splain matters."

The old man said nothing, but groaned in anguish.

There was no more talking, but much working over legs; and a bright day dream was banished to the limbo of things that are not.

A TOWN SKETCH

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There were about fifteen hundred people in the town of Lockburg. Some five hundred of these were negroes. Nearly every white man owned his home; nearly every negro owed his rent. Nearly every white man had a bank account; nearly every negro, a grocery account. Renfroth, the banker, was an ordinary man of the white race. Jiles Brennen, the smartest negro in a circle of twenty miles, did not know the meaning of interest. White children listened to their parents, read the daily papers, and discussed the signs of the times. Negro children paraded the street, delighted in being out of sight and hearing of their parents, and but few could tell the time of day on the face of a clock. The white teachers were competent and faithful. The one negro teacher had neither legs nor training. The white people returned from church saying: "These points in the sermon fit right into our business ventures. These show our need of moral fiber and the remedy. May they do us good, as the truth always does the meek and far-seeing." The negroes returned

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from church shouting and praising some "preaching man."

Jiles Brennen and several others were an exception to this rule. Jiles knew most of the white people better than they knew themselves. When he conversed with them he always "talked up." He knew the negroes better than they wanted to know themselves. There was not one who could not repeat a score of "wayside sermons" preached by Jiles. "A rat to its hole, and a negro to his folly," Jiles used to say. "When the last trumpet sounds some negro will be dividing his time between saying 'amen' to a sermon and 'cluck, cluck' to his neighbor's chickens." This remark brought Jiles more than fame. It brought blood.

"If the teacher and preacher of this district were killed and put into a bag, their ghosts would be too lazy to say 'Howdy.'" When the preacher heard this he offered a prayer for Jiles that was intended to remind him of a warm region. When the teacher heard of this remark, he said: "As I have no legs to go after the blackguard, I will let him come to his sense at leisure."

One dark night, as the preacher and others were crawling across a creek on a log someone held up a lantern in front of them.

"Go on," said the rest to the preacher.

"I can't," replied he. "This light blinds me."

"Come on," shouted Jiles, "my light has blinded you before."

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The white people took up the remark, and with it fought all Jiles' future battles.

Sickness and death determined negro society in Lockburg. All visited the sick. All attended the funeral. Why should not all attend all other functions? All answered the question for themselves, and attended regularly.

A score of men and women were chatting in Sister Renfro's bedroom when the preacher peeped in at the door and paused long enough to say: "Come out to 'sifting meeting' to-night. Spread the news."

"Will Jiles be there with his lantern?" asked Neal Grafton, a friend of Jiles.

"Never mind about that," answered Sister Renfro. "Say what you please about him, but he's a preaching man."

Sister Renfro's guests soon began to spread the news. Neal Grafton was the most active of all. He stood where he could command four corners.

"Sister Polly," he called to a rather corpulent woman who was passing with a heavy bundle of clothes on her head, "stop a minute—'sifting meeting' to-night!"

"What you say, Brother Grafton? Come here! You knows I can't hear like I used to. I caught cold from shouting at the big meeting five years ago. Who could have kept sober feet? *That* was a preaching man."

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"I say, Sister Polly——"

"Now, stop, son. Let me get in hearing order." After wiping her face with her apron, she said: "Now go on, son."

"Sister Polly, there will be a 'sifting meeting'——"

"Hold, son! The bundle comes down over my ears. Raise it a little. A 'sifting meeting'? Where? Oh! at the church? Raise up the bundle again, son. Now hold it there. Now tell me about it."

"That's all, Sister Polly."

"No! No! It's been five years since we had one. You heard your mother tell about it, didn't you?"

"Yes, but——"

"I know you did; she was there. Sister Renfro was there. I was there. It was a glorious time."

"Yes, Sister Polly, but——"

"My head's just beginning to rest, son. Well, the negroes lied and lied, but one told the truth."

"May I put the bundle on the ground?"

"The clothes are clean, son. I'll head them again soon. That sister told the truth and her head fell. Hold a little longer."

"Oh, my arms, Sister Polly!"

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"Hold till I raise up that woman's head. I'll listen afterward."

"After I take the bundle?" "No, son. Hand it here. 'Sifting meeting' at the church? I'll be there."

Sister Polly went on humming, and left Grafton rubbing his arms. He notified a number of others, at a distance.

Polly delivered the clothes and mentioned the "sifting meeting."

"What is such a meeting, Polly?" asked her employer.

"It's a meeting where you tell what you don't know and where people know what you don't tell. If you want more light, come to the meeting. Good-by, I'm in a hurry," answered Polly. Her employer was content to hear from the meeting.

An hour before meeting time Sisters Polly and Renfro were ready. They had spent considerable time arranging their hair. Polly's hair was rolled around a saucer that belonged to her employer. Sister Renfro's was put into the same shape by means of the flounce of an old black dress.

Just then one might have seen forty or fifty people, moving in single file, led by one with a lantern. There were no lights in the town. It was customary for someone with a lantern to come along and gather up the church-goers. The leader to-night was Grafton. Sisters Polly and Renfro joined the procession in the rear. It moved silently on to the end of the little bridge, when Sister Renfro stumped her foot and fell. Sister Polly, in trying to assist her, fell also. Both had to return home, and were late in reaching the meeting. Grafton led the procession into the church.

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The church was cold, and fairly well filled with smoke. The sexton was rubbing his eyes. The preacher with closed eyes was tapping his foot and humming a hymn. Grafton suggested that the windows and doors be opened a few minutes, but the preacher demurred, saying that it was too cold. In consequence, the cloud-laden condition of the room was not altered. It is difficult to understand how the congregation remained in that smoky room two hours; but they did so.

The next day Neal Grafton reported the proceedings of the church to Jiles Brennen, and it took Jiles just six months to laugh "sifting meetings" out of the town and the community.

Sisters Polly and Renfro declared the preacher stopped the meeting to keep them from showing their new style of head-dress, and it took him a year to live down the accusation.

"Is your head well?"

"Not quite. Is yours?"

"Well it's doing better than it did after the other 'sifting meeting.'" These remarks and others of like tone showed the nature of the meeting, and also served to divide the congregation.

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And the teacher? He did not count, and never had a wish to.

THE STUMP OF A CIGAR

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Stump of cigar, as I am, I have a history that is interwoven with that of human beings. When I was in the form of seed I was safely housed in a nice glass jar in a large seed store. For some reason or other I was given the best shelf in the show window.

One day a beautiful young lady came into the store and priced me.

"Why," said the clerk, "that is——"

"Never mind," said she, "what it is. I simply want to know the price."

He told her; she paid it, and bore me off gracefully.

"Ah," said I to myself, "I shall never again see the young man who comes every day and stops opposite the show-window." One windy day, as he stood in his usual place, a lady's hat came rolling along the pavement. What immediately followed this will be told further on.

As I said before, the lady bore me off gracefully. It was night when she entered her well-lighted apartment. "She will examine me," thought I, "and sniff me. Then how I will worship the tears that fall from her eyes."

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However, I received no such attention as I had anticipated, for the young lady simply placed me in the center of a large table, sounded a bell, and began to talk, as if addressing someone present.

"You were there, weren't you? You will take me at my word, will you? Let's see. This is how it will go." She then walked to the middle of the floor and acted out a little play that will be given further on. As she finished, she turned to a young woman who was standing in the door and said harshly: "What do you want?"

"The bell sounded," replied the young woman.

"That was not for you," said she. "That was for the devil." She threw a glass at the young woman and left the room. Several times during the night I heard her say: "That was not for you. It was for the devil."

At eight the next morning the servants put breakfast on the table, leaving me still in the middle. At ten minutes past eight my mistress, whom I shall call Ladybug, came into the room and addressed a little speech to me that I did not understand until matters grew much more serious. You could not understand it at this point, so it will not be given now. Five minutes later the young

woman who had been chased out of the room the night before, came in. For the sake of convenience I shall call her Butterfly. I was astonished to see Ladybug embrace Butterfly and kiss her twenty times on the forehead. I thought this a bit of amusing comedy. I afterwards found it stern tragedy. [Pg 76]

They sat opposite each other at the table and remained about thirty minutes. They spent the time talking and smiling. They did not eat in the common acceptation of the term.

Ladybug rolled her chicken into nicely rounded balls and tossed them down her throat. Butterfly soaked her chicken and bread in milk and drank the milk.

They finished this unusual task together, and started to leave the room, hand in hand, when Ladybug, glancing at the clock, whispered to Butterfly: "I must go; it is time for me to test his heroism and devotion."

Coming to where I rested, Ladybug picked me up, pressed me closely to her heart, and left the room, carrying me with her. She went straight to a nearby lake, and entered a little boat, in which sat a lone individual. It was the young man who had stood so often opposite the show-window. Ladybug took a seat in the boat, and in silence the young man rowed across the waters.

Two hours on the lake were we, and no words were spoken. Then rising, still in silence, Ladybug hurled me upon the bosom of the lake. Twenty times I was thrown into the water, and nineteen times rescued by the young man. The twentieth time? It was fate and heroism. Ladybug pressed me closely and began to rock from side to side. This she did twenty times, each time more and more violently. Her great black eyes seemed to burn into his all the while. [Pg 77]

She then once again tossed me into the water—and leaped after me. This was the action of the play she rehearsed out in her room that night when first I came. The young man followed Ladybug in her mad plunge, and at length succeeded in bringing her to their craft. Ten minutes later she was stretched out upon a boat, alive but unconscious. The young man was flesh for the fish, and I was in possession of a countryman.

When Ladybug regained consciousness and learned that the young man had been drowned, she said: "My lover is free. Hell cannot hold him. Human blood and water have atoned for his crime." This is the little speech she addressed to me that first morning. Then it had been put in the future tense.

Twelve months later a beggar gave Butterfly a hand of tobacco for his supper. While he ate she rolled the best leaf into me, placed me between her teeth, and left the room. Soon Ladybug entered, sounded a bell, as was her nightly custom, and waited. [Pg 78]

In a few minutes a hideous form entered, smoking me.

"I am the devil," said the shape.

"I am his mistress," said Ladybug, and seized the shape by the throat. The beggar, whom Ladybug had not seen, and whom Butterfly had forgotten, was present, and tried to separate them. In so doing he caused me to get entangled in the laces worn by the woman, communicating my fire to the flimsy garments. Now, the hideous form was Butterfly. Soon the clothing of both was ablaze, when they were darting about the room, the beggar trying to help first one and then the other. Both fell across the piano about the same time, and began to reach out, as if to clamber from the flames. In this way they played, as it were, their own dirge. When the sounds ceased they were dead. A mystery? Yes! No!

* * * * *

On the morning of the wedding-day a groom-to-be sailed out upon the lake. Said he to himself: "Christian people say that he who provides not for his household is worse than an infidel, and that a millstone had better be placed about his neck and be sunk into the sea. What have I for wife and children? Prosperity has passed me by. Friends are not friends. Fate is my executioner."

Three days after this his body was recovered and buried. [Pg 79]

The preacher said to the people: "Suicide is an unpardonable sin. The young man, therefore, who was of noble birth and parentage, who was chaste in life and honorable in business, is in hell."

Ladybug, the dead man's fiancée, believed the rash-judging preacher. She soon lost her reason. Then came upon her the hallucinations that wrought the other tragedies. She believed that if her lover's twin brother, the young man of the fatal boat ride, would stand opposite the seed store for twenty days, and then perish as described in the boat ride, her lover would be released from hell and returned to her. Ladybug, among other hallucinations, believed that the number twenty held potent virtues; hence, the twenty days, twenty kisses, and the like. The lover was twenty years old, hence Ladybug's counting by twenties. The twin brother out of pity consented to humor her whim, not thinking it would cost him his life.

Ladybug passed the seed store every day to see if he was true to his pact. As she passed the twentieth day, her hat blew off. He started to get it, but she said: "Let it be. Some of my troubles may roll away with it. I will be at the boat to-morrow morning with a charm. Then my lover shall live again. Blood and water shall atone for his crimes." [Pg 80]

She immediately bought me of the clerk. There was no logic in this part of the affair. She simply

thought the first thing her eyes fell upon would serve her purpose.

To make sure of her lover's return, she would also practice upon Butterfly, her sister. Butterfly, too, submitted to humor her whim.

The embraces and twenty kisses were the beginning of this.

Butterfly of her own accord had dressed and acted the devil on the fatal night, in the hope that the appearance of the devil would act as a counter-shock, and restore Ladybug's reason again. The presence of the beggar was a mere accident. The hand of tobacco out of which I was made was ground from the jar of seed left with the countryman.

As I lay upon the floor that dreadful night and saw Ladybug and Butterfly lying dead across the piano, I said to myself: "Stump of cigar, as I am, I have a history."

A RUSTIC COMEDY

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Abraham and Ruth, his wife, were stingy and childless. Three children had come to them, whose taking off left Abraham embittered against men. Ruth often said: "Complain not, Abraham, my man. Is not an angel more than a child? The little ones were your flesh, but my soul. Complain not, Abraham, my man."

Abraham had met, wooed, and wed Ruth in the fields, and ever afterward kept her there. Side by side they toiled, eating little, visiting seldom, and ever replenishing the money-bag at the bottom of the meal barrel. At the time of this incident the money bag was full and the meal barrel was about empty.

It was winter, and the old couple had just returned from a visit to a neighbor. As Abraham stirred the fire he said: "Ruth, we are getting old and must soon be done with things earthly. We have toiled hard and been a little saving. The neighbors have never had the opportunity of finding fault with your cooking; nor has the good parson ever had the hardihood to look this way for a contribution. I have been thinking of the best way to dispose of our wealth just before the breath leaves our bodies. Ruth, like yourself, I have always been pious-minded and desirous of doing something that will benefit the neighbors, and at the same time start their tongues to wagging about our good parts. It strikes me the best way to do this is to leave our money to erect a parsonage and to place a bell in the chapel. The bell will spread our fame above, and the women who visit the parson's wife will spread it below. I know from experience, Ruth, that it is a blessing as well as a curse to have ones acts linked with the tongue of a woman. Now, what think you?"

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"Abraham," said Ruth, "I have always thought you had some good aim stuck away in your soul; and as time rolled on your good angel would discover it to you. This is why I have seldom differed from you. Why wait until we die to have this done? Let us take our savings of years to-morrow and place them in the hands of the parson."

"You have spoken wisely, my dear wife," said Abraham. "It shall be done."

After kissing Ruth, Abraham turned and stirred the fire. Just then someone knocked at the door. Abraham opened it, and in came a stalwart stranger, carrying a pair of saddle-bags. He asked for supper and a night's lodging. The old couple frankly told him they had no supper for him, but he was welcome to warm by the fire and sleep in the loft. He gladly accepted their proffer, and took his seat by the fire. Soon he began to spin yarns of all lengths and descriptions, and ended by telling how, while stopping with an old couple, he had kept them from being robbed. After this he crept upstairs and retired.

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When Abraham thought the stranger was asleep he told his wife to prepare an ashcake for their supper. She told him there would not be meal enough if she threw away the husk.

"Well," said he, "put in husk and all."

The ashcake was soon spread upon the hearth and covered with hot ashes. Abraham bowed his head as though to ask a blessing.

"Not yet," said Ruth. "We are told there may be many a slip between the cup and the lip." Here they were interrupted by a noise from above.

"My dear friends," said the stranger, as he tumbled downstairs. "I forgot to tell you how my land runs." He took the poker, and, placing it in the middle of the ashcake, and moving it in keeping with the words, said:

"My land runs north, south, east, and west; then, coming back to the middle, it runs around and around." Having thus ruined the ashcake, he went back upstairs. After a considerable silence, Abraham said: "The Lord giveth and the Lord taketh, and blessed be the rope that hangeth the stranger."

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After removing their treasure from the meal barrel and almost worshipping it, they returned it and retired. They were soon fast asleep, but the stranger was not. Hours passed, and still the stranger was awake. Before knocking at the door to be admitted he had heard the old couple's

talk concerning their money, and what they intended to do with it the next day. He had also seen them take it from the barrel, and replace it. He was now thinking about it. What were his thoughts? Was he planning some way to rob them? Was he thinking how he might protect them in a case of emergency? Hearing a noise below, he crawled to the opening and looked down. He saw that the side window had been opened. Looking farther, he saw a man stooping over the meal barrel. With the greatest precaution he descended and slipped up behind the man and soon gagged him with a handkerchief. He held the intruder easily by pressing him against the barrel. Beside the barrel lay a meal sack. This the stranger slipped over the intruder's head and arms, and wrapped him around with a rope that was lying near. By this time Abraham and his wife were awake.

"Look," said the stranger, "what I have done for you. This thief almost had your treasure when I apprehended him. He is all right, now. Where shall I put him. What about this closet here? You know we must keep him until morning and turn him over to the officers." With this the stranger dragged the robber into the closet. [Pg 85]

"Let us have more light," said Ruth.

"No," said the stranger; "there may be more. Light might frighten them away. I want to serve you well to-night. You know I owe you a little something for listening to how my land runs."

"What was that white something," said Ruth, "you had over the fellow's head?"

"It was a meal sack," said the stranger.

"That is strange, indeed," said Ruth. "There was not a meal sack on the place when we went to bed."

"This is a strange night," said the stranger. "I am your friend, and yet I am so strange I would not let you eat that delicious ashcake. Go to bed, Aunt Ruth. Uncle Abraham and I will watch the thieves. The Lord giveth and the Lord taketh; and, Uncle Abraham, will you finish the rest of it?"

Abraham said nothing. He thought the stranger was getting very familiar; but since he had done them such a good turn they could stand almost anything at his hands.

Ruth could not return to bed without first looking into the meal barrel in search of her treasure. It was there, and around it were a dozen or more bundles. [Pg 86]

"How is this?" said she. "It is quite an honest thief that will take one treasure and leave another."

"Be not deceived," said the stranger; "a thief is by honor as a criminal is by his chains. A criminal does not worry himself and bruise his hands against his chains because he wishes to atone for his evil ways, but in order to get loose so that he may continue his crimes. Whenever a thief puts forth an act that smacks of honor, it is simply that he may conduct his business on a larger scale. Don't you see the point, Aunt Ruth? The thief we have in the closet stole those things somewhere else. He was afraid to leave them outside lest someone should steal them from him. When he saw your bag of money was so heavy he could not take them both, he concluded to leave the things and take the money."

"Why did he take the pains to put them into the barrel?" said Ruth.

"That is clear enough," said the stranger. "Had he put them on the floor you might have stumbled over them before morning and had your attention drawn to the robbery ere he could have gotten out of the neighborhood. By the way, he must have had the bundles in that sack in which he is now safely housed. He had emptied the sack before I saw him, and, I think, was stooping over to lift out the bag of money." Ruth and Abraham accepted this as a logical argument, and Ruth was soon in bed and asleep. [Pg 87]

"I think I hear footsteps," said Abraham to the stranger.

"I am quite sure of that, sir," said the stranger. "I will settle him about as I did the first. I have a handkerchief. You get a bed quilt and a cord and follow me." They walked into the yard, the stranger leading. In the distance they saw a figure approaching.

"Let us go a little farther over this way," said the stranger. The words were hardly out of his mouth before he uttered a groan. When Abraham looked, the stranger was nowhere to be seen. Another groan, however, located him. He had fallen into an old cistern. On turning, Abraham stumbled over a ladder. With this the stranger was soon rescued.

By this time they could see that the approaching figure was a man with something like a sack on his shoulder. Instead of coming straight to them he turned his course a little in order to reach the side window.

"Uncle Abraham," said the stranger, "while we are out here wrestling with this fellow, some other one might go in and make off with the bag of money. Don't you think you had better bring it out and hold to it? I can handle this chap." [Pg 88]

"Yes, yes," said Abraham; "it is a good thought."

He accordingly returned to the house, brought out his treasure, and sat down by the side of it, watching the newcomer.

The man with the sack walked up to the window and leaned the sack against the house. He then deliberately opened the window and peeped in, placing himself in very much the same position as had the one who had stooped over the barrel. Stepping swiftly up to the window, before the man could remove his head, the stranger had him gagged. In another minute he had been enfolded in the quilt, with a cord fast around him.

"I groaned in yonder sinkhole," said the stranger, "but you shall both groan and sleep in there the rest of the night, if you sleep at all." With this he rolled the latest intruder into the old cistern and placed boards across it.

"Uncle Abraham," said the stranger, "you take the money and I'll bring in the sack. Aunt Ruth, we have another of your honest thieves. He is out in the old cistern, thinking how he will not use your money. See what he has left you?"

Removing the contents of the sack, they so filled the barrel that there was no room for the bag of money.

"Young man, my dear young man," said Abraham, "there are no family ties between us, as far as I know, but I find myself drawn as closely to you as a father to his son. I could trust you with our lives, much less with our money. Keep watch over the bag of money while we take a good, solid nap." [Pg 89]

The old couple were soon fast asleep. About four o'clock Ruth awoke and said: "Abraham, the door is open."

"So it is," said Abraham.

"But—but—Ruth, where is the stranger?"

"But—but—Abraham, where is the bag of money?"

Sure enough, both stranger and money were gone.

"I thought he was claiming kin a little too soon," said Ruth. "These folks who claim kin so soon are just like the folks who come to your house and tell you one lie about your neighbor in order to get you to tell a hundred. Then they will have a sufficient stock to supply the whole neighborhood. Is the fellow in the closet safe?"

"I'll see."

"How about the one in the cistern?"

"Safe, too," said Abraham. "We will turn them over to the officers as early in the day as possible, and then set them on the trail of the stranger. Maybe he will have some of the money when caught. In the meantime, what shall we do to keep up our spirits until it is good and light?" [Pg 90]

"I never in my life," said Ruth, "felt more like hearing a prayer by Deacon Brindlebee and a sermon by Parson Prudence."

"Why, look," said Abraham, "the rogue has left his saddle-bags. Let's see what is in them."

He opened one side and drew out a copy of an old newspaper. He unfolded it, and there was a sermon on Patience by the identical Parson Prudence.

"Ah," said Ruth, "the rogue has also left his hat. What's in it?"

There was a folded paper between the hat and inner band. This she opened, and found that, among other things, it contained a prayer by Deacon Brindlebee.

"Now we have them," said Ruth. "Let us take our minds off rogues and place them on the words of these holy men. It would be far better to have them here, but let us stammer through them as best we can."

For nearly two hours Abraham and Ruth prayed the deacon's prayer and preached the parson's sermon. When six o'clock came they were still so carried away with the prayer and sermon that they were not conscious of the presence of two men who were standing near the door until they spoke.

"What's up now, Abraham?" said one of them. "Have robbers been about?" [Pg 91]

"Pretty officers are you," said Abraham. "You should have been here last night. We have been entertaining robbers the whole night. Their aim was to rob us of our life's savings. One was good enough to entrap the others, so that you will have no trouble in securing them. Then, as soon as we were asleep, he took the bag of money and made off with it. Assemble the whole neighborhood, and I will turn two of them over to you."

In a short time nearly every man, woman, and child in the neighborhood was there. The man in the closet was dragged out and laid in the middle of the floor. The one in the cistern was hauled up and laid by his side. Then Abraham told the people how he and Ruth had labored through forty years to save the money; how at last they intended to spend it for a parsonage and a bell for Parson Prudence's church, and how the rogues lying before them tried to steal it, and were prevented and captured by the other and greater thief, who succeeded in getting away with it.

The people grew furious. Some wanted to hang them; others wanted to drown and bury them. One good deacon declared that it would be a great advantage for such characters to go to torment bundled up in that way, for, after they were in and their wraps were burned off, the devil would not know when they had come in nor what they had done.

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"Let us do nothing rashly," said Ruth. "These poor souls may never hear another prayer or sermon. Let some brother come forth and read Deacon Brindlebee's prayer and another read Parson Prudence's sermon."

Two brethren came forth and conducted the services, after which the two men were untied and uncovered. To the surprise and consternation of all, there lay Parson Prudence and Deacon Brindlebee. The men were so chilled and cramped it was fully an hour before they could make themselves understood.

In the meantime other scenes took place.

"The very thought of a parson and a deacon turning thieves," said some, "is enough to give every sinner a license to miss heaven."

"The parson and the deacon are innocent," said others. "This old scoundrel and his wife, and maybe someone else, have played a trick on them. Where did they get money enough to buy a parsonage and a bell? They have always lived from hand to mouth. During forty years they have never had enough to give a neighbor a meal, and were never known to give the smallest contribution to the church. Gag them and serve them as they have served our parson and deacon."

The men seized Abraham, gagged him, and lowered him into the cistern. The women served Ruth in the same way and stored her away in the closet.

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At this point the storekeeper stood upon the edge of the barrel and said:

"Parson Prudence and Deacon Brindlebee came to my place last night and bought two sacks full of groceries. They said that Abraham and his wife seemed to be in need, and that they were going to bring some things over here and slip them into the room while Abraham slept, so that the heretics might be surprised in the morning. Now, this is the way they were paid for their kindness. Ladies and gentlemen, think also of that prayer and sermon. Was that a mere accident? I think not. The whole affair was planned. They were not satisfied with sacking, quilting and cording them. They must stretch them out upon the floor like sure-enough, night-prowling, dishonest thieves; and, while in that position, pray to the deacon the prayer that he has been budding and blossoming into length and boisterousness for the last twenty years. Then think of the parson in the same position, listening to the sermon on 'Patience,' when you know, ladies and gentlemen, as well as I, that the parson, with a very little vocal effort and a slight movement of his hands, has put three generations to sleep with that identical sermon. Let us look for the groceries, and, if found, take vengeance."

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As the word "vengeance" was uttered the speaker's feet slipped into the barrel so far he had to be extracted. This showed the people where the groceries were. By this time the parson and deacon were on their feet and ready to state their side of the case.

"Hearing that Abraham and his wife were in hard lines," said the parson, "the deacon and I, as has been said, bought two sacks of groceries from the gentleman who has just spoken, intending to come together and slip them into this room. By some means we were separated, so I came alone; and, finding the household asleep, I crawled into that window and put the contents of this meal sack into the barrel yonder. I was surprised to find in it a large bag of money. All this time Abraham and his wife were asleep in this bed. Just as I straightened up to go two strong arms caught me, gagged me, sacked, and closeted me. I think, ladies and gentlemen, I have said enough to prove my innocence, and that of Abraham and his wife. There has been a mistake, somewhere, or the man with the strong arms was playing a winning game for himself."

The deacon came forth, and in a few words told his story, and ended by saying that the two strong arms that so lovingly handled the parson must have gagged, quilted, and imprisoned him.

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Abraham and Ruth were ungagged and brought before the people. Their statement of the case at certain points was just like the parson's. They told how the stranger had been admitted, how he treated the ashcake, how he claimed kin, and, lastly, how they had trusted him with the money, and been deceived.

"Innocent! innocent!" shouted the people; "all here are innocent. The stranger alone is guilty. Is there nothing here by which he can be identified?"

"Here," said Abraham, "are his saddlebags and hat, with a name on the former that is doubtless his."

"He must be a strange thief indeed to leave behind him such telling witnesses as these," said the deacon.

"Ah," said the parson, "I fear there is still more mystery in this matter."

While the people were speechmaking and changing their opinions, the two officers who were the first to arrive and hear Abraham's story had been prowling over the farm. Just at this point they bore a man through the crowd and laid him on the floor where the deacon and parson had lain.

He was gagged and corded after about the same fashion as they had been.

"Ah," said one, "the stranger has been playing gagging-binding master to another weakling."

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"No, my man," said Abraham, "that is the stranger himself."

At this the mob seized the bound man and yelled: "Confess, confess! You shall confess!" They pulled him in and out of the closet. They lowered him into the cistern and hauled him out again and again. At times a hundred voices were bawling: "Confess, confess! You shall confess!" During all this confusion the parson was the only person who noticed that the poor fellow was still gagged.

"How can he confess," said the parson, "when he is gagged as daintily as a parson in a closet?"

They removed the gag, but not the cords.

"Gentlemen," said he, "if you are as ready to give me justice as I am to confess the truth in this matter, my part of the mystery will soon be cleared up and I can enjoy myself here with my uncle and aunt."

"Claiming kin again, Abraham," said Ruth. "Look out for your life next time."

"Strangle the hypocrite," said one.

"Give the impudent whelp a bath in the mill-pond," said another.

"No," said the parson, "let him confess."

"Gentlemen," said he, "I am innocent. If I stole the bag of money, why should I leave my saddlebags behind, with my name on them, and one side of which is full of money?"

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The saddlebags were now examined by the crowd, and the stranger's statements found to be true.

"Then," said he, "why should I encumber myself this way? In fact, how could I? It would be impossible."

This somewhat appeased the crowd, until someone suggested that maybe he took the bag of money outside to hide it, intending to come back and get his own property; but as daylight overtook him he hired someone to gag and cord him in that way. On hearing this one man grabbed the prisoner by the foot and started to drag him to the cistern again. In so doing one boot was pulled off, out of which fell a picture.

"Here, Abraham," said Ruth, handing him the picture, "this may be all you will ever get for your bag of money."

Abraham took the picture and looked at it closely.

"Now, gentlemen," said the stranger, "a few more points, and I will have this mystery clear."

"You had better clear it quickly," said the crowd.

"Don't be too hard," said the parson. "Let him confess."

"Yes," said the stranger, "I am anxious to confess. This gentleman is really my uncle. He and my father have not met since I was born. Father and I agreed to pay him a visit. Since I have always been a funny chunk of humanity, father thought it might be well for me to come last night and twit uncle a little. He promised to arrive this morning. As I neared this house last night I saw two men standing close to the door, as though listening to what was going on inside. On seeing me they moved off at a brisk pace. Before knocking, I listened and heard Uncle Abraham and Aunt Ruth talking of their money, and what they intended to do with it the next day. Now, of course I thought the two men were listening to the same thing, and would be back in the night to rob them. After I had been admitted and had spoiled the ashcake—so that I could have a good excuse for giving them a nice little gift this morning for wronging them—and had gone to bed, it seemed I could see those two men trying to get into the house. Sleep fled my eyes; and, as I lay pondering what I would do in an emergency, I beheld the good parson here at the meal barrel. Thinking that he was one of the men I distrusted I slipped up behind him, and, after bundling him up in the fashion you beheld him, I tucked him into the closet. When the deacon came I treated him likewise, and rolled him into the cistern. The groceries they brought were put in the barrel. I could not account for this part of it, but now I see. Having disposed of the supposed robbers so nicely, Uncle Abraham put the bag of money in my keeping. Thinking I had nothing more to fear, I set the bag at my side and fell asleep. When I awoke a man was looking in the window through which the parson had climbed. As I heard no signs of another, I opened the door and grappled with him. While we were rolling over the ground a second man walked off with the money. I started to follow him, but my man clung to me so that I had to drag him a considerable distance before I could beat him off. In fact, he was so exhausted he did not rise for some time, to follow me. I caught up with the other fellow just as I neared the old well. He evidently thought I was his confederate. I said not a word, but lifted the bag from his shoulder and dropped it into the well. Seeing his mistake, he struck me a terrible blow that felled me to the ground. When I came to myself I was bound and gagged, just as these officers found me."

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The crowd gazed at one another in unbelief, but decided, nevertheless, after some parley to

proceed to the well to investigate the truth of the strange story the prisoner had to tell. Arrived there, a man was lowered into the well, and soon gave the signal to be drawn out, with the bag of money. Some of the crowd were still disposed to doubt the innocence of their captive. They claimed that he was one of the band, that the bag of money fell into the well by accident, and that he was beaten, bound, and gagged because he was too mean to go along with the others.

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"In short," said one, "they left you here for an outraged people to dull their vengeance upon. Let every lover of justice help to string him up."

"Hold! hold," said Abraham. "This picture has a story to tell. There are two likenesses on here. One is that of a brother that I have not seen for thirty years, and the other is of the stranger here. Is this not sufficient evidence with what you have already heard? I think—guess—believe—that this is enough for— Well, gentlemen, don't you think this is enough for me?"

"Yes," said a low-browed son of passion who was trying to put a noose around the stranger's neck, "it is enough to make this fit decently."

"Let the man have a chance to confess," cried out the parson and the deacon jointly.

"Let me have a chance to collar his neck with this noose," said the low-browed son of passion.

Then followed a struggle, in which the parson and the deacon seized the noose on either side of the fellow's neck, and kept it from being tightened. The struggle grew in intensity, so much so that none of the excited throng noticed a dignified old gentleman dismount and run up to the crowd. Abraham, standing to one side in the confusion, noted the old man's approach, gazed at him, and at once clasped him around the neck and cried: "My brother! my brother!"

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Disengaging himself, and upon seeing the young man in his sorry plight, the old gentleman hurried forward crying: "My son! my son!"

The young man hearing the cry in the midst of the melee looked up and gasped, "My father! my father!"

By this time Abraham and the young man's father forced their way to the young man's side. The people fell back and scattered in all directions, leaving the young man almost exhausted. His bonds were at once cut, and he was put upon his feet and refreshed.

The young man was soon able to smile.

His Uncle Abraham and Aunt Ruth kissed him and commended his heroism.

Sometime later in the day the two real culprits were apprehended, and confessed their guilt, stating that they had overheard part of Abraham's conversation regarding the money when the young man's approach had led them to await a better hour. Thus were Abraham and Ruth vindicated; thus, too, were all doubts as to the young man's story laid at rest. Parson Prudence got the bag of money with which to buy the parsonage and bell, and Deacon Brindlebee was handsomely rewarded for his part in the comedy.

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Ashcakes were never thought of again in that house, for Abraham's brother and nephew were rich, and they all lived as one family. The parsonage was erected. The bell was hung; and, as Abraham prophesied, the bell spread their fame above and the women who visited the parson's wife spread it below.

THE JACKAL AND THE LION[1] AN AFRICAN FOLK-LORE TALE

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The Jackal and the Lion were hunting in the jungle. "Brother Lion," said the Jackal, "the young elephant we seek is a good distance away. Well, it is not so far away either, but you see it will run around and around and in and out, and that will make the distance long. I see that you have a sore foot, and so long a journey might cost you your life. It would be a pity to lose your great head and pretty voice."

"It would, indeed," said the Lion. "I am glad to find someone who understands my worth."

"You see, Brother Lion," said the Jackal, "if I should get lost or killed the world would not miss me, but you, Brother Lion—you—!"

"Yes, Brother Jackal," broke in the Lion, "my place could not be filled; but do not take my greatness too seriously. You are worth a little, and that little should be saved."

"Brother Lion," continued the Jackal, "I would gladly give my whole self for your pleasure. You lie down here in the shade, keep cool and think great thoughts, while I take your spear and run down and kill the elephant that you have long desired to eat. When I have done so I will return and take you to it!"

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"Very good," said the Lion. "You are kind and thoughtful. Take my spear and best wishes and be off. I can almost taste the feast now."

The Jackal took the spear, and in a short time had killed the elephant and covered the body with leaves. It then ran to another road, cut its finger and let the blood drip here and there for a great distance. Then it returned to the Lion and said: "Brother Lion, I almost lost my life in killing the elephant. Just go through yonder forest until you come to the straight road. By the elephant's blood you can trace it to the spot where it fell. As soon as I rest I'll be with you, I charge you now that to taste the meat before I come will mean death to you. This is a new law of the jungle."

The Lion went in search of the bloody path, and the Jackal returned to the elephant and began to eat. Now it happened that the Lion hurt his foot and, while binding it up, saw the Jackal eating and looking around.

When the Lion came up to the Jackal he said: "You little rascal, I have a notion to eat you for deceiving me." [Pg 105]

"Be patient, Brother Lion; I am doing you a favor. Unless a Jackal eats of a young elephant first, its meat will kill a Lion. This is a new law of the jungle, and I am still in love with your great head and pretty voice. You remember I gave you a charge to this end."

"Yes," said the Lion, "I remember, and I thank you for saving my head and voice; but since you have tested the meat, what keeps me from eating my fill?"

"Just another new law of the jungle," said the Jackal. "This new law says that such meat must be put upon a high stone tower where the sun's rays may strike it. Then all may eat it unharmed."

"Oh, Brother Jackal," said the Lion, "how can I ever pay you for saving my head and voice?"

"In this way," replied the Jackal. "According to the law, my wife and children must be masons upon the wall, and you and yours must hand up the stones; and you see there are plenty of them about here. Of course, I remain on the ground to direct. I have told my wife and children, and they are coming. You go and bring yours."

"That suits me quite well," said the Lion. "I'll be back with mine in a short while."

When the Lion and his family had returned, the Jackal and his family had eaten half of the elephant and were dancing. [Pg 106]

"You little rascal!" roared the Lion, "have you deceived me again?"

"Not a bit of it," replied the Jackal. "See that little bird lying dead there? That is the messenger of the new laws. By accident I killed it. The new law requires that the one who kills such a bird, and his family, must eat half the meat present as a punishment; and such a punishment as it has been! But for this new dance my wife invented we should all be dead. This means that you would be dead, too. The life of the Jackal in such a case goes into the bird. It becomes ten times as powerful as a Lion and kills everyone it meets. See?"

"I do," replied the Lion, "and thanks again for my head and voice. Let me remind you, Brother Jackal, that my wife and family are not likely to die at present from over-eating."

"Let me remind you, Brother Lion, that one more speech like that from you will put life into that bird, and you will never eat another dinner."

"Thanks, Brother Jackal, for your wisdom and kindness. Let's build the tower."

In a short time the tower was erected.

"How are we to get the meat up?" asked the Lion.

"Oh," said the Jackal, "my wife, who invented the dance, has invented a rope to pull the meat up with." [Pg 107]

"I am glad to hear that, Brother Jackal," said the Lion, "for my wife, who is rather dull, may learn many things from yours."

"Brother Lion," said the Jackal, "when a Lion passes a compliment like that upon a Jackal's wife he had better roar it far and wide, or he will be counted a flatterer, and flattery puts life into that little bird."

The Lion roared the compliment until every beast in the jungle heard it. The Jackal's wife and children let down the rope and pulled the meat up.

"Brother Lion, there is one precaution we must take. That little bird lying there must never be allowed to come back to life, and there is but one way to do it."

"Brother Jackal, pray what is that?"

"Pick up that rock lying there by the bird. When my wife has pulled me to the top of the tower, throw it to me. If I catch it, the bird is dead forever. We will then pull you and your family up, and what a feasting there will be!"

"My dear Brother Jackal," roared the Lion, "you are all wisdom. Now you are up, and I am ready with the rock. Shall I throw it?"

"My dear Brother Lion," said the Jackal, "I am so high up I fear I shall not be able to catch it. There is one way to keep me from missing it. Put your wife right under my hands as I hold them [Pg 108]

out."

"She is there," called the Lion. "Now catch the rock." The Lion threw up the rock. The Jackal withdrew his hands, and it came back, striking the Lion's wife and almost killing her.

"You've killed Ma! you've killed Ma!" cried all the little Lions, and scampered off into the forest.

"That was a terrible mistake, Brother Lion," said the Jackal. "It was all your fault. You didn't ask me whether or not I was ready. That bird is coming to life! I feel it. Unless I can get you up here in five minutes it will be on wing and right after you. Now throw up the rock. That's right. I have it. Good for you. Here, wife, heat this rock and hand it back to me when I ask for it. You understand?"

"Yes, Mrs. Jackal," called the Lion, "hand your husband the rock when he asks for it, for that is indeed a precious rock."

The Jackal let down the rope, telling the Lion to tie it tightly around his body below the forearms. When this was done the Jackal began to pull the Lion up.

"Brother Lion," called the Jackal, "that little bird down there is moving."

"Sister Jackal," cried the Lion, "have you the rock?"

By this time the Jackal's wife was holding the rock with a pair of tongs, for it was very hot.

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"That's right," shouted the Lion, "hold that rock carefully."

"That terrible bird!" mourned the Jackal.

"Ha, ha!" said the Jackal's wife, "I'll drop this hot rock into your mouth, and then how you'll kick and claw the air!"

She tried to drop the rock, but the tongs would not open. She then tried to drop both tongs and rock, but could not. The tongs soon began to burn her hands. In trying to throw them from her, she fell from the tower and killed herself.

The Jackal dropped the rope and so freed the Lion. The tower trembled and fell.

The little bird that the Jackal thought dead was the cause of the change. It was the spirit of the jungle and believed in fair play. It sang a sad song while the wife of the Jackal was being buried. It then sang joyously while the Lion and his wife and children, who had come back, ate the rest of the meat.

The Jackal was badly hurt and crippled by falling with the tower, yet he had to wait on the Lion and his family while they were feasting. And ever afterwards the Jackal was an outcast among animals, despised by all because of his evil and deceitful spirit.

FOOTNOTE:

[1] This story was told to me by a native African who was lecturing in this country.

THE KING'S SHOES

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When King Mesina died his twin sons, Savo and Savoda, became joint heirs to the throne. This was according to the King's wishes. He thought, however, that as Savo was the older and meaner he might at some time rob his brother of his part in the kingdom. So he had placed in his will a clause to the effect that should this happen Savoda was to be the sole heir. Ere the people had ceased mourning for the King, Savo began to persecute Savoda. It mattered not what Savo did Savoda always had an excuse for him. In fact, he thought his brother angelic; and, hence, could do no wrong.

As the time for the coronation approached Savo more and more ignored and persecuted Savoda. At last he said: "Savoda, my servant, sit down in the corner and be as little as you really are while I, your king, conduct matters." Savoda obeyed with a smile upon his face, thinking that all things work together for good to him who is the son of a king and has an earthly angel for a brother.

Savo looked after the coronation in every part. He made all kinds of demands upon his people, and they gladly responded. He sent his leading captain to visit distant lands and bring back luxuries for the occasion. Everything progressed nicely until the captain returned with, as his sole cargo, an ugly dwarf.

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This threw Savo into a rage. He had the captain seized, beaten and thrown into prison. When the dwarf was brought before him, he said: "Begone, human reptile! Go, dwell in the woods with your kinsmen."

"My body is small and weak, but by the power of wit shall I be remembered in the affairs of this kingdom," said the dwarf.

Savoda was still sitting in the corner, trying to smile, and to be small at the same time.

"You, sir," said Savo, pointing at Savoda, "are as impudent as this dwarf. Your stillness means plotting, and your smile means ridicule. You think that by your wit too you shall be remembered in the affairs of the kingdom? I'll see to that. My wisdom is a seine that holds fast to the big fish and crushes the minnows as they slip through. Minnow, sniff your fate. Well, you may have wit enough to dish out soup. Soldiers, to the woods with this abominable dwarf, and to the soup-house with this simpleton who dreams of being king."

After Savo had recovered from what he considered a very righteous indignation he sent for his trusty porter. [Pg 112]

"Well, Porter," said he, "is everything ready for the coronation?"

"Everything is ready, my King, save your shoes; and to-morrow is the event. The dwarf you sent to the woods took them with him."

"Go quickly and have the same shoemaker turn your king out another pair on time."

"My king, there is no relief in that; for he went with the dwarf, and neither can be found."

"By the clearness of my conscience, is there not one other in all my vast domain that can so fit my feet that my wrath shall not be called upon to fit him?"

"There was one this morning, my King."

"Is he not now?"

"He is, my King."

"What is he doing?"

"He is shoeing his soul."

"Shoeing his soul? What mean you?"

"A shoe is used to cover something that very much needs to be covered. Is it not, my King?"

"It is."

"As you know, this shoemaker was skilled at making shoes, and especially skilled in stealing leather, my King. He believed that the ease with which a king treads upon his handiwork will blot out the theft in procuring the leather. The story runs that this morning he went to the soup-house to get his usual bowl of soup. A stranger waited upon him. As he put the bowl to his lips the soup turned clear as water, and in it appeared two pictures. The first was the likeness of the stranger before him, and on his breast was the name, 'King Savoda.' The second represented himself standing before a great white throne. His soul was uncovered, and over it were written the names of the ones from whom he had stolen leather. His soul was the shape of a boot; and there he stood trying to make a shoe to cover it from the sight of Him who sat upon the throne as the Great Judge. The longer he looked the more fearful became the second. In a fit of despair he gulped down the soup so fast that it strangled him, and he fell dead at the counter. So, my King, is he not shoeing his soul? My King, the people say that Savoda, who was a stranger to the shoemaker, knew not what he saw in the bowl. He simply thought he was weak from overwork and, in keeping with his good nature, he straightway gave him a decent burial."

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"Ha, ha! The dreams of a porter frighten not his king. If there be no real workman about, find me a cobbler."

"A cobbler there is at the turn of the square, but, O my King, his failure at making you shoes will be equaled only by your success in cutting off his head." [Pg 114]

"Porter, you are wide-awake when you speak of cutting off heads. Take this leather and my measure to the cobbler. Remind him that to-morrow is the coronation, and that no shoes for the King means no head for the cobbler."

The porter departed, and the cobbler soon received the leather and the measure and the message and, despite the gloom of the latter, he worked bravely on until he had completed his task. Being very tired, he fell asleep. When he awoke he found that the cat had turned the candle over on one of the shoes, and, as a result, the upper was burned completely out. He had received just leather enough to make the shoes, and there was no more of that kind to be had. The hour of the coronation was near at hand. What was he to do? Just then the porter came in. Without saying a word he put the shoes under his arm and carried them to the king. As soon as the king saw them he ordered the cobbler's head to be taken off.

The cobbler had hardly finished kissing his wife and children when the king's soldiers seized him and began dragging him through the streets toward the block. A terrible voice then sounded forth. It was more like thunder than that of a human being's. The soldiers knew it was the voice of the great giant Lubercal; so they left the cobbler and hastened to save themselves. After giving the cobbler something to refresh him, the giant put him in one of his coat pockets and carried him off to his mountain home. The cobbler soon found there were two others in the pocket with him.

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"Ah," said they, "we are glad you are in here."

"Ah," said the cobbler, "you are no gladder than I. They were about to cut my head off out there."

How relieved I feel!"

"On the life of us," said they, "we don't see where the relief comes in. As we see it, you have simply exchanged a beheading for an eating. So certain were we to be eaten by the giant and his wife for supper that we had already said our prayers. As you are so big and tender, it may be the giant will feast upon you to-night and leave us for breakfast, giving us a chance to escape in the darkness. We are told that he always refreshes the one he is going to eat first. So, you see we are glad you are in here."

By this time the giant had reached his home. He took all three out, and said to his wife: "Here they all are. Prepare the cobbler first. The other two will keep."

We must now leave the cobbler and his friends to their fate with the giant and his wife, and return to the coronation at the palace. The palace is thronged with noblemen, and Savo is pacing up and down barefooted and bareheaded. We know why he is barefooted; but why is he bareheaded? He had the crown placed upon the throne instead of on his head. He did this he said in order to start a new custom; but it was simply to hide, if possible, the mishap with the shoe.

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The king and his noblemen soon sat down to supper. The order was, eat a while and boast a while. To make the events of the supper clear we must know something that took place at the gate just before the coronation.

The porter had served under the old King Mesina, and had kept fairly straight. Being a wise man, he saw that Savo was weak and his kingdom would soon fall, so he set about making himself whole. As soon as Savo cast aside the shoes because of the burnt one, he saw the possibilities of a fortune in the good one. His business that night was to sit at the palace gate and admit the guests. To every simple looking nobleman that passed he would hold up the good shoe and say: "How much am I offered for a shoe that is so fine the king will not wear it?"

At last there came a nobleman whose bluntness equaled the porter's wit. He took the shoe, and left the porter a bag of gold.

As has been said, the order at the supper was eat a while and boast a while.

Nobleman after nobleman told of some precious keepsake he had, and its history. At last they called on the nobleman with the shoe. He was so slow to respond that he was roundly hissed by the guests, as having nothing worthy the attention of a king. This was too much for nobility at a feast. He first told a strange story of how he came into possession of the shoe. Then he snatched it from his pocket so quickly that it dropped from his hand and fell plump into the king's dish of soup.

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"Soldiers of the king," said Savo, "cast the intruder into prison, and see that his head comes off bright and early to-morrow morning."

Thus ended the coronation. The guests departed, and Savo retired for the night. Just after the nobleman was placed in prison the giant Lubercal passed the palace gate and saw the porter asleep beside his bag of gold. Knowing what had happened, he took the porter and the bag of gold around to the prison. There was a huge chimney leading down into the cell where the nobleman was. The giant reached down and brought out the nobleman and put the porter in his place. The nobleman and his bag of gold were carried by the giant to his mountain home.

In the meantime what had become of the cobbler and his two friends?

They were still at the home of the giant, safe and sound, with no fear of being eaten. What had the giant meant by telling his wife to prepare the cobbler first? Simply that he had heard the conversation that passed among the three men in his pockets as he went home, and as he was of a rather grim but jovial nature he made pretence of devouring his captives. Of these three we know of the cobbler, but who were the two friends? One was the captain that Savo had put in prison for bringing the dwarf. The other was Savoda.

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The giant Lubercal thought that Savo might make away with them during the coronation, so he protected them in this way.

Early the next morning Savo sent word to the jailer to dispatch the man in the cell and bring the head to him. It was done; but, when the head was brought, Savo almost fell from his throne.

"My porter! my porter!" said Savo, "you have been dealt with foully. How dare you, Jailer, to turn the nobleman out and put my porter in his place? Soldiers of the king, seize the deceiver, and off with his head."

Before the soldiers could carry out the order the giant Lubercal appeared before the palace and sent his voice through the halls.

"Come, Savo," said he, "it is time to reckon."

The giant first took from his pocket the cobbler, who was red-eyed and sneezing, and bidding him no longer to fear King Savo, gave him his liberty. When the cobbler was set free he secured the burnt shoe, that it might remind him never again to fall asleep over his work, and hastened to his family.

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Lubercal then followed this by freeing the nobleman, with a similar injunction. When the nobleman was given his liberty, he distributed the bag of gold among the poor, and, after awaiting Savoda's coronation, departed to his own estates.

Then the giant Lubercal now, in keeping with King Mesina's will, put Savoda upon the throne, and made Savo gate-keeper.

A good giant was Lubercal? Well, he was not so good, after all, as one other act will show. Even giants must live by some law.

The law by which Lubercal was controlled allowed him to be king if he could steal the whole nation at once. To do this all the people must be gathered into one house. Lubercal's aim was to deceive the people into building a house large enough to hold them all, and then proclaim himself king.

He suggested to Savoda that he force his people to erect such a house, so that the whole nation might come together and celebrate his (Savoda's) accession to the throne. Savoda did so. After much time and labor, the house was ready. The morning of the fatal day arrived—the day on which Lubercal intended to put into execution his plan of stealing the throne and Savoda's people. Lubercal stood upon the mountain and sent his voice ringing over the country. Savoda and the people thought this a good omen, and expected the giant to come down and rejoice with them. While King Savoda was arranging his crown, in walked the dwarf.

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"Good morning, my King," said he. "I have come to rescue you and your people this day from the hands of the designing Lubercal." Noting Savoda's look of suspicion and incredulity the dwarf continued: "I see, my King, that you have little faith in my remark. Go you now to the temple, and ere the day is done you shall see your own salvation."

King Savoda and his people, after further insistence, though still not convinced, went to the temple, while the dwarf hastened to encounter the giant.

Again we must go back, in order to make clear events soon to be narrated.

Savo had been too silly to remain king, yet he was wise enough to see the force that removed him. He therefore set about finding the source of Lubercal's strength. While Lubercal was away he went up into the mountain and hid himself where he could see, but could not be seen. Lubercal soon came, and straightway tried to pull up a large tree by the roots. At first he failed to move it. He then went to a large cask containing fluid of some kind, and smelled it. At the next trial he pulled the tree halfway up. He went back to the cask and smelled again. Then he walked to the tree and with a slight effort snatched it from the ground and tossed it down the mountain.

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"Ah," said Savo, "I have the secret of your strength. It is in that fluid."

Then Lubercal sat down, and began to talk to himself of how his strength lay in smelling the fluid in the cask, and how his length of days depended upon the running of the old-fashioned clock that hung beside a tree.

That night, as the giant slept, Savo slipped to the cask and examined it. He found it had two chambers, and that the fluid was in the lower one. He climbed into the upper chamber, thinking he might find some way of letting the fluid out. He found none, and to his surprise smelling the fluid made him weak instead of strong. He soon became so weak he could not get out; so there he stayed until morning. At daybreak he first heard the giant's voice ringing over the country. He next heard the shouts of King Savoda and his people as they were hurrying to the great temple, and lastly, the small clear voice of the dwarf piping out a challenge to Lubercal.

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"Giant Lubercal, I have come to thwart your designs upon King Savoda and his people. Strength, I suppose will be your weapon; but wit shall be mine. The war is on. Here's at you."

"A flea in a kettle of hot water, my little man, is not more at a disadvantage than you are with me," said Lubercal; "but if you want a quick, easy death, come on."

At this the dwarf scratched the giant's great toe, but did not even make it bleed.

"For that, sir," said the giant, "you shall serve to whet my appetite for breakfast."

Now, according to an ancient custom, the giant could not eat a human being without first closing his eyes and saying a long blessing. While he was thus engaged, the dwarf turned himself into a fierce bird and circled above the giant's head. Every now and then he would strike the giant a stinging blow. After a hard struggle the giant succeeded in catching him. He held him tightly in his great hand; but in a flash the dwarf turned to a flea. The giant was not well proportioned. His body was large, with a deep crease between the shoulders, and his arms were so short they could not reach it.

The dwarf found the crease and began to bite. The giant soon became frantic. He ran to the tree; and, in trying to kill the dwarf, he broke the old-fashioned clock upon the running of which depended the length of his days.

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He lay upon his back and rolled and tumbled, and then with marvelous force he drew up his limbs and straightened them out. One of his feet struck the cask, and fluid and Savo were dashed down

the steep mountain-side. The once mighty Lubercal soon became so weak that the dwarf assumed his original form, tied a rope around his neck, and led him into the temple where King Savoda and his people were celebrating. At the dwarfs command Lubercal told the assembled multitude of his designs against them, and begged that he be allowed to return to his mountain home and breathe out his last as his forefathers had done. He returned, and soon a terrible wail told the people he was no more.

"Honor to whom honor is due," said King Savoda. "Let us honor the dwarf who has saved our whole nation. Truly, the power of his wit shall be felt in the affairs of this people."

"My great and good King," said the dwarf, "I am honored in being in your midst, and happy in seeing you happy. My life work is ended and I am ready to go."

As the autumn leaf falls withered to the ground, so the dwarf fell dead at the king's feet.

"My people," said King Savoda, "let us spend the rest of the day mourning for the dwarf and honoring his memory. How shall we best do this?" [Pg 124]

"My King," said an aged man, "I have a suggestion."

"What have you done that you should be allowed to even make a suggestion concerning so great a person as the dwarf," said the King.

"My good and wise King, look closely and you will see that I am the captain who was imprisoned for bringing the dwarf into this kingdom."

The King looked, and seeing the man had spoken truthfully, told him to draw near.

"You shall no longer be the captain of a ship, but the first of my wise men. We will follow your suggestion. Let us have it."

"My King," said the captain, "yonder mountain-top upon which the giant Lubercal now lies dead is a solid rock. I suggest that you send your best workmen in stone up there. As they look upon the giant, let them shape out of the rock his exact image with the arms extended. Let them lay a marble slab across the arms, and upon this place the image of the dwarf."

The King was so impressed with the suggestion that he sent hundreds of his best workmen to carry it out. A signal told when they had finished the work. Then the King, followed by the people bearing the body of the dwarf, ascended the mountain. He was much pleased with the images, and ordered that the bodies of the giant and the dwarf be buried in the solid rock side by side. [Pg 125]

As he started to leave he heard some one say:

"My brother, Savoda, I am nigh unto death. Hear me ere I depart."

The King turned and, seeing it was his brother Savo, clasped him in his arms, and placed a kiss upon his cheek. Savo in a few words begged his brother to forgive him for what he had done, told him of his adventure in the cask and how it ended. He then kissed his brother again and again, and expired. Savoda was so overcome that he had to be borne to his palace. Knowing their King's feelings in the matter, the workmen made an exact image of Savo, and placed it beside that of Lubercal, after which his body was buried close to the others. At the command of the king a huge stone was placed near the statues to remind the king and people of their duty.

Ever after that people would take their children to the mountain top and tell them the story of the king's shoes and the lessons to be learned from it.

King Savoda lived a long and useful life. His people loved him for his wisdom and goodness. He left twin sons to succeed him. They were so small that both sat in the same chair. They always agreed, and under them the kingdom flourished. They were so much like their father that the people called them the double king with one soul, borrowed from their father. [Pg 126]

HOW MR. RABBIT SECURES A PRETTY WIFE AND RICH FATHER-IN-LAW

[Pg 127]

Mr. Rabbit was hard to please in love affairs. Those upon whom his eyes fell were either too ugly or too poor, and in some cases both. At last he concluded that the greatest failure in the world is courting that does not end in a wedding.

He arose early one morning and sat down by the roadside to think over the different flowers along the path of love that had proven thorns to his soul. As he sat there, taking them up and dismissing one by one, with a frown on his face and a bachelor-like sourness in his soul, he chanced to see a beautiful maiden tripping over the meadows. As soon as he saw that she was pretty, he believed he loved her, as soon as he learned that her father was rich, he knew it.

"O soul, my poor wounded soul! a smile from yon creature of grace and beauty would cure you. Let us haste and secure the remedy. I can well afford to exchange a task like this for the smiles of so pretty a wife and her father's pocket-book."

Mr. Rabbit knew his only stock in trade was wit, so he sharpened this and visited the girl's father. [Pg 128]
He walked up to the old gentleman and said:

"Good morning, sir. My name is Mr. Rabbit. I have come to be your son-in-law, and your daughter has my letter of introduction."

The old gentleman was so surprised at Mr. Rabbit's words he did not call his daughter to test their truthfulness. He admired his visitor's boldness and readiness of speech and, after talking awhile, invited him out to breakfast. Having learned the girl's name during the conversation, Rabbit spoke to her on coming out, and also took her by the hand. Now, he carried in his hand a stamp bearing the words "I propose."

After breakfast the old gentleman asked his daughter if she had Mr. Rabbit's letter of introduction, and she answered by holding up her hand. Then he asked her if she had ever met him before, and she said she had not. Without further ado he seized Rabbit by the throat and said:

"My dear child, this whole thing has been forced upon you. Now, how shall I punish the impudent young whelp?"

"Why, father," said she in her sweetest tones, "let both of us punish him by making him your son-in-law."

Seeing that he could not withstand the combined forces of Cupid, his only daughter, and a wily lover, the old gentleman said: "Well, Mr. Rabbit, you may have the girl on the condition that you go down to the great frog settlement and prove that you are master of all the frogs there. This must be done by to-morrow at twelve o'clock." [Pg 129]

"It shall be done," said Mr. Rabbit.

He dressed himself as strangely as possible, and, taking a looking-glass in his hand, went down to the frog settlement. He stood by the branch and waved the glass until the frogs gathered around him.

"This is not the place," said he. "This is not the place."

"Yes, it is," said an old frog. "It is the very place that has been here all the time."

Mr. Rabbit looked again and said: "It is the place, sure enough."

"Didn't I tell you so?" said the old frog. "If this place had moved, we would have known it."

This served to open the conversation. While talking, Rabbit held the glass so the frogs could see themselves. He told them it was a soul-drawing machine, and that by looking into it the soul would come out of the body and go behind the glass.

"Do you know," said Rabbit, "why Mr. Snake swallows so many of you? It is simply to get your souls. As the soul is in the body, he must swallow the body, also. Let him see that the soul is out of the body, and he will no longer bother the body, but go after the soul. If the soul is behind the glass, he can't get it. So you see, gentlemen, every frog should have a glass. All he has to do is to carry the glass with him, and, when Mr. Snake comes, just hold it up so as to see himself. Mr. Snake, seeing the soul out of his reach, will scamper off." [Pg 130]

All agreed with Rabbit, but wanted to know where glasses sufficient for all could be had.

"Ah," said Rabbit, "that is my business here. I have come to build a factory for making them. All you have to do is to turn the wheel I will make. This wheel will turn the mill and out will come the glasses. There will be no charges."

The frogs agreed to turn the wheel as long as needed. Then Rabbit built a watermill for grinding wheat and corn, and put the wheel above the water. The frogs knew no better.

"In order to turn the wheel," said Mr. Rabbit, "you frogs must be divided into as many bands as there are paddles to the wheel. The first band must jump upon a paddle and force it down, then jump into the water and swim to shore ready for the next turn. Each band must do so in turn, and the wheel will go round. There are several things you must do. You must not be seen until I give the signal. Then you must come, start the wheel, and keep it going until I tell you to stop. At the second signal you must bellow as loudly as you can, or your souls will be so long in getting behind the glass that Mr. Snake will catch them. On the third signal you must dance as you come around, or the glass will be easily broken." [Pg 131]

All agreed, and said there should not be a single hitch in the programme.

Then Rabbit sent for his father-in-law to come, and bring his wheat with him. He did so; but laughed at Rabbit's mill-wheel.

"The wheat will be ground," said Rabbit, approaching the water and giving the signal agreed upon with the frogs.

At the first signal the frogs came by hundreds and sent the wheel over and over again in great haste. At the second signal they began to bellow; and, at the third, to dance. This procedure was continued, and in a short time the wheat was all ground.

"Now," said Mr. Rabbit, "I am not a member of the family as yet, but see what a means of income I am. How will it be further on? By the way, my father-in-law-to-be, how do you like the wedding-march my slaves are playing for me?"

"Very well, my son Rabbit, very well," said the old gentleman. "Come, let us have the ceremony." They then proceeded to the magistrate, when Mr. Rabbit and the young lady were duly wedded. [Pg 132]

What became of the mill? Mr. Rabbit cared nothing for a cheap affair like that when he had succeeded in securing a pretty wife and rich father-in-law.

What about the frogs?

There is no telling how long they turned the wheel, bellowed, and danced; or how they got the glasses from between the millstones.

THE LITTLE BOY AND MISTER DARK

[Pg 133]

My name is Little Boy, an' I'se gwine ter tell you er story 'bout myself an' Mister Dark. Once 'twuz night, an' my Mammy an' my Daddy an' my dawg an' my cat an' myself wuz in de big cabin-room. My Daddy, he dun skinned de rabbit fer de breakfast time, an' my Mammy, she dun stirred up de hoecakes fer ter go 'long wid de rabbit, an' I dun make up my mind ter sleep till I gits er appertite fer bofe de cakes an' de rabbit. Meanwhile my cat, she says: "Meaw, meaw!" an' my dawg's tail says: "I whop, whop on de floor."

Atter while my Mammy, she snored an' my Daddy, he snored, an' de cat meawed, an' de dawg's tail whopped on de floor, an' I got so skeered I could hardly keep comp'ny wid my own bref.

Den sump'in' happened. Mister Wind, he broke down de door an' roared in an' licked up de candle light. Den I shet my eyes an' listened fer my cat, but didn't heah no meaw. Mister Rain, he spattered down de chimbly an' swallowed up de fire. Den I put my hands over my face an' listened fer my dawg, but didn't heah no tail flopping on de floor. Atter bein' skeered er long time I spunked up an' opened my eyes, an' dere wuz Mister Dark es big es de cabin-room. [Pg 134]

Atter er nudder while I spunked up erg'in an' says I: "Mister Dark, whar does you live?"

Mister Dark says: "I lives everywhar when de sun's in bed." Den I asks him a r'al spunky question: "Mister Dark, how big is you?"

Mister Dark says: "I'se es big es de whole world when de sun's kivered up in bed."

Den I says: "Dis cabin-room's too little fer you. Jes leave it fer us."

Mister Dark, he says: "I'se gwine ter stay heah an' have sum fun outer you. Ef you's skeered, Little Boy, jes' call on yo' Daddy's snore an' yo' Mammy's dreams, an' yo' cat's meaw an' yo' little dawg's floppin' tail. You must read me a story. Heah's er book. Heah's specticle-glasses fer de dark. Now read an' let de fun begin."

I shakes my head, an' den I seemed jes' like er big piece o' gumbo. I wuz tall an' den short, an' in an' den out an' square an' den round. I says ter myself: "Ef I ends er foot ball, Mister Dark will have a great big kick cum'in'." All at once I felt de book in my hand, de specticle-glasses on my nose, an' I wuz tryin' ter read. I could read, an' den I couldn't. I'd call de fust wud, an' den dat wud would jump on all de udder wuds es I cum ter 'em, an' I'd jes' call dat wud right on frum de top ter de bottom o' de page. [Pg 135]

"Looker-heah, Little Boy," said Mister Dark, "you jes' cyarn't read. Let's all laf." Den Mister Dark chuckled er laf, an' Mister Rain spattered er laf, an' Mister Wind roared er laf, an' my cat meawed er laf, an' my little dawg flopped er laf wid his tail, an' I lafed jes' er little teeny bit, an' I wanted it back erg'in.

Mister Dark made er funny little noise, an' whut does you reckon happened? My cat wuz on one knee, an' my dawg on de udder. De specticle-glasses wuz on dey noses, an' dey read every wud in dat book. Now what does you reckon dem wuds wuz erbout? Dey wuz erbout dat wud dat played leap frog frum de top ter de bottom o' dat page when I tried ter read, an' erbout dat rabbit an' dem hoecakes, an' how I wuz gwine ter oversleep myself, an' how my mouf would wotter when I seed de rabbit's bones picked clean.

Den I said ter Mister Dark: "Mister Dark, you's pokin' fun at me, an' you's makin' my cat meaw fun at me an' my dawg flop fun at me wid his tail; but I'se gwine ter beat you in de end fer I'se gwine ter sleep."

"Scuse me fer readin'," meawed my cat, an' jumped down frum my right knee.

"Scuse me fer readin'," barked my dawg, an' jumped down frum my left knee. [Pg 136]

"Scuse us too," mumbled de book an' de specticle-glasses.

"Now, my Little Boy," said Mister Dark, "ef you'll jes' shet yo' eyes an' open yo' mouf you'll 'scuse me too to-morrow mawnin'."

I closed my eyes an' opened my mouf an' went ter sleep. I slept an' slept an' slept, an' at last I waked up. Mister Daylight wuz dere as big as de cabin-room, an' my Mammy wuz frying de hoecakes, an' my Daddy wuz stewin' de rabbit, an' when I got all de glue outen my eyelids I sed: "Mammy, I'se bin erway, an' I'se hongry."

"Give dat chile er cake," says Mammy.

"An' sum rabbit," says Daddy.

"An' give my cat an' dawg sum too," says I.

Den we all eat an' eat an' eat, an' all at once Mammy says: "Look-er-heah, chile, you dun growed er whole pound last night."

"Yas'm," says I, "an' it wuz dis way. While you all wuz er snorin' Mister Dark cumed in an' tried ter skeer me, but I jes' spunked up an' closed my eyes an' opened my mouf an' swallowed Mister Dark right down an' went ter sleep, an' course I'se bigger."

"Give dat smart chile er nudder cake," says Mammy.

Daddy puts de cake in my mouf, an' I starts ter swallow it 'fore I thinks ter say: "I thank you." Den I tries ter say it an' swallow at de same time, but I gits choked. Den I swallows an' swallows an' swallows jes' dis way (Imitate swallowing), an' at last I swallows it down. Den I reaches fer en nudder cake, but it ain't dere.

[Pg 137]

My cat, she meowed, an' my dawg's tail whopped on de floor, but I ain't gwine ter tell no more stories, no I ain't, till my Mammy makes more hoecakes, an' my Daddy stews more rabbit, an' de great big Mister Dark cums back ter make me grow an' give me er appetite.

OBSERVATION

[Pg 138]

"Madam," said the negro principal of a public school to an old negro woman who was washing, "I wish your boy to attend my school."

"Whose boy?" asked the old woman as she straightened up and wiped the suds from her arms.

"Your boy, madam."

"Well, ef he's my boy, I reckon I'll look atter him."

She placed one hand on the rim of the tub and resumed washing with the other.

Every few seconds she would change her position, allowing each hand a rest period. She would also change the pitch of a negro melody she was singing, accordingly.

"'Fesser," said she, "is you still waitin'?"

"I am, madam."

"'Fesser, you cyarn't git dis boy."

"Madam, I'll stay and argue with you."

"I won't argue wid you, 'fesser. I'se got ter argue wid dese suds. Does you heah?"

"Your boy, madam, is running wild."

[Pg 139]

"'Fesser, you don't need ter run. You kin jes' walk. I'se mighty perlite, but does you see dat gate?"

The principal started toward the gate. In passing an ant-hill he walked around it. As he reached the corner of the house a large fierce dog sprang at him. He spoke to the dog, and patted its head. The dog wagged its tail and followed him to the gate. After much trouble he opened and closed the gate and started off at a brisk pace.

"'Fesser! 'fesser!" cried the old woman, "you kin hab dis boy. Come back an' git him right now."

The principal returned and asked the old woman what had converted her.

"It was dem ways of yourn, 'fesser. You's got er mighty good heart in you, 'kase you walked erroun dem ants. Dat's jes' de heart I wants ter beat fer my boy. Dat dog bites most folks, but you jes' charmed all de fight outen him. My boy's got er lot of fight an' some meanness in him, but I sees you kin charm dem out. Most folks leaves dat gate open, but you jes' kept on till you closed it. I knows you'll keep at dis boy till you makes er man outen him. Heah's de boy, 'fesser. Jes' take him erlong."

As the principal and boy walked in the street the old woman stood at the gate and said: "Jes' look at dat boy of mine; he's walkin' lack de 'fesser erready."

[Pg 140]

Once upon a time a Mule, a Hog, a Snake, and a Boy met. Said the Mule: "I eat and labor that I may grow strong in the heels. It is fine to have heels so gifted. My heels make people cultivate distance."

Said the Hog: "I eat and labor that I may grow strong in the snout. It is fine to have a fine snout. I keep people watching for my snout."

"No exchanging heels for snouts," broke in the Mule.

"No," answered the Hog; "snouts are naturally above heels."

Said the Snake: "I eat to live, and live to cultivate my sting. The way people shun me shows my greatness. Beget stings, comrades, and stings will beget glory."

Said the Boy: "There is a star in my life like unto a star in the sky. I eat and labor that I may think aright and feel aright. These rounds will conduct me to my star. Oh, inviting star!"

"I am not so certain of that," said the Mule. "I have noticed your kind and ever see some of myself in them. Your star is in the distance." [Pg 142]

The Boy answered by smelling a flower and listening to the song of a bird. The Mule looked at him and said: "He is all tenderness and care. The true and the beautiful have robbed me of a kinsman. His star is near."

Said the Boy: "I approach my star."

"I am not so certain of that," interrupted the Hog. "I have noticed your kind and I ever see some of myself in them. Your star is a delusion."

The Boy answered by painting the flower and setting the notes of the bird's song to music.

The Hog looked at the boy and said: "His soul is attuned by nature. The meddler in him is slain."

"I can all but touch my star," cried the Boy.

"I am not so certain of that," remarked the Snake. "I have watched your kind and ever see some of myself in them. Stings are nearer than stars."

The Boy answered by meditating upon the picture and music. The Snake departed, saying that stings and stars cannot keep company.

The Boy journeyed on, ever led by the star. Some distance away the Mule was bemoaning the presence of his heels and trying to rid himself of them by kicking a tree. The Hog was dividing his time between looking into a brook and rubbing his snout on a rock to shorten it. The Snake lay dead of its own bite. The Boy journeyed on, led by an ever inviting star. [Pg 143]

THE NEGRO AND THE AUTOMOBILE

A white man wished to sell an old-time negro an automobile. To this end he took him a spin around the town. Soon something was in the way, and that "honk-honk!" warning was sounded.

"Boss," said the negro, "I don' see no wil' geese 'roun' heah."

As the automobile increased its speed the negro braced himself with his feet and gripped the seat with both hands.

"Is the machine running too fast?" asked the white man.

"I don' keer how fast you runs, but I does objects ter flying," said the negro.

The automobile was stopped and the white man got out. The "works" continued with that "chook-er-chook" sound. The negro, seeing that the wheels were not moving, sprang out excitedly.

"Will you buy the automobile?" asked the white man.

"No, suh," said the negro. "I don' buy no thing lack dat whut flies when hit's running, an' whut runs when hit's standing still. No, suh! Good-by! I'se gone!" [Pg 145]

FAITH IN THE WHITE FOLKS

It was night, and Elm Street was dimly lighted. From a negro eating-house that opened into the street came sounds of harsh voices and the rattling of pans. Rachel, the mulatto, who believed everything a white person did or said, and who tested all information with: "Did de white folks say so?" was tugging at her little grandson, who was selling papers.

"I can't sell papers here, grandma."

"Why, son?"

"The folks in the eating-house won't let me."

"Did de white folks say so?"

"No, ma'am. This route was given to another boy."

"Did de white folks do it?"

Just then some one threw a loaf of bread in the eating-house. It passed through the door and struck Rachel. Her little grandson pulled her apron and asked: "Did the white folks do that too?"

"No, child. Dis is de way of it. Dis bread will fatten de chickens. De chickens will sharpen de white folks' wits. De white folks, dey'll boss de niggers; and de niggers, dey'll be niggers still. Come on now, honey child, an' bring de bread erlong wid you." [Pg 147]

THE CANE AND THE UMBRELLA

[Pg 148]

A man who had never seen a cane or an umbrella chanced to be at a sale and bought one of each. He held the umbrella over him and tapped upon the ground with the cane as he walked. The wind rose suddenly. He boarded a car quickly without lowering the umbrella. Away went the car, and away went the umbrella.

He alighted from the car after riding several squares. He was tapping the ground with his cane as he walked.

"How are you?" said a man he had not seen for years, and extended his hand.

"How are you, old friend?" he replied and offered the hand that held the cane, giving his friend a severe whack.

"You rascal!" cried his friend, and knocked him down.

In falling he broke his cane and alighted near the fragments of his umbrella.

"Cane and umbrella," said he, "you are the cause of all my trouble."

*** END OF THE PROJECT GUTENBERG EBOOK NEGRO TALES ***

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