

ROMAIN'S LEGACY.

His Christmas Present to Mrs. Blake and Her Children.



ONLY two days until Christmas! How different this will be from the one I looked forward to this year!" thought Mr. Romain as he restlessly paced the wide porch of his handsome home.

"How pleasant the air is—warm and balmy as spring! Exquisite, if one had some one to enjoy it with; but I'm lonesome. Poor Tom! How I hoped to see you again, to tell you that the fault was mine in that quarrel; and you are dead—buried only last week, they tell me—and I am back in Old Virginia, with never a child or a chick to bid me welcome."

"Dood-mornin', Mister Man; will you please tum to ye nauction?"

As these words fell on his ear, Mr.



MR. ROMAIN TURNED AND SAW TWO CHILDREN.

Romain turned and saw two little children standing on the steps, a chicken held tightly under the arm of one of them.

"They were pretty children, too—a boy and a girl, exactly the same size. Blonde curls crowned each shining head; brown eyes, with long, curling lashes, looked frankly out from under straight, clear-cut eyebrows, and two little pug noses turned up merrily from the little rosy mouths that were always smiling beneath. No, not always; for there was a frightened little quiver about them now, as their owners looked up timidly at the stern, handsome man who was so earnestly regarding them.

"Come to your what?" repeated Mr. Romain.

"To our nauction," the boy explained. "Papa's gone to Heaven, and we's goin' to have a nauction; it's to det money, you see; we's goin' to sell all our sings. Mamma says ye more ye folks come, ye more we'll det money; and if dere's enough, we's not goin' to sell my wookin' horse. I ae det Piekie, dis here chicken, sate me and Rosy take turns holdin' her, but we can't take ye horse. I dese we'll do now."

"Did your mamma send you?" asked Mr. Romain.

"Oh, no! she's cryin', an' we dus fought we'd help ask folks. Please tum, Mr. Man."

And smiling in a friendly but half-frightened fashion, the children trotted down the walk. As their little figures vanished, Uncle Peter came around the house.

"Who are those children, uncle?" queried Mr. Romain, gazing after them.

"Dey's po' Massa Blake chilluns, sah. Yo' members I tote you how Massa Tom done die las' week; well dey's his twins. Dey do say it's scandalous how Miss Blake's bein' treated. Massa Tom done sign a note fur a genneman, an' he can't pay, an' dey is ter be a auction dere to-morrow, an' Massa Tom not dead a week yet scasily. Po' Miss Blake!"

That night Mr. Romain sat up late in his library, reading over letters and papers he had not seen in ten years—not since the day he had had that quarrel with Tom Blake, for it was that same morning he had received a cablegram calling him to Europe to take possession of a large estate left him, and yesterday he had reached home for the first time since his hurried departure.

"I was just beginning my battle with the world then," he mused; "now I feel like a warrior, battle-scarred and lonely. How enthusiastic Tom and I were then! how close our friendship was!"

And taking up an old letter, a low laugh burst from his lips as he read its witty allusions to an almost forgotten college scrape.

A very different look came into his

face as he glanced down the pages of the next letter which met his eye, and read:

"MY DEAR FELLOW: After all, I find I can lend you that money. I have seen old Brown, and he is willing to give it if I mortgage the Meadow Farm. I don't like mortgages, but we must save your home. Brown imagines there is coal under that land. I think not. I'll tell you a secret, though. I know there is under the field adjoining."

"In ten years I hope to have money to open my mining land; meantime I'll use my Meadow Farm to save your home, and you can repay me before the mortgage falls due. I had intended to settle both farms on Nellie as soon as we were married; so if anything happens to me, my dear boy, you may consider Nellie and her interests your legacy from

"Yours as ever, TOM."

"To think I threw away a friendship like that!" almost groaned Mr. Romain, as he laid down the paper. Then a sudden thought struck him, and he hastily rang the bell.

"Uncle Peter," he said, "who owns what used to be Mr. Tom Blake's Meadow Farm?"

"Old Mr. Brown, sah; he got powerful rich on dat farm. Yo' see, sah, hit's got a coal-mine in it. Oh, yes, sah, he's rich."

"And Tom mortgaged that land to save my old home," thought Mr. Romain, sorrowfully. "I wonder if it could be that the check I sent from England did not get to him in time? In any case he's dead, and Nellie and the children penniless, and—" glancing at the letter again—"a legacy to me!"

"An auction almost at Christmas eve! Why, it seems fairly barbarous," thought Mr. Romain, indignantly, as he entered what had been the pleasant home of his friend Tom, and was so soon to be left desolate under the hands of the auctioneer.

It was early in the day, but already the house was filled with neighbors who had come from miles around to attend the sale; and as Mr. Romain moved among them his ears were constantly greeted with remarks on the foolishness of "signin' for people."

Sick at heart, he entered the little kitchen back of the house, which was as yet unoccupied, save by Mrs. Blake's faithful old colored cook, Aunt Nancy. She was sitting on a split-bottomed chair, rocking herself to and fro, and occasionally wiping her eyes with her blue-checked apron.

"Where is your mistress, auntie?" Mr. Romain asked.

There was a kindly ring in his voice that unlocked the old woman's burdened heart, and she sobbed aloud as she answered:

"Oh, massa, she done took de chilluns, an' gon' to her cousin's Miss Rachel. It jest broke my po' ole heart to see 'em go! But Miss Blake say she couldn't staid it here, an' dey have to go soon sure. Po' things! only de good Lord know what's to come of dem, she say."

"Oh, massa, hit's awful hard on missis, dis is. She went all over de house dis mornin' tryin' to say good-bye to it. De little ones a-cingin' to her kep' a pickin' up things. 'Mamma, dey won't take my wookin' horse, will dey?' 'Mamma, will de nauction man det my little chair?' dey ask. Missis tried to hol' back de tears an' speak chirk to dem chilluns, but when she come to her own room she say: 'You stay out here, darlings; mamma wants to go in here alone.' I took de chilluns, but presently I peek in de room, an' dere was my po' missis, a kneelin' before massa's big arm-chair, wid her head a-lyin' on de big family Bible dat she'd put on de chair; she had her arms around dat, an' she was cryin' softly."

"Oh, my husband!" she whispered over and over, an' den she say:

"A fader to de faderless, a husband to de widow. Dear Lord, let dis cup pass from me."

"I shot de do' den. By'm by she come out, all white an' tremblin', but she tried to smile on de chilluns as she led dem down the walk."

"Dose po' little things! Rosy was huggin' her rag doll an' tryin' to hide it under her apun, an' Romain was totin' Piekie, de chicken, clost in he arms. 'De nauction man can't take mamma's chilluns, an' so he can't take ours,' dey'd keep sayin'."

"Romain?" repeated her visitor.

"Yes, sah, Romain; dat's for a frien' of Massa Tom's; Massa not see him for years, but he talk a heap o' Mr. Romain."

"Thank God! Tom forgave me," whispered Mr. Romain, as he left the kitchen in response to the business-like tones of the auctioneer that now rang out clear and cold as he began offering the parlor furniture.

Great was the indignation of one spectator when the first bid of a tall, handsome stranger carried the price far beyond the sum she had mentally decided on, and he secured it without opposition.

Her feelings were soon shared by most of those present, for a similar scene took place over almost every article offered for sale, from Mrs. Blake's piano to Romain's rocking-horse. The stranger outbid every one, and was soon sole possessor.

He even became the owner of the farm

and stood the only active bidder against him being the representative of Mr. Brown for the field adjoining his coal-mine.

Mr. Brown had not expected to meet with any opposition, and so had set the limit his representative was to pay at a very moderate figure. This Mr. Romain instantly outbid, and so secured the whole.

As soon as the auctioneer announced the close of the sale, Mr. Romain asked the astonished and disappointed crowd to please vacate the premises as soon as possible, as he had bought every thing for a lady who would take possession of her property that night.

The people filed slowly out, and Mr. Romain was at last left alone with a lawyer he had brought, the auctioneer



"HE TALK A HEAP O' MR. ROMAIN," and the holder of Mr. Blake's unfortunate obligation. All the claims against the property were very soon met, and then, after seeing the gentlemen depart, Mr. Romain hastened to the little kitchen.

"Go for your mistress, auntie," he said, "and ask her to please bring the children and come back at once. There is a paper she must read."

When Aunt Nancy delivered this message, a few minutes later, to Mrs. Blake, she was greatly surprised; but, with the patience born of deep suffering, she at once called the children to accompany her, and went home, wondering, as she walked along, how she was to endure the agony of seeing her home despoiled of its treasures.

She had dreaded the sight of wagons and people moving her goods, and, as she entered the gate, was astonished to see no one. Only Rollo, the old dog, lay basking in the last rays of the setting sun, and bounded up to meet them. The children ran joyfully up the walk, and at the sight of the rooms, when they entered, cried gleefully: "Why, mamma, may be dere wasn't no nauction!"

Mrs. Blake gave herself no time to think, but hastened from one room to another, seeking the lawyers, until she came to her own room.

How pretty and homelike it still looked! There was her husband's big arm-chair, still drawn up to the table, just as she had left it; the family Bible still lay on its seat, but on it lay something she had not left there, and as she picked it up she read her own name on the big envelope. With fingers trembling so she could hardly use them, she tore it open and read:

"MY DEAR MRS. BLAKE: When you read the inclosed letter, written twelve years ago, by my friend and your husband, I think you will not deny it is my right to give you the inclosed deeds, etc., securing to you your home. He gave me mine."

"I find Mr. Brown hurried this sale to secure the land adjacent to his coal-mine. It is very valuable, and in a few years will make you rich."

"And now, my dear friend, to-morrow can not be to you a Merry Christmas, but with brave cheerfulness I hope you will make it to your children not an unhappy one. I am very sincerely your friend, as I was your husband's friend."

"JOHN ROMAIN."

"A father to the fatherless, a husband to the widow." Once again the words fell from the lips of the weeping woman, who for the second time that day knelt by the old arm-chair.

Then clasping her children in her arms, she cried:

"Thank God with me, my darlings; we have a home once more!"

"And is de nauction clear gone away, mamma?" Romain asked, anxiously.

"All gone, my treasure; every bit gone, thank God!"

"Then," said little Romain, carefully pulling out Susanna Louise from under his apron, "get down Piekie and Rosy on, folks, an' les have Christmas!"

Anna Pierpont Sivilier, in Santa Claus

A Christmas Recipe.

Take about eight quarts of unselfishness and unadulterated charity; mix briskly with a liberal supply of generosity, kindness and forbearing love. Simmer gently over a slow fire of forgiveness, good-will and good-fellowship. Put in a dash of cheerfulness and a plentiful sprinkling of smiles, and serve piping hot with your Christmas dinner.—Judge.

YVES' PENANCE.

TEN LIVES FOR ONE.

EDITED BY

LADY GEORGINA FULLERTON.

CHAPTER I. (CONTINUED.)

And so the three children went their different ways—Aubin to his comfortable bed, Armelle to her father's wretched hut, but poor little Maclou to a kennel where Marcotte's watch-dog used to live.

Aubin went to his home with a light step and heart, and yet he knew that he had incurred a punishment. No matter; better so than that poor little Maclou should suffer unjustly, or that his own kind parents should be grieved by this new instance of his brother's violence. Still Aubin was but a child, and brave as he was he liked being punished as little as any other child; so he turned a little out of the way to say a prayer at the foot of an old wayside cross, where he often brought his childish troubles and difficulties. At the foot of this rude Calvary, in a niche, stood an image of Our Lady. It was made of the coarsest pottery; over it hung a box, into which the village children now and then dropped a sou, and the shepherds often laid bunches of broom and heather on the steps. There she stood in her little niche, smiling on every one, and holding out her child to the poor and suffering, to young and old; there was no rich canopy over head, no jeweled decked her crown; only the blue sky above her, and the sweet wild-flowers at her feet. No trained voices sang anthems in her honor; but many a "Hail Mary" was whispered, many a simple hymn sung before her. And the birds perched on the arms of the cross, and greeted her with their carols. Ah! many were the confidences breathed into her ear; many the good resolutions formed at her feet; many a mother came there to pray for her children, and countless blessings fell from her sweet hands on bent heads and aching hearts. "Our Lady of the Road," they called her; and I am sure she showed the road to heaven to many a suppliant.

Aubin knelt down on the steps, laid a bunch of wild-flowers on them, and prayed for strength to do right, then for all he loved—not forgetting the straw-cutter's little girl—and lastly, for Marcotte. As he crossed the threshold of his home, he thought he caught a glimpse of Armelle crossing the yard, and carrying something white, and a large basket. But what could Armelle be doing at the farm? He entered the big room where meals were taken; his brother was there, but neither of his parents. He asked the carter where they were. The man pointed silently to the door of the inner room, and Aubin, startled and a little frightened, sat down by the fire, and Labrie, his dog, couched at his feet. For this inner room was one which was only used on solemn and important occasions; the children of the house, indeed, were never allowed to enter it till the day of their First Communion. Afterwards they were only admitted for very grave reasons. To be sent for into the inner room was an alarming event.

Limping Louison now came in, full of consternation, exclaiming that one goose was missing, and at the same moment Jean and Marthe came in. Both looked very grave, and there were traces of tears in Marthe's eyes; but the master took his place as usual, said grace, and supper began. There was plenty of talking at the meal, much joking with Louison, and many compliments to the mistress on her cookery. The farm-servants discussed everything which concerned the interest of their employers with a kind of filial eagerness which is peculiarly Breton, and the farmer, in return, treated them more like children than inferiors. On this particular evening, however, his words were few and short; and the servants were on the point of withdrawing, when he said to the herdsmen:

"Are all the cattle right?"

"Yes, master."

"Jaquet?" (to the shepherd), "did you count the sheep and goats?"

"Ay, master; they are all right."

"And your geese, Louison?"

"There is one short." And the old servant cast a pitying glance at Aubin.

The farmer turned to his son.

"You have been careless," he said severely. "Careless shepherds must be punished. Your godfather made you present of six francs on New Year's day; the goose you have lost was worth quite as much as that; you have forfeited the money; others must not suffer for your fault."

"No, father, you are quite right."

"Now children, it is bed-time, come and say good night."

Yves came slowly forward, and as he knelt at his father's feet, Jean said in a low and broken voice, "take warning, Yves; do not disgrace your father."

Aubin meanwhile had gone to his mother for her blessing; and as she

laid her hand on his head, and said with great earnestness: "May God bless thee, as I do."

Aubin was not long before he fell asleep, and dreamed that he saw Armelle busily employed in removing the wings of the dead goose. As she did so, they grew larger and larger. She fastened them to Aubin's shoulders; and to his surprise and delight, he began flying about like a bird or an angel. A rough shake aroused him from his dream. Yves was standing by his bed with an excited expression.

"If you dare to say a word!" he muttered.

"What about?"

"You know well enough, it's lucky for you that only I heard you just now talking about the geese, and Armelle and angels, and the crown-piece."

"You know quite well, Yves, that I never meant to say a word."

This little incident will show the character of the brothers. As Yves grew older, his mother's anxieties increased. She was very gentle with the stubborn, ill-conditioned boy, always reproving him with kindness, often with tears. She never praised his brother to him, for fear of exciting his temper; and with a mother's patient hopefulness she was always trying to find some tender spot in his heart, but all in vain. The Abbe Ker-dre was untiring in his efforts for the amendment of this black sheep of his fold; but it really seemed as though the boy had neither heart nor conscience. The jealousy with which he had always regarded Aubin had become something terribly like hatred, ever since the story of the geese; he never would believe but that Aubin had told his mother everything. He was right in thinking that Marthe knew the truth, though not from his brother. The straw-cutter's little daughter could not feel easy in her honest child's conscience at receiving Aubin's present. A fat goose would be very nice for supper, certainly; but was it quite right? And so, while Aubin was praying at the Calvary, she had taken the goose to the farmer's wife, and told her the whole story in confidence; for she did not forget Aubin's wish to screen his brother. Marthe was very much touched; she scooped down and kissed Armelle, telling her to keep the goose as a present from her, and giving her besides a loaf and a bottle of wine. So now there was a secret between Marthe and little Armelle.

Then came a time when there seemed to be a hope of Yves changing for the better. The boys were preparing for their First Communion; and certainly, both the cure and Jean and Marthe thought he was impressed by the instructions he had received. He was less gloomy and jealous, and once or twice he threw his arms round his brother, and earnestly asked his forgiveness. The eve of the great day came; and when the boys knelt to ask pardon of their parents for all they had ever done to offend them, Yves covered their hands with kisses and tears. Poor Marthe! It seemed to her like her firstborn's second and better birthday. When the family returned from the Mass, at which the children had received their Lord for the first time, the parents led them into the inner room, and Jean Patriarch opened a large book which lay upon the table, and told the boys that it had been in the house for two hundred years. It was the book of the Holy Gospels, and on the fly-leaf were written important family events—births, marriages, etc.

"After this great day," said the farmer, "should you commit any serious fault, God forbid it should be a crime, I should be obliged to write it down in this book. May this necessity never occur! Here, my children, write down your names; and may God give you grace and strength to live and die His faithful servants!"

There was character shown in the very way in which the lads signed their names. Yves scrawled his in a hasty slap-dash fashion, Aubin wrote his slowly, feeling as he did so the solemnity of the occasion, and of his father's words. Jean added the date of the month and the year, and the children left the room in silence. From this time the servants called them "our young masters," which much gratified the self-importance of Yves. Still, that was a small matter; and the boy seemed so altered for the better, that for the next six months Marthe was happy.

At the end of that time, however, the old anxieties returned. He went seldom to church; he grew cold and served with his mother; complaints of him were constantly being brought to his father. One day he had turned some cows into a clover-field; on another he had overturned a neighbor's beehives, or robbed his orchard. Jean's remonstrances were met by indifference or insolence; and by degrees Yves took to frequenting the tavern on Sundays, and keeping company with lads as idle and mischievous as himself; and now there was always one empty seat in the family bench at church, one absent at the evening meal on Sunday. The unhappy boy had be-