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His Christmas Present

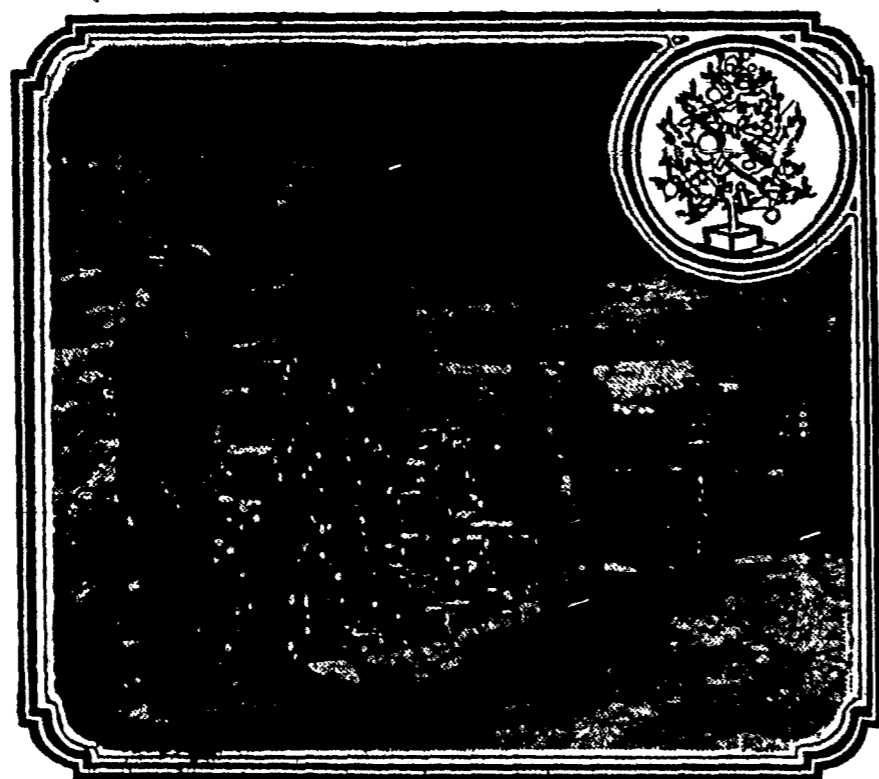
TALE OF A FAMILY QUARREL AND A MYSTERIOUS BOX

By H. E. REALE

(Copyright, 1924, by Hamilton Muske)

I of being at home I was obliged to ride through sleet and snow. About 12 o'clock I rode up to a farmhouse and asked the farmer if he could give me something to eat. "Y' bet," he replied. "Y' kin have the best in the house, and no pay." He stood in the doorway, and at his side was a little boy about four years old, on whose curly locks his hand rested affectionately. Within I could see a young woman setting a table, while before a fireplace sat a young man. All seemed naturally interested in me, a stranger, but the little boy's eyes were full of childish wonder. I alighted, my horse was put up and I dined with the family. After dinner I lighted a cigar, offered the men a smoke and said to the farmer: "Now I want you to tell me what makes you so happy today?" "Well, stranger, they say a man that's suddenly got somepin' fust rate wants to talk about it, so here goes." He took the little boy in his lap and began: "When my ole woman died—Sary's mother there—Sary was 'bout fourteen

be Sary. I jumps up, prayin' that it was Sary, and went to the door. There stood a bent ole man with a long white beard. If he'd been fat, I'd thought he might be Santa Claus. A box was a-settin' by him. He looked at me and axed was I Juddins Brough, and I said that was my name. "I got a Christmas box fur y'," he said. "Who from?" I axed. "I was forbid to tell, and I was forbid to leave it unless y' promise not to open it before 9 o'clock." "Waal, I says, 'I hain't had no Christmas gift fur five year, but I reckon I kin wait, specially since it's only a few minutes.'" "Y' must be keeful of it," he said, settin' it down soft'y, "and when y' open the box take the nails out easy like, so's not to injure what's inside. It's perishable." "I'm not likely to harm the first present I've got since my darter went away. D' y' think it's from her?" "I'm only a-bringin' it to y'," he says. "Have y' got a darter?" "I had onct." Then it struck me that mebbe Sary had jined her moth-



CHRISTMAS TREES FOR THE CITY CHILDREN.

THE Christmas trees are assorted according to size and quality. Tall ones are the favorites for churches and homes with ample space between floors and short ones for the city rooms and flats. A tree with long lower branches is generally preferred. When laden with presents the branches spread and give a graceful outline.

year old. She was a likely little gal and stepped right into her mother's place in takin' keer of the house, and every year I got more dependent on to her. Five year ago, when she was 'bout eighteen, that galoot over there—the young man referred to as the galoot grinned—"come a-sparkin' of her. What was to become of me if he married her he didn't seem to caren himself. I didn't keer to give her up without a fight, and give him fair warnin' that if he come nosin' round the farm I'd empty the load in that shotgun hangin' agin the wall up there. This had the effect to keep him away; but, Lord, what's the use keepin' a feller from a gal when the gal-they're all sick as greased cats—kin go to the feller? Sary lit out one day and lef' her ole dad in the lurch. Didn't y' Sary?" "Yes, pop."

"She jined Ben there, and they was married. They didn't dare come 'round here, but they sent a letter implorin' forgiveness. I didn't send 'em no answer, so they jist never tuk no more notice of me. That's 'bout it, ain't it, Sary?" "Y' struck it jist right, pop." "Y' knowed I'd riddle y' if I got sight of y', didn't y', Ben?" The young man grinned again, but made no reply. "I passed the ornariest five years," continued the farmer. "I ever spent in my life. Lonesome? Ben and Sary jist let me alone and didn't show up nowhere. The fust three years I spent cussin' 'em, but the fourth year I thought if they'd come back I'd forgive 'em. The fifth year I went a-huntin' fur 'em, but didn't get no track of 'em."

"The wust times I had was the hollidays. When Christmas come along, I allus went to town. Meetin' the crowds was better 'n sittin' here all alone, but the crowds was bad enough, fur everybody was a-buyin' somethin' fur somebody and 'minded me that I didn't have nobody to buy anything fur. I allus got to thinkin' of the days when Sary was a little gal and we hung up her stockin' and it bulged on Christmas mornin', and how them black eyes of her'n danced when we drawed the things out, makin' b'lieve they'd got stuck, so's to take 'em out slow."

"Last night was the fifth Christmas eve I'd spent alone, and it didn't seem 's if I could git through it. I was a-sittin' here before the fire a-lookin' over the backlog, picturin' in my mind the faces of them as had gone, a-hopin' I'd jine some on 'em before another Christmas, when there was a rap at the door. I give y' my word, stranger, it was the fust rap on that door any Christmas since Sary lit out. Seemed 's if some on 'em was a-comin' back sure. It couldn't be Sary's mother, fur she'd gone to where they don't come back from. It might

be Sary. I jumps up, prayin' that it was Sary, and went to the door. There stood a bent ole man with a long white beard. If he'd been fat, I'd thought he might be Santa Claus. A box was a-settin' by him. He looked at me and axed was I Juddins Brough, and I said that was my name. "I got a Christmas box fur y'," he said. "Who from?" I axed. "I was forbid to tell, and I was forbid to leave it unless y' promise not to open it before 9 o'clock." "Waal, I says, 'I hain't had no Christmas gift fur five year, but I reckon I kin wait, specially since it's only a few minutes.'" "Y' must be keeful of it," he said, settin' it down soft'y, "and when y' open the box take the nails out easy like, so's not to injure what's inside. It's perishable." "I'm not likely to harm the first present I've got since my darter went away. D' y' think it's from her?" "I'm only a-bringin' it to y'," he says. "Have y' got a darter?" "I had onct." Then it struck me that mebbe Sary had jined her moth-

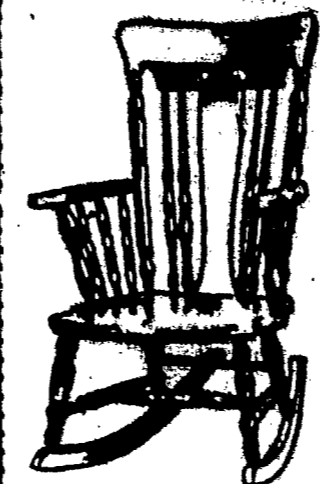


"WHAT MAKES YOU SO HAPPY TODAY?" "er, but when I looked there was nothin' there. I gets the hatchet and goes to work at the cover of the box, but there was nothin' but tacks into it, and after loosenin' 'em a bit I pulled the hull thing right off. As I did so I heard—what did I hear, Jud?" he asked of the child in his lap. "Merry Christmas, grandpop!" laughed the boy. "You kin guess the rest. And that's the reason why y' kin have the best in the house, and no pay neither."

Then He Took Another. Comfort Brown—Don't you think it nonsensical, all this kising under the mistletoe? Thomas Tubbs—Sure thing! But a little nonsense now, and then is related by the best of men—and women!



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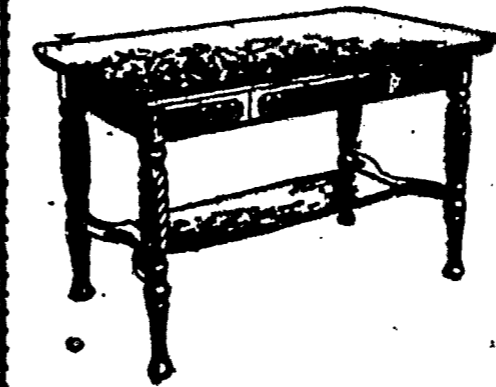


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That it takes more than muscle to make a man.
That bigness is not greatness.
That it requires pluck to be patient.
That selfishness is the most unmanly thing in the world.
That consideration for mother and sister does more to mark a gentleman than the kind of necktie he wears.
That the only whole man is a holy man.
That to follow the crowd is a confession of weakness.
That the street corners are a poor college.
That one real friend is worth a score of mere acquaintances.
That to be afraid to be one's noblest self is greatest cowardice.
That it is never too soon to begin to make a man of one's self.
That what is put into the brain to day will be taken out of it ten years hence.
That the only manliness worth possessing is shown in the life of the Son of man.—Selected.