A New Year's Meditation

THE earth was brown and bare and cold.
Another year had swiftly rolled
Its twelve months round, and as its life went out it seemed
To bring to mind all the fond hopes that man had dreamed,
Which in the waking never were fulfilled,
Every disappointment that had chilled
A single heart, every broken vow
Each day had known, and now
The year was going, with bowed and heavy head.
The whole earth sad
And nature, too, seemed dead.

The heavens looked with pity on the earth below
And to hide its desolation sent the snow.
All that long night the soft white flakes were whirled,
And when the morning came their innocence and purity had clothed the world.
A bright New Year had dawned, which did not know
The sin and sadness that had come a year ago.
The past was covered. God had sent this untried year to give
Another chance to man, that he might wake and hope and live.
—Outlook.

New Year's Calls

PERHAPS the only distinct Dutch custom that afterward came into widespread use in the United States, though now discontinued was the New Year's calls of the gentlemen on their lady friends.

The main thing to be accomplished on New Year's day was a certain number of calls made on one hand and a certain number received on the other. That being the game, who [illegible] and compare notes. [illegible] who came in [illegible] "Happy New Year! Lovely day, isn't it? Yes this is my [illegible] Jack [illegible] lard and I am going to make fifty. Thanks, I believe I will. I remember your lemonade [illegible]. Happy New Year!" seemed to live up to the requirements of the day.

Grandmother had pronounced views as to the morality of serving anything of an intoxicating nature on New Year's day. As she said, "It would not matter if ours were the only house visited, but when a man sets out to call on fifty people and takes a little wine at each house he is none the better for it, and, besides, it is a poor example for young men and a bad beginning for the new year."—Charles Battell Loomis.

The Best Gift of All.

Of all the gifts that come to cheer
The best one is a brand new year
Snow wrapped and holly decked it comes
To richest and to poorest homes

Twelve jeweled months all set with days
Of priceless opportunities
A silver moon and a golden sun,
With diamond stars when the day is done

And over all a sapphire sky.
Where pearly clouds go floating by.
Joy to you for the year that brings
So many and such precious things.
—Bertha E. Jacques.

ELECTING A PRESIDENT.

Power of Congress to Deal With Electoral College Returns.

The electoral commission established the precedent that congress should not seek to go behind certificates regularly submitted by recognized state governments. That principle is also embodied in the Edmunds law of 1887, which defined and enlarged the power of congress to deal with electoral college returns.

This act directs that if any state shall have provided by law before the selection of electors for the final determination of contests regarding their appointment the state's decision shall be final unless the regularity of the state's action is questioned by both houses of congress.

If two or more returns are received these rules govern:

First.—If the state shall have determined that the votes forwarded in one of the returns were given regularly those votes shall be counted.

Second.—If two authorities, each claiming regularity, shall both have determined that the different sets of voters were regularly cast then congress must decide which set shall be accepted.

Third.—If the state shall have made no determination then congress shall [illegible]. But if the houses cannot agree the votes of those electors whose appointment is certified by the governor shall be counted.

The general purport of the act is to recognize the right of congress to decide all disputed questions in regard to the counting of electoral votes which the state has not decided or has decided irregularly.—New York Tribune.

BUILDING A BOOK.

Cases Where the Ending Was Written Before the Beginning.

There has been more than one instance in the history of literature of a book being written upside down—that is, its end becoming its beginning or its beginning becoming its end.

Probably the most outstanding instance of the topsy turvydom is "The Idylls of the King." Tennyson's great masterpiece. As every poetry lover knows, this great series of poems ends with "The Passing of Arthur," and there can be no doubt that this is the proper and inevitable close of the wonderful pageant of the king's life. But Tennyson wrote that closing passage when he was a youth of twenty, and it was not until forty years later, the whole series was finished and published in one book that the old poem of his boyhood was found to fit into its place as naturally as the broken arm or foot of a classical statue fits the place from which it has been removed. Thus the first became last.

A case of double change is presented by the novel "David Harum." The first part of that book to be written by the author constitutes now chapters 19 to 24—that is, almost the last chapters in the book. Then, when the author had practically finished his book, he found that two of his main characters were not introduced to the reader at all until he was halfway through the work. He therefore wrote last of all the two opening chapters for the express purpose of introducing these two essential personages to the reader. This is probably a record case of topsy turvy authorship.—Pearson's Weekly.

The Larch In Labrador.

The soil and atmosphere are so cold and dry in Labrador that scarcely any vegetation thrives at all. The larch is a species of pine tree which is found in all northern countries, but its growth is so stunted in Labrador that a specimen found on the most southern part of that dreary land was but nine inches in height and the trunk was but three-eighths of inch in diameter. A careful examination of the miniature tree revealed its age to be at least thirty-two years, for there were that number of ring growths shown in its small trunk. The very cold currents pouring down from the north and the fact that Labrador has less sunshine than Alaska, together with several inland climatic conditions, make the summer seasons shorter and colder than are those of Alaska.—Exchange.

Durable.

"I want a slogan," said the manufacturer of phonograph records, "something that will convey the idea that our records never wear out."

The advertising man lit a fresh cigarette and thought for eight seconds by the clock.

"How will this do?" he asked. "One of our dance records will outlast the best hardwood dancing floors ever built."—New York World.

Raw Food Must Be Washed.

"Gritting of sand between the teeth while eating vegetables raw is a certain sign that they have been cleaned improperly, if at all," says the New York Medical Journal and adds that because of improper washing it is often not safe to eat raw vegetables, salads or fruits.

Never Again.

"Does your wife ever make you exchange goods she buys and doesn't like?"

"She tried that once, and only once. I exchanged a silk dress for a meerschaum pipe."—Louisville Courier-Journal.

Scared Him Into It.

Young Widow—Did you have any trouble getting Jack to propose? Girl Friend—No, dear; I told him you were after him.—Boston Transcript.

A Long Siege.

After a siege of twenty-four years Turkey took Candia from Venice in 1669.

The Seasons

THE winds that sigh in the forest
The leaves that drift to the ground,
The fleeting clouds and the moon beams
That cast their halo around

Bespeak the coming of Winter,
His hoary head in the blast,
His blanket of white about him
And his breath that chills so fast

The changing seasons are coming
And going and coming again,
The autumn, winter and summer,
Then spring with its April rain.

The seasons are passing ever,
Today as in olden time,
And always leaving a message
Both simple and sublime

And each for the other preparing,
They come and go as of yore.
And swiftly the springtime passes
For the rich as well as the poor

The summer time comes upon you,
A season of greatest toil,
The earth and the air combining
To bring a reward from the soil;

The leisurely days of autumn,
With the harvest all complete,
The children, laughing and singing—
A music joyful and sweet

And at last the winter, approaching,
Will bring a pause and a rest,
For the soul of the toiler wearies,
And the seasons bring what is best
—W. H. Justin.

Good Cheer on New Year's Day

WHEN I was a girl of sixteen I received one New Year's day in an old New York family of Dutch name and descent in a spacious old house—which long ago was torn down for business purposes, wrote the late Alice Morse Earle, famous for her descriptions of early American customs. The grandaunt, a grand dame, had her table set on that day to her taste and in the old style and I recall well its appearance.

In the center was a large epergne of silver and cut glass filled with tiny mandarin oranges, lady apples and raisins. A splendid boiled ham, a great turkey and a boiled goose, all served cold, stood on this table, and there were handsome forms of veal loaf and jellied chicken and several cut glass dishes of pickled lambs' tongues and oysters which no one tasted.

Decanters of port and Madeira stood here and were constantly refilled. Eggnog was served with New Year's cakes from another table, which held also a vast frosted cake like a wedding cake. All the dishes were decorated with little rosettes and streamers of silver paper and wreaths of ground pine.

From 1 o'clock in the afternoon until 9 in the evening constant relays of hot oysters were served—stewed oysters, scalloped oysters, creamed oysters—and I think those were the only hot viands that appeared. Two barrels of oysters had been sent from Mystic, Conn., on Dec. 30.

Certainly 200 men called on that day—many of them very old men, men of distinction in public life, whom I am glad I saw and knew—and all ate heartily of the hot oysters, as if this house was the only one where they found any food, when really all had been in fifty houses equally generous in provision for a hungry crowd.

When the calling was ended the extra servants of the day, all negroes, carried off to their homes all the pickled oysters and tongues and the jellied dishes. And the grandaunt said with vexation, "I will never have those cold, pickled things again. No one touches them." "Do, Aunt," said her brother, "you have said that every New Year night for fifty years."

Testing the Future.

With the exception of All Saints day, there is no time in the whole twelve month about which so many superstitions cluster as New Year's. Some form of divination to foretell the future is practical in almost every land on Jan. 1. This, of course, is generally the case with young people who desire to know whether they will get married during the coming year or soon thereafter. In the country districts of England and Germany there is a tea and coffee test which is most satisfactory. A teaspoon is balanced carefully on the edge of a cup. Then tea or coffee, as the case may be, is dropped into it drop by drop. Every drop that the spoon will hold without losing its balance means another year before the wedding. One or two large drops will usually upset the spoon, and so this is a very popular way of looking into the future.

BILLY BRADFORD

Story of a Boy Who Had Never Heard of Christmas

By F. A. MITCHEL

Billy Bradford was the son of a constitutional rover. Billy was born in a prairie schooner crossing the plains in 1849. When he was old enough to experience his first Christmas he was astride a donkey in Mexico. There was no Christmas for the Bradford family and no mention of Christmas. If Billy's father remembered it was Christmas day he said nothing about it. The wife and mother remembered it with tears. She had no home. There was no mantel on which her little boy might hang his stocking and if there were there was nothing to put in it.

The mother died when the family were still moving from place to place. Then the father died while passing through an uninhabited country. Billy found himself alone. He was eight years old. [illegible] left in a wilderness with no one to take care of him, perhaps his way of [illegible] influences of a home were [illegible]. With a rifle, [illegible] kind neighbors he went about providing for himself as a young spirited [illegible] does who is left on its own resources.

At last he set out under the trees [illegible] partly under ground. For food he lived mostly on berries. But his father had left a gun and Billie knew how to bring down birds. That is all he did, the same as wild animals.

One day while examining the articles his father had when he died Billy found some certificates of shares in a mining company located near San Francisco. He had no idea what they were, but one day a traveler passed that way, and Billy showed them to him. He told Billy that they represented a fortune for whomsoever owned them. When Billy told him that his father's was the name written on them and that he (Billy) was all that was left of the Bradford family the stranger advised him to go to San Francisco and look the matter up. Billy explained that his father had crossed a country with no trees and plenty of Indians and stopped awhile in a city, whereupon the man inferred that Bradford had been a forty-niner, had invested in a mining venture and moved on.

The stranger furnished Billy with funds to go to San Francisco, writing out a note for the amount, and Billy made an X at the bottom. Then the lender went on his way, saying that he would likely turn up some day in San Francisco and claim the amount due him. He never did.

Billy knew nothing of traveling and walked the whole way to San Francisco, more than 300 miles. He reached the suburbs of the town on a winter evening at dusk. Passing a house that was lighted up he looked in through a window. A number of children were inside and some older persons were hanging evergreen festoons from the ceiling. The scene in the house pleased Billy, and he went to the door and knocked. A little girl opened it, and Billy said to her:

"What you puttin' up the green things for?"

"What are we putting them up for? Why, for Christmas, of course."

"What's Christmas?"

"Oh, my good gracious!"

She ran back into the room where the Christmas preparations were being made and cried out:

"There's a boy at the door who doesn't know what Christmas is."

The astonishment at this announcement among the children was eclipsed at sight of Billy, who followed the girl into the room and stood staring about him, half blinded by the lights. A lady descended from a stepladder and confronted him.

"Are you the boy who doesn't know what Christmas is?"

"No; I don't."

"Where were you brought up?"

"I wasn't brought up at all. I was a mover."

"What do you mean by that?"

"That's what mother said we was. We was always goin' somewhere."

"Where is your mother?"

"Dead."

"And your father?"

"Dead."

"And you never heard of Christmas?"

"No, I never did."

"Children," said the lady, "how often have I tried to make you understand how thankful you should be that you are surrounded with comforts? Here's a boy who has neither father nor mother, who has always been a wanderer and who doesn't know what Christmas is. Have you anything to be thankful for, little boy?"

"Yes, I'm thankful that I wasn't borned a groundhog or somethin' like that."

The children were not able to comprehend this assertion. They did not know that the only thing the boy had to be thankful for was that he was a human being. If they were thankful it was that they were far above other human beings who lived in small houses, wore ragged clothes and didn't have all the money they wanted for candy.

"Come with me," said the lady to Billy.

She led Billy into another room, where a gentleman sat reading, and told the gentleman what had thus far taken place. Then she went back to the room from which she had come and resumed her Christmas preparations.

For an hour the gentleman questioned Billy and drew from him a disconnected account of his life. He was principally interested in that part of Billy's wanderings which pertained to the child's visit to San Francisco when gold was discovered in the territory and there was a great hegira of gold hunters. For Billy told him about the "printed papers," as he called them, and that he had come to the city on its account. But the trip to the gold fields had occurred when the boy was too young to remember much about it, and he was enabled to give the gentleman very little information.

Billy took out the pocketbook and showed the certificate. The moment his interviewer saw the name of the mining company printed in large letters at the top he opened his eyes in astonishment. The certificate was for a thousand shares of stock, and each share was worth several hundred dollars. It was plain that this little orphan boy, if he really owned that bit of paper, was very rich. Never before had the gentleman seen such wealth centered in a person so near to the brute creation. The woman returned and said:

"Little boy, you're going to sleep in this house tonight."

"Reckon I couldn't do that. I never slept in a house."

"It's time you did. We're going to show you what Christmas is. Come."

"One moment," [illegible] and [illegible]. "Let me have that old pocketbook you [illegible]."

Billy gave him the pocketbook, then went with the lady to the room where the children were. His attention first fell on a row of stockings dangling from a mantel.

"This is Christmas eve," said the lady. "Tonight, so the tradition is, Santa Claus will come down the chimney, and fill these stockings with gifts. This is your stocking. Tomorrow morning you will find it full of nice things."

This was all Greek to Billy, except that something would be given him. It was a new sensation, for nothing had ever yet been bestowed upon him. Then he suffered himself to be led up to a bathroom, and after he had been soaked and the softened dirt rinsed off him he was taken to a little room with a white iron bedstead and snowy linen on it and told to get between the sheets. He obeyed, but when half an hour later the lady looked into the room Billy was not to be seen. She sought for him and found him curled up like a dog under the bed instead of in it. She thought best to leave him where he was.

The next morning Billy was dressed in some borrowed clothes and stood before a mirror to note the change in his appearance. It would be impossible to say whether he was more astonished at his clothes or his reflection. Both were a wonder to him. Then he was taken downstairs, where the children were opening their stockings, and given his own Santa Claus' offering. He had no idea as to what most of the things were, but demonstrated that possession is a human instinct by being much delighted with everything he took out.

After breakfast the lady took Billy into the library and told him the story of the birth of the Christ Child in a manger; how the sins of the world had been redeemed and how the event had been celebrated once a year. Then Billy was taken back to the children who taught him games and told him stories about what they did, how they went to school and Billy absorbed every word of it. All day it seemed to him that he had been translated to heaven. His lair in the forest began to seem horrible to him, and he wondered if he would ever become sufficiently polished to live among these lovely persons.

And the Christmas dinner. Billy looked at the table loaded with good things, and seemed to be in a stupor of wonder. He ate till he could cram no more into him.

After dinner the gentleman who had questioned him took Billy's pocketbook and opening it drew forth the certificates of stock that Billy was going to San Francisco to see about.

"My boy," he said, "Christmas reminds us that we must do for others beside ourselves. We have given you a pleasant Christmas, but it behooves me to do something far more important for you. I do not doubt that you are heir to that which will buy everything you can wish for—far more than you can crave. What was probably worthless when your father made an investment in it of a few hundred dollars is now worth hundreds of thousands of dollars. Tomorrow I will take the matter up for you and hope to establish your claim to your property."

This was lost on Billy, but Christmas was not. As it was his first Christmas, it was his happiest. And when it was ended and they told him he must wait a whole year for another it seemed to him very far away.

It took some time to establish the fact that Billy was the son and sole heir of the owner of the certificates in the mining company, but it was finally accomplished. Billy was permitted to remain with the family with whom he spent his first Christmas, and the court appointed the head of that family his guardian. Billy went to school with the children and came to look upon them as his brothers and sisters.

But at last Billy became of age, and from a wild boy he had become quite a gentleman-like and intelligent young man. The fortune he received on the day of his majority he handled with skill and discretion, enjoying the income of it with the girl who had received him when he knocked, at the door and asked what they were decorating for.

—What— HOUSEWIVES Wish to Know

Smart Afternoon Gown

The handsome afternoon gown herewith shown is featured in georgette crape and French satin in light gray, old rose, tan, burgundy, navy blue, black, Joffre or copenhagen blue. The bodice and upper part of skirt are of georgette crape embroidered in gold and self colored silk. The under bodice is of silver lace and the crushed girdle of satin. Design by Franklin Simon & Co., New York city.

Household Suggestions

When ironing blouses or frocks with large buttons sewed on try using several thicknesses of blanket or towels to iron them on. Turn the garment button side down and press on the wrong side.

Add an equal quantity of boiling water when pouring hot fat into a bowl. This will make any pieces of meat and gristle in the fat sink to the bottom, and the drippings, when cool, will be white and clean.

To remove whitewash from carpets, dampen the spots with a mixture of a teaspoonful of ammonia in one gallon of warm water.

The disagreeable taste of castor oil may be concealed by giving the dose in hot milk flavored with salt and a sprinkle of black pepper.

Add a little drop of salad oil to mustard when it is being made. Not only will it improve the taste, but it will keep it fresh for days.

Uses of Saleratus

When cooking meats and vegetables a little saleratus will hasten their cooking and make them tender.

A little saleratus added to beans before they are put in the oven to bake makes them more digestible.

To sweeten meats wash in saleratus before they are cooked.

To remove fruit or tea stains use saleratus moistened with sweet milk.

To make clothes look white add a liberal quantity of saleratus to the water in which clothes are soaked, and the clothes will not require so much rubbing.

To keep baby's bottle sweet rinse with water in which saleratus has been dissolved.

To keep kitchen sinks clean and sweet use saleratus freely.

A small quantity of saleratus added to the bath is very refreshing.

GOOD RESOLUTIONS.

On New Year's day I will resolve
To be as good as gold;
I'll never say an ugly word,
I'll do just as I'm told.

I'll help my mother clean the house,
I'll share my toys with Joe,
I'll never fuss or frown or fret,
On errands I will go

I'll make the sunshine in our house,
Though it may storm outside.
When things go wrong to make me cross,
My feelings I will hide.

I'll be so good mamma will say
I fill her heart with joy,
And when she'll say her prayers at night
She'll bless her little boy.