

"Give my your hand, my love," I said "lean forward and listen to the words of the sage, whose whiskers are silvering rapidly, and upon whose former curly locks the hoar-frost of age is setting thick. Know, then, there is a secret embedded in most men's hearts, and the secret divulged tells of a terrible dread of Christmas time. Understand, that men in fighting the battle of life too often get behind with their butcher or baker, their grocer or their draper, to say nothing of the firewood dealer and the landlord. Every body is to be squared up at Christmas. I say to my butcher, 'It will be all right with you, Mr Cutlets, by the end of December; and to my baker, 'Don't be impatient, Mr Alum, wait till the year turns and then bring me a stamp receipt in full.' I have told all my tradesmen the same thing in effect. But, my precious rosebud, I know that I have only been telling so many fibs to stave off a difficulty. Don't I know that I shan't be able to pay what I owe at Christmas any more than I was able to pay last Michaelmas or on Guy Fawkes' Day, or during the prevalence of the equinoctial gales? Christmas to me, my love, and to thousands of men,

a time of such anxiety as only really good sound beer in liberal quantities and the twist which cometh from Virginia will assuage. Everything has got to be done at Christmas. There's a new gown for mother, new frocks for the girls, knickerbockers for the boys, and the Lord knows what all besides. If these are 'hallowed associations,' my young lady, then I have any amount for disposal upon the very easiest terms. And about this 'forgetting and forgiving' business, which you gush about, do you think, my forlorn one, that a man is so constituted that he quite loses his memory on Christmas-day? If I hate a man on the 24th December, do you think I don't hate him quite as much on the 25th? Of course I do, and before the day's out and the Christmas sherry is concluded in the bottle, I feel that if mine enemy was to stand before me I should more than ever like to punch his nose.

"Fond one," I concluded, "there's a good deal of humbug talked about Christmas-day. Fare thee well, and when he who adores thee to madness and anguish asks you to have him, you have him, and the time will come when the words of the sage will beat responsive to the debtor and creditor side of your housekeeping book."

#### A RETROSPECT.

I WRITE this on the last Saturday of the old year, and I am taking stock of the last three hundred and sixty-four days. Looking back on the past, I feel that I have much to be thankful for. Providence has awarded to me the great blessing of poverty, and only those who have enjoyed this estate can speak of its many inestimable advantages. Being poor, no one ever thinks of asking me to accept or endorse a bill, or to lend money, or to become bail, or to go security for anything. I have no trouble in keeping myself down to sixteen shillings ten, there or thereabouts. I am not obliged to wear purple and fine linen, consequently, whether walking or sitting, I have no uneasiness about spoiling my cloths. In worldly circumstances I am about three and fourpence better than I was last year, besides which I have a two gallon keg of light bitter beer in my establishment which has not yet been tapped. All these are great helps towards feeling comfortable. I hope by my unaided efforts to learn to become as content as a friend of mine who I visited a few days back in the debtors' side of Mount Eden Gaol. He had been there two months, he said, and unless something extraordinary occurred, he was happy to say he had yet got another two months to run. My friend went on to say he had never passed such a happy two months before in his life. No one came to dun him or ask him to pay money which he had not got. His meals were brought to him with the greatest regularity. He had abundance of sleep, with clean bedding; and the beauty of the thing consisted in his having nothing to pay. If a slight regret passed over his mind, like a passing shadow, it was that the gaol dietary didn't include pickles; but he thought this trifling drawback might be assuaged by memorialising the authorities. My friend would not allow me to divulge his name. "For," said he, "if you do, the fellow who sent me here will be for hitting me out. I have got a few more debtors who may prove tender-hearted, and be by being vindictive, by which I

may manage, one way or other, to remain here during the greater portion of 1883, in which case I intend learning the French language, as an elegant accomplishment." Why, Socrates or Plato could have learned a lesson upon the delights of contentment from my friend, had he lived in their days or they in his. Just imagine, O, ye worldlings, ye cravers after the fat things of the earth, ye worshippers of Mammon and unrighteousness, the supreme fact of a fellowman being only a bottle of pickles short of complete and unmitigated happiness!

In looking back upon the events of the last year in personal connection with myself, there are one or two matters which I regret having done, and for which I hope to be forgiven. I acknowledge on one occasion to have committed a mean and contemptible action. Some months ago, in virtue of my connection with the Press I received a ticket to attend a public banquet. Under the rascally pretence of wanting to see how the tables were laid out before the banquet commenced, I shifted the decanter of sherry which had been placed for the chairman, and substituted for it one which had been intended for the reporters. I am not going to be such a sneak as to insist that a fair exchange is no robbery. It wasn't a fair exchange at all. The sherry I collared was real Amontillado, dry and of a full nutty flavor, without the smallest headache or acidity of the stomach whatever in it, while what I gave for the chairman would have been dear at a pound a dozen. Wasn't that chairman sold that night?—and the Amontillado was grand. But it wasn't the square thing to do, and I am sorry for it now, because I think the chairman was ill all the next day. Something in connection with that banquet struck me as peculiar at the time. There was a long line of dishes placed on the banquetting-tables, each of which contained a pair of delicate chickens embedded in delicious gelatine, which quivered and trembled under the brilliancy of the lights, most lovely to behold; but I noticed that not one of these chickens roasted to a delicate brown, had their livers, as is usual, tucked into the folds of their left wings. The next day at noon, I happened to enter the house of the caterer of that banquet, and I saw him sitting down to a late breakfast. It consisted chiefly of chickens' liver, simmered in cream and served with bread sauce. Then it struck me that what I observed at the previous night's banquet was nothing at all peculiar.

I have nothing else in particular to regret having done or having left undone for the year 1882. I think, taking it altogether that the world we live in is a very good world indeed, and the people a long way off from being so bad as some people would try to make out. We laugh and rejoice a great deal more than we sorrow. Most of us would sooner do a good turn to each other than a bad one. And there are a great many more good people than there are bad. I have found it so in the course of a somewhat chequered career, and so I believe have most others. We remember a pleasure longer than we do a regret, and forgive a wrong sooner than we forget a kindness—that is if we are composed of the material which goes to make up the kind of men and women which a merciful and beneficent providence intended we should be. I shall, to the end of my days, feel deeply grateful to old Tompkins for the receipt he gave me of a new way to cook rock oysters. "Procure them fresh, Snyder," he said to me one day. Pick both the middling-sized ones. Clean out a frying pan, into which melt a lump of fresh butter. Drop in your oysters and fry them to a light brown. Take them out. Squeeze a lemon over them and sprinkle with cayenne pepper. Eat with the crust of a new roll spread with butter slightly pickled, and then tell me afterwards what your idea is of the seventh heaven." Talk about Heliogabalus and his dish of peacocks' brains which cost the price of a Great Eastern, or Sover's pate of nitingales' tongues, for which he charged the Marquis of Waterford a hundred guineas, why, neither are to be compared to the dish that cost me, upon a close estimate, not more than fourpence half-penny. Of course I can't speak with anything like a dead certainty, because I never did eat nitingales' tongues or peacocks' brains, but I know I feel as grateful to Tompkins for that receipt as he did to me when I referred him to a cheap but honest lawyer to carry him through the insolvent court, which he tells me he finds is as easy as

going down a flight of stairs with broad steps and bannisters on both sides.

#### MY WASHERWOMAN.

SHE is aged, but has profited much by long years of experience and close observation of human nature. I am, as I verily believe, the only man she admits into her confidence. She respects me, she says, because I am punctual in my payments. She occasionally hints that I was not as candid as I should have been on the subject of buttons, which she, in a weak moment had consented to attend to without any additional charge. She had no idea that any man could have such a down upon buttons as I had. She told me that the last bundle of clothes I had sent to her for the wash, she thought as she opened them that it was at a moment when a sharp fall of hail had suddenly struck upon the roof of the house, whereas it was only the enormous quantity of buttons which had become detached from my shirts and waistcoats, and fell in showers upon the floor. However, she always followed up her obnoxious remarks by referring back to the subject of regular payments made by me. The last time she brought home my "things," I, as a matter of civil enquiry, asked her how business was, when she informed me that it was quite impossible it could be worse. Paper had been the ruin of her trade, and had caused a blight to fall upon the home of many a washerwoman. Gentlemen now wore paper collars, and paper false fronts, and paper cuffs. Men of the present hour, she went on to say, had nothing to wash so to speak. They bought socks at sixpence a pair, which they wore till they wouldn't stand any more wearing, and then they were thrown away for another sixpennorth of the same cheap and unendurable article. In her line of business she called this the age of paper.

I was grieved to hear that the lines of my old and much respected laundress had fallen in such unpleasant places. I attempted to console her, by drawing her attention to the fact that the customers of her own sex at least didn't wear clothing composed of paper material; to which she made answer with three emphatic nods of her head, and said, "Didn't they. If I thought they didn't, that was all I knew about it, which was something less than precious little. If you only knowed as much as I know, Mr Snyder, in these matters, you wouldn't talk like that. What the men do send you to be washed they generally pays for, and they don't grind you down to the last farthing; but here's a young lady comes on a Thursday morning and says to you, 'Mrs Lathers, I want you to call down for my dress, which must be ready for Sunday;' and of course I call down, because I've got to keep my old man, who ain't kept himself for the last ten years; and there's the dress, with nine founces and two panniers, which has got more than half a day in it to wash as carefully as twenty-two yards of book muslin requires, then it's to dry, then it's to starch, and then it's to iron. And when I say to the young lady, 'I can't bring this back on Saturday afternoon under one-and-sixpence, miss, because there's such a lot of doing up in it,' she goes on in a manner as women only go on before one another and never before men, excepting their husbands, which of course being the case is of no consequence. She says that one-and-sixpence is outrageous, that one-and-three would be an imposition; but that as it must be ready for Sunday she will give me one-and-threepence. And, of course, I have to take it, and there I am a working away at those founces, and panniers, and the body until it is so stiff with starch and flat-irons that it would almost stand by itself."

And it was here my dear old laundry woman suddenly dropped the pathetic and burst out into a fit of laughter. She apologised, but said she couldn't help it.

"Because, look here, Mr Snyder, when I am walking down the Strand on the Sunday afternoon don't I see that young lady gallivanting with a swell, who looks to be as proud of her as if she was a blood relation of Queen Victoria and the rest of the royal family, and he was shortly going to be related to her by marriage. Don't I feel an inclination to go up to him and say, 'Sir, will you allow me to speak to you confidentially for the matter of about three minutes and a half?' Then if he let me wouldn't I say to him, 'That's a lovely and a beautiful dress that lady in company with

you's got on, and is fit almost for the angels to carry away to cut into rain-bows; but if you would only get hold of a good spirit-rapper, and ask him to give you half-a-crown's worth of information as to what the lady has got under that dress, it might, in the course of time, alter the tone of your feelings towards her. Her dress is beautiful for a cheap material, so is her hat, and her boots ain't bad, but if the spirit-rapper would only inform you about the quality and whiteness of her stays, and the real value of her under 'parel, you would come to find out that all she has got wouldn't reach a quarter of the value of the two locks of artificial hair she has fastened on to the back of her head.' Look here, Mr Snyder, I often hear people say how do these young ladies manage to get so much finery. Those as ask the question don't know like the likes of me. It's a painted sepelkur outside they are, and a dreadful lot of makeshifts underneath. Their mothers and fathers starve themselves upon boiled necks of mutton and no capers to keep them going in outside finery. Men have got hearts for the most part of them, but, bless you, the smallness of women's hearts is redooed to the very lowest pitch, if you only new it as I do. You see, Mr Snyder, I don't altogether live by washing and mending. Sometimes I goes out to deaths and burials; and when one of these happens to a man, the first thing as always enters the mind of his widow, is what sort of mourning will best suit her figure and complexion, and how many plates the coffin should have, and how the corpse can be made to look to the best advantage, like as if it was a dead Dook or a Lord. And of course she cries a good deal, and takes on dreadfully; but she never cries half so much or takes on half so dreadfully as when people are about her, and 'specially when they are 'grand' people. But if it is a wife as has died, the man is quite different. He says to me, 'Do what you think is right and proper, my good woman. Have everything decent.' And he goes about rather bewildered like, and smokes a good deal; but I believe that man thinks more about his wife in a kindly-hearted way than the wife would have thought about him, for she was always awfully mean in the matter of the washing bill, and made him wear his shirts longer than she did her own things. But, heaven save us both, and you in particular, Mr Snyder, and it's thanking you I'll be for that three-and-ninepence for a fortnight's washing, due owing, as my old man used to say, when he was a bailiff as served summonses, and hoping that if you ever do such a thing in your life as holy wedlock you will see your wife don't want twenty-two yards of book muslin, with nine founces and panniers, starched and ironed, and carried home for one-and-threepence, and call day after to-morrow for the money."

These were the last words my washerwoman said to me as she put my washing account in the palm of my hand, and gave a second caution on the matter of buttons.

#### HINTS TO MUNICIPAL CORPORATIONS.

I DON'T like the ways of Borough Councilors a bit. They flurry themselves too much, and do not deliberate with that calmness essential to the responsibilities they have taken upon themselves. They are not sufficiently serene or subdued in their operations. As a guide for Borough Councilors, I propose to set before them the principles upon which a Corporation of which I was a humble, and I trust a not unworthy member, conducted municipal business. It was in Victoria, and in the year 1852, being just fifteen months after the outbreak of the goldfields. We used to meet at noon, and by the time the town clerk had read the minutes and correspondence it would be somewhere about one o'clock, when we adjourned to the Mayor's private room and partook of a lunch, in which cold chicken, claret, and ham formed an element in the ingredients. The cost of this refreshment was always charged to departmental petty expenses. Thus, if after lunch we were going to discuss the matter of private lanes, the lunch would be charged as expenses incurred by the Private Lanes Committee; or of tender, the Public Tenders Committee; or of pump handles, the Committee of Pumps and Sackers. We never allowed the word "lunch" to be entered in the books, which, had the citizens seen, they might have objected to. So refreshments of

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