

by outward appearance, and the awaking from the glamour of her delusion was very bitter. Ere a sleepless night had passed away, Anna had decided her betrothal to Oscar should be broken off at once, and that she would do it herself. After breakfast the next morning, she asked for an interview with him, and they went together, out of Agatha's sight and hearing, into the summer house in the garden, sacred to Mynheer and his long clay pipes. The subtle odour of tobacco clung to chairs and table, mats and ceiling, as the lovers held their last meeting together. Truths were spoken on Anna's side that Oscar could not deny, as she looked up at him with her brown sorrowful eyes. Ere she left him, Anna had spoken the bitterest words that had ever been heard from her gentle lips.

"You love Babette," she said. "Go and marry her, and be happy, if you can. I have been deceived in you, that is all."

"Oh, if you wish me to marry Babette, it makes matters plain, but I thought you cared for me yourself. How hard it is to understand women!" retorted Oscar, with a faint tone of reproach in his voice.

Perhaps he would have added more, but Anna had left the summer house ere his speech was finished, and was already on her way to her room to prepare for her departure.

Oscar went off to console himself with a visit to Babette, and when he returned, Anna was gone.

Agatha had parted from her coolly, never once alluding to her betrothal with Oscar having been broken off; indeed, all along she had ignored that any betrothal ever existed.

"Such presumption for a girl like Anna to think of Oscar!" she said—"a girl who has neither beauty nor money, and Babette has both!"

What a sad journey home that was to Anna, so different from her almost triumphant entry into Arnhem!

When she reached the buff-coloured house, the little servant was speedily recalled, and right glad was she to exchange the service of Mevrouw Skiene, the sharp-tongued matron, with her nine troublesome children, for the calm delight of being again with her beloved mistress.

To one of Anna de Velde's character, trouble did not come with a scathing, withering power; rather, it seemed to draw her only closer to Him who, even in His divine sonship, knew of human trial and "learned obedience by the things He suffered."

She did not mourn with hopeless affection, nor waste her days in sorrowful retrospection, but with hopes raised heavenward, and with undying faith, she sought to make her life such as her Master would approve, and in the homes of the sad and sick she found a sphere of duty ready at her hand. In that sparsely inhabited district her services were invaluable, and she was often summoned to the bedside of the suffering, to tell the joyful message of salvation, to pray for the Spirit's influence to bless that message.

(To be concluded.)



WHAT WE USED TO DO AT CHRISTMAS.

By RUTH LAMB.

"AUNT JOE can remember lots of things about Christmas and New Year, and can tell us what she used to do when she was a little girl. Of course, I mean *old New Years*," added Jack Swainson, by way of giving a particularly lucid explanation of his speech.

Aunt Josephine, or "Joe," was Mrs. Rivers, and Mr. Swainson's only sister. She had been many years married, but having no children was equally beloved and tyrannised over by those of her brother, on whom she bestowed the affection which might have been given to her own, had they lived to claim it.

Christmas would have seemed dull, and the New Year of as little account as the old one, had not Aunt Joe and her equally popular husband formed members of the family party at these seasons.

"Well, tell us about Christmas and New Year, aunt."

"Ah! we did a great many things, and were pleased with some very simple ones which you children would laugh at now. But, then, I can remember my first ride on the first railroad made. I can remember being taken out—in fact, we children all went, solemnly and with quite awe-stricken faces—round the town to see the effect of gas for the first time, just as some of you will be able to speak to your children of the first electric light you saw. It was Christmas time, and though I am sure the gas was very poor, and the lamps few and far between, it was *the* sight of the season, to us children especially. We were all allowed to stay an hour later when we went out to tea that Christmas on account of the increased safety insured by the improved lighting. Before that we had a dim oil lamp per quarter-mile or so, when there was no vestige of a moon visible. At other times no pretence at lighting."

"How did the church look?" asked one of the girls.

"It had large, square pews, in which little people were quite extinguished, unless the elders kindly mounted them on the seats, and so brought their heads into view. Boys were not generally mounted thus, and I am afraid that, as they could neither see nor be seen, they occupied much of their time, when unaccompanied by their elders, in cutting their names and drawing, sometimes, objectionable hieroglyphics on the woodwork.

"Woe betide the sacrilegious artists if the old sexton caught them! He was a tall, old man of severe aspect, and something peculiarly awesome about the eyes, the lids of which were unnaturally elongated, and looked as if they were turned inside out. He used to pace solemnly round the church at intervals, walking softly, and carrying a long cane. His height enabled him to look down into the pews as he passed, and the youngsters who saw him coming would be still as mice, and keep their eyes steadily turned towards the part whence the voice of the preacher proceeded.

"If he caught a carver busy at his work, down would come the cane on his devoted head, with a 'swish' that could be heard all through the church.

"If a cry followed, a scuffle was certain to come next, and the shutting of a door told that the offender had been bundled out of the sacred edifice. I had a great awe of the old sexton, and so had your father, Jack, when we were children. In later years we knew him as a trustworthy and useful old fellow, who, out of church, had nothing terrible about him.

"There was no heating apparatus, except a little stove in the vestry by which to warm the

parson's fingers—no light except what came from a central chandelier, and here and there a candle stuck in a tin socket of primitive pattern, and attached to the woodwork of the pews. The church was of great size, and you may fancy how we shivered through the services during an old-fashioned Christmas.

"As to our decorations! They corresponded in style with the system of lighting. The clerk did them, and his method was to stick in a good branch of holly, laurel, or other evergreen wherever there was a hole in the woodwork into which he could insert a stem. The tops of the pews appeared to have bushes growing thereon at irregular intervals, and of equally varied shapes and sizes.

"The decorators never scrupled to enlarge the holes in the woodwork by a vigorous use of the pocket-knife. The effect of their operations may be imagined when rendered fully visible by the removal of the withered evergreens at Candlemas. This mode was appropriately termed 'sticking the church.'

"As to the clergyman, his head looked out from a perfect thicket, it being considered correct to make the pulpit a complete bower of greenery. Somebody irreverently compared him to an owl looking out of an ivy bush. I am sure the dear good man's hands sometimes suffered amongst the holly, which, on account of its gay berries, was lavishly used on desk and pulpit.

"Had we plenty of bell-ringing, did you say? I should think so. Not only at Christmas, but for weeks and weeks beforehand. It was the custom to practise ringing for Christmas, so for three nights in each week the musical old peal of eight bells was kept on a continual jingle. The ringers tried firing salutes, change ringing, and even played Christmas hymn tunes on the bells. We, however, not only had the result of all this painstaking when the time came, but we had been hearing all the blunders and their gradual correction for at least six weeks beforehand.

"There were two ringers for each of seven bells, but it was an article of faith with us that there was only one man who could ring the biggest. He was leader, teacher, and tyrant all in one, and the bells made pleasant melody under his guidance. Still, his fourteen subordinates often grumbled, and vowed that, after the New Year had once been rung in, they would stand no more of Dick's 'ordering ways.'

"But they always forgot this threat when they came to receive contributions and to be complimented on their fine ringing on New Year's morning. At length the day came when they sorrowfully rang a muffled peal for their chief, and another stepped in o Dick's vacant place. The biggest bell was not silent, but sounded much the same as of old—another proof that however much we may think of ourselves, we can be done without, and the world goes on as before."

Aunt Joe paused and looked thoughtful. Somebody whispered the words—

"CAROL SINGING."

A smile came on Aunt Joe's face.

"We had the Waits, of course, as we have now. But I always want to laugh when I think of a woman who used to come round when I was a little girl. She carried a wooden box under her arm, suggestive of a small coffin, smuggled beneath her shawl. She used to fling open the street door, and standing in the doorway, commence the old carol—

"God rest you, merry gentlemen,
Let nothing you dismay;
Remember Christ, our Sa-vi-or,
Was born on Christmas-day."

"I presume she called her performance singing, but it was simply indescribable. She jerked out each syllable in a nasal shriek with a touch of howl in it, and I never heard a

second verse myself, or of any person who could endure more than the four lines, which would be got through whilst someone reached the scene of the performance.

"She 'shut up,' as you would say, Jack, so far as the carol was concerned, when we children made our appearance, and, throwing aside her shawl, brought out the box, opened the lid, and displayed a wax doll dressed in white and adorned with artificial flowers.

"I suppose it was meant to typify the infant Saviour, and we looked at it with a certain amount of awe, chiefly, I think, because it suggested a dead baby in a coffin rather than a living one either in cradle or manger.

"Then mother would give the least amongst us a silver coin to pass to the exhibitor, who bobbed a curtsy, shut the box, and passed on to fling open the next door and repeat her performance."

The youngsters here asked if Aunt Joe could give them an imitation of the style of singing. She began, but after a line or so her voice was drowned in shouts of laughter, and the youngsters declared it was no wonder that a second verse was never called for.

"On Christmas Eve, in my native county, everybody baked hot currant, or *plum cakes*, as we called them. The oven was heated by the blazing yule-log, and the hot cakes were served with spiced ale and cheese for supper, all comers being invited to partake thereof. It used to be one of our local superstitions that for every sample of Christmas or Yule cake that we tasted, we should have a happy month in the coming year. Of course, everybody wished to taste in at least twelve different houses, so as to ensure a year of perfect felicity.

"We used to ask each other how many cakes had been tasted, and condole with those who had not made up their dozen.

"The same thing is sometimes said about mince pies, which are in certain localities counted equally lucky and indigestible.

"There was a great deal of pig killing at this season, and it was customary, and I dare say is still in my native county, for little presents to be sent by those who did kill to those who did not. A little maiden would carry a basket neatly covered with a snowy cloth, and deliver the same 'with mother's love, and she has sent you a taste of *pig cheer*.'

"Lift the cloth, and mince pies proportioned to the number of the family, links of sausages, a highly-ornate raised pork pie, or perchance a spare-rib would be revealed. And all this was done with the simplest kindness, and the plenty of the one household overflowed into the homes of the neighbours who were not pigkeepers.

"We had our superstitions, too, at which you youngsters would only laugh to-day. Amongst these was a desire to have a lucky person as

'THE FIRST FOOT ON NEW YEAR'S MORNING.'

"I once heard a gentleman declare that were a woman or a fair-haired man to endeavour to be the first to enter his house on New Year's morning, he should be ready to use force, if needful, to hinder such an unlucky 'first-foot.' Dark-haired men were supposed to bring luck; and it was not the poor and untaught who said this, but the richest and best educated people in country communities at that time.

"Some would sit up for the ringers, who would be the first to enter. Others had a member of some particular family who would come long before daylight and do duty as 'first-foot.' Of course he received hospitable entertainment and a New Year's gift, in proportion to the means of those he visited.

"I can remember stealing downstairs, as a little toddles, in very insufficient garments, to

see our 'first foot' admitted before there was a ray of morning light. I was scolded, bundled up in a warm shawl, and allowed to remain by the kitchen fire whilst he partook of the usual refreshments.

"He always brought with him a large stick, which he placed in a corner of the parlour. This was in obedience to the old saying, that something should always be brought into the house on New Year's morning, before anything was taken out, to insure plentiful supplies during the year. Every inmate of the house was expected to fetch in some article, which was duly placed in a fitting corner or on a shelf, and not stirred until the following day, for fear of ill luck.

"I do not know what calamity would have been expected had one of these articles been inadvertently removed; but, as masters and servants were equally superstitious, and children solemnly warned not to touch, nothing was ever disturbed.

"Sometimes people would play tricks by bringing in some lumbering article and placing it where it would be in every person's way. All the same, it had to stay there.

"You look as though you would like me to give you an instance, children, so I will. A waggon laden with corn was standing under the shed ready for starting on January 1st. It had been made ready overnight, but the men who should have gone with it wanted a holiday on New Year's day. Knowing their master's superstitious feeling about the removal of any article that might be first carried into the house, they propped up the waggon, took off a hind wheel, and carrying it into the great kitchen, placed it in the very centre of the floor.

"The farmer knew why the trick had been played, but he would not have the wheel moved. He only laughed good-humouredly, and gave the men the wished-for holiday.

"There was another thing which was deemed unlucky, and that was the paying of money on New Year's day. 'Never do it,' said an old woman, in my hearing. 'If you begin the year by paying money, you will be doing it all the year through. You will pay much and take little.'

"In like manner it was said that, in whatever occupation we spent the first day of the year, we should also pass the greater portion of the remaining 364; so we were warned to be cautious, and employ its hours wisely and well.

"Let me see. What else did we do? We took off the yule-log before it was quite consumed, and extinguished the fragment in a pail of water. This was carefully preserved and used to light up next year's log.

"Parles of mummers used to go about dressed up in all sorts of tags and ribbons. I think I see St. George with his wooden sword, swaggering up and down a farmhouse kitchen, attended by an impossible dragon, and repeating an old rhyming jingle that had been handed down from generation to generation, for many past centuries. These exhibitions, and the superstitions I have told you of—familiar to the country folk of half a century ago—are gradually dying out. The mummers, guisers, and plow-jags, or jagers, on whose coming we children used to count, are no longer seen. Many of the old customs that are still kept in mind are regarded in a very different light from what they used to be, and happily so, since they were usually the outcome of gross superstition."

"But what did you do before Christmas trees were invented?" inquired a small girl.

"We did without and never missed them. They are becoming old-fashioned institutions to many of you young people, and every year there are fresh contrivances to surprise and amuse you. Still, I think no little people would like Christmas trees to be abolished. In my young days everybody—that is, all who were acquainted—invited everybody else out

to tea at Christmas time, when we played the games which our great-grandmothers had delighted in, and were abundantly satisfied therewith."

At this moment Uncle Tom made his first remark during the sitting. "I can tell you," he said, "that of all the girls I ever heard about, Aunt Joe was the very naughtiest."

There was an indignant protest from the whole assembly, and several voices insisted loudly that Aunt Joe might have been fond of tricks and fun, but *real wicked!* Never!!

"That is what I meant. She played tricks on everybody, but they were such as the victim could laugh at as heartily as could the lookers-on. She was a great taleteller too in those days."

"Tell us a proper tale, Aunt Joe."

"About one of your tricks."

"A Christmas trick, Aunt Joe," shouted a chorus of voices.

Aunt Joe complied with suspicious promptitude, and there was a mischievous twinkle in her eye as she began:—

"When I was a girl of twenty, I was one of a number of young guests at a delightful country house. The owners had no children, so they invited as many guests as they could accommodate at Christmas and New Year, and then called together the neighbours of similar age to meet them.

"Country neighbours often live several miles apart, so guests that had a distance to drive used to leave early. After their departure we still had a pretty long evening before us, often extended, too, beyond the usual bedtime. I used to be treated then much as I am now by you children—pounced upon and made to do as I was bid. Our dear, kind hostess would stay with us, though I am bound to confess that the stories which pleased the children, often had the effect of sending her to sleep in her chair.

"It was on New Year's Eve—how well I remember it! I had been telling tales for hours. Amongst my hearers was a gentleman of about five-and-twenty, the youngest brother of our dear hostess. He had no business amongst us. He ought to have been with the gentlemen, instead of sneaking off in that objectionable manner, and leaving our host and his friends, in order to listen to stories never intended for his ears.

"The children resented his presence. As a matter of course, one's tales were interfered with by that grown-up wet blanket. How could I talk nonsense properly with that dreadful, whiskered individual sitting glowering at me and taking in every word?"

"He was so atrociously quiet, too! and I dare say he thought that would be a recommendation, and entitle him to a good-conduct certificate and unlimited toleration in the listeners' circle. We all regarded it as an additional aggravation. Perhaps the most annoying thing of all was that, when we had forgotten his presence for the moment, the tiresome creature would break out all at once into a chuckling laugh, which showed that he had taken in every word of the story. Then, as if afraid of consequences, he would become as silent and sober-looking as though the laugh were all a mistake, or somebody else was the guilty party."

"What a nuisance of a fellow!" said Jack.

"We thought him so; and the youngsters wondered how we might contrive to keep him out of our snuggery. But we had to be careful, for Mr. John—I will call him—was our dear hostess's favourite brother, and we would not have pained her for the world.

"If Mr. John comes to our room to-morrow evening I shall either leave it or remain silent!" said I, at the close of our sitting.

"This resolution did not suit the youngsters, who clamoured against it.

"If we could only send Mr. John to bed!" they said.

"A happy thought seized me. 'I will send him to bed,' said I. 'He shall go, or he shall leave the room, at any rate, before ten o'clock.'

"The young people wondered how I should accomplish this, but I would not tell them, and they looked anxiously for the accomplishment of my promise.

"Evening came; some friends who had dined with us went off at nine o'clock, and the usual party retired into the snugger, Mr. John excepted. He was detained by his brother-in-law to talk over some family matters, and we thought that there would be no need to carry out my threat.

"At half-past nine a servant always placed a certain number of bedroom candlesticks on a side table in our apartment, for there was no gas in that country home.

"Just before ten o'clock in came Mr. John, more hurriedly than usual, as if to make up for lost time. He could hardly help glancing at the group of candlesticks as he entered, and quickly as possible I darted from my seat, seized one of them, and, having lighted the candle, presented it in the most insinuating fashion.

"You were looking for your candlestick, Mr. John," I said. "Allow me to give it to you, and say good-night."

"He took the hand I offered, shook it, said good-night in turn, made his adieux to all the rest, and departed. Whether he went to bed or not I did not care to ascertain; but after having fulfilled my threat, I am afraid I felt some compunction of conscience for the trick I had played him. The youngsters laughed uproariously at my success, and began to gather round me to make a night of it, after our ordinary fashion. I could not join in their mirth, or feel properly triumphant and at ease. The thought of Mr. John's disappointed face, his longing glance at the expectant circle, his lingering departure, and of the shy nature which had not courage to assert its right to sit up another hour, or to

sit down amongst the young guests, made me feel a little dissatisfied with myself. My listeners were also dissatisfied, and, with the frankness of children, told me that my stories were not half so good as usual. We broke up our sitting earlier than common, and—"

"And," interrupted Uncle Tom, "then I turned taleteller, and I managed to make Aunt Joe listen to me, though she had treated me so unjustifiably on the preceding evening."

"You! You! Why, you are not Mr. John!" shouted the young folks.

"Ah! do you not know that taletellers seldom give real names. The children called me Mr. Tom in those days."

"And what tale did you tell, Uncle Tom?" asked a small voice.

"I told Aunt Joe that she had the sweetest voice and the dearest face in the world. That no child amongst them liked to listen to the one, or look at the other, so well as I did. And, after all these years, I repeat that tale to-day. I told her she had stolen my heart away, and must give me hers instead; that my home was lonely, and she must come to cheer it, and make it and me bright with the sunshine of her dear presence. She listened—and, children, you know the rest. We are old husband and wife now, but nearer and dearer than ever. And, though Aunt Joe turned me out from her group of hearers once, I have had cause for thirty years or more to thank God that she listened kindly to my story."

Laura Leigh.

A TALE OF HIGHBRIDGE PAPER MILLS.

By the Author of "Cora; or, Three Years of a Girl's Life," etc.

CHAPTER VIII.

IN THE LIBRARY.

How large, wide, and stately this town mansion seemed when compared with the curate's cottage, where Laura had been staying so long! She shuddered as if with cold, as she passed through the lofty hall, and found her way along the corridor to the well-known oak door.

It was twilight by this time. When she looked into the library all seemed so still, so shadowy, so calm, that she thought Blanche must have made a mistake; the room was apparently deserted.

But near the hearth-rug stood Mr. Leigh's arm-chair, with its high back towards her; and stepping forward, she discovered her father was seated there, his head thrown back, his eyes closed.

The light from the fire fell full on his face, and she started when she saw how



"THE LIGHT FROM THE FIRE FELL FULL ON HIS FACE."