

The Family Circle

THE OLD PLAYGROUND.

Our school days they come to us
Like shadows through the haze;
We view the kindly faces, and we
Mind the kindly ways
Of all the little boys and girls
We played with long ago,
Upon the old school playground,
Those curly heads of tow.

And, too, the bright and laughing eyes
Are looking through the mist,
The years have flung about us,
That we'd forget I wist;
But all the old-time friendships
Learn to linger, if to say,
'T'd love to take you romping
Out upon that ground to-day!

I'd love to take you romping out
Upon the old board walk,
I'd fain go with you arm in arm,
To have an old-time talk;
I'd like to see you hustle at
The tap of recess bell,
A topsy-turvy one and all—
I'm weary as I tell.

A sad old sight 'tis some would make
Upon that ground to-day,
With blear old eyes and memories
That lead them far away;
Of home ties sadly torn, alack;
The world were none too kind
I'd walk with you and tell it all,
If you, old chum, don't mind.

How many paths that led away
From that old hurtling spot;
How many faces die in mist,
How many joys forgot!
How dear to us 'twill ever be,
The feast that youth had spread;
Alas! how many of our throng
All silent, now lie dead!

The Columbian.

A MODERN SANTA CLAUS.

It was Christmas Eve. The lights were beginning to gleam through the windows of happy homes and trace tracks of brilliancy over the snow. Around a little shanty on the outskirts of the city were grouped a number of rough-looking laborers who were employed during these days in making a cut for a new railroad. They were being paid off now, and many of their faces already glowed with the anticipated pleasures of the approaching night. Though most of them were powerful men physically, there was one who towered above the rest and showed a breadth of shoulder that marked him out.

He was evidently a rough character. In spite of his poor clothing, he did not seem to mind the cold or snow of that December evening. He leaned carelessly against a telegraph pole, just out of the circle of light from an arc lamp, with his collar turned up and his soft hat pulled down well over one eye. I had passed that way by chance and became interested in the process of paying off; but in watching this individual I soon forgot the other. His companions, I knew, were a wild and turbulent set—hard workers all of them, but hard drinkers too when occasion offered, and full of untamed animal spirits. Looking at the deep chest, bull's-neck, and harsh features of this specimen, as he stood apart and watched his fellows receive their wages, I thought I saw before me six foot-two of recklessness and depravity.

In groups of three or four the crowd began to move up the street. A pair of brightly lighted windows belonging to a dispensary of cheering beverages held out an invitation that most of them accepted at once. Almost to a man they poured into the place, and their hoarse, loud laughter and snatches of song soon told the tale of increasing jollity. The fellow I had been watching came slowly up the street after his companions. He was counting his money over again and seemed lost in thought. Just before reaching the doors that had swallowed up the others, he stood irresolutely. There was uncertainty written all over him as he alternately glanced at the money in his hand and at the glowing windows. Then resolutely thrusting both hands into the pockets of his coat, he passed the place hurriedly. A few yards beyond he paused and looked back. Would he return, I asked myself, and throw away his few hard-earned dollars on drink and a night of revelry? I felt it was a decisive moment on which hung the happiness of that Christmas for him and for his family, if he had any, and I breathed a prayer that the good Mother of God would give him strength to win the battle. He came back a step or two, stopped again, then crossed over to the opposite side of the street, and stood surveying the scene and listening to the coarse laughter and the spasmodic attempts at song. It was too much; with a gesture of despair he rushed across the street. His hand was on the door, when once more he turned and actually ran away.

Whispering a thankful prayer, I followed him unobserved. He did not dare look back, but slackening his pace into a fast walk he went on till he came to a small store combining the offices of a grocery and dry-goods shop. This he entered. I watched through the window and saw him lay out almost his last penny on edibles and clothes. When he came out I accosted him, though doubtful of my reception.

'You're one of the men from the new railroad, aren't you?'

'Yes,' he said a little gruffly, as he eyed me suspiciously.

'Quit early to-night?'

'Yes; it's in honor of Christmas. They let us off early.'

'Well, pardon me, but I noticed you going in here and thought you must be preparing to make this a merry Christmas for some one.'

He laughed nervously.

'I've tried the other track many a time, too. It's bad. It's hard to get off it once you've started that way.'

'Going home?'

The ice was broken. He thawed completely and really grew enthusiastic.

'Home? Yes, that's it. I'm going home. Over at Albion—that's six miles from here—my old mother's waiting for me. We've always been together at least on Christmas Day. I've got a few new duds for her here, and something for a Christmas dinner. It'll make the old woman happy. I'll be her Santa Claus.'

'Well, good-bye—and "Merry Christmas."'

'Merry Christmas.'

And he was off in the darkness, starting on his long tramp to make glad the heart of his aged mother. It was another victory for the spirit of Christmas, and I am sure that when the angels that night sang 'Peace to men of good will' their blessing fell abundantly on the heart that beat so warmly under that rough exterior.—*Father Dunne's Newsboys' Journal.*

A BARBED QUESTION.

A certain newly-rich young man, assuming great airs, was neatly squelched a few days ago by a member of one of our oldest families. The pompous young man had somehow managed to obtain membership in a select club, where he assumed a certain attitude and remarked, in what he imagined to be the proper tone:

'It's deucedly disagreeable, don'tcheknow, to associate with one's inferiors.'

'Ah,' said the other, 'how in the world did you find that out?'

YOUR OWN PHOTOGRAPH

Or one of the Family Group will be more pleasing than anything else you can send for Xmas, and it's time now to make an appointment with—

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