

MISCELLANEOUS.

Written for this Paper

AN OLD-FASHIONED LOVE STORY.

Children like stories, and grown people too, so I have observed, and especially at Christmas time, and indeed they expect this sort of amusement along with many other things, music, songs, games etc., and to help entertain the readers of our home paper, I am going to tell a story of Christmas happenings a long time ago. It would be little use telling about a modern Christmas, the children are familiar with its details and grown up people know only too well, what Christmas means at the close of the nineteenth century; yet many people are made happier by the observance of the Christmas giving and receiving. However as happiness does not exist in fine clothes, or elegant presents, nor yet a grand house, or even in luxuries of any sort, Christmas in the olden time brought as much good-will and pleasure as our Christmas of the present day.

As a matter of fact the young people nowadays know very little of the customs and ethics of the past generations, and sometimes it is well to remind them that though there was less ostentation and show—there was real enjoyment in the simpler festivities and plainer cooking of the days of their grand-parents. But the story I shall tell you will not deal much in Christmas sweetmeats, nor even the meat and game dishes, with which the dinner table is often graced on these occasions, but more with the sentiment of days gone by and with people, plain every day folks, who lived in a very simple way with humble surrounding, in fact it will be, an old-fashioned love story.

"I must drive to town and get the mail tonight; Dick, harness old Betty and bring the chaise around to the front gate will you?" said a country gentleman to his hired man one cold afternoon in winter and turning to his wife explained, "I shall be back in good time for tea don't be worried, its moonlight and the mare is safe, and as tomorrow is Christmas the post office'll be shut."

Mrs. Fleming followed her husband down the walk to the gate, chatting as she went telling him to keep wrapped up well, for the snow was falling fast now, "five miles to drive in a snow storm John is a long way, hadn't you better send Dick?" "No, I'd like the ride it'll do me good to stir about, and you're busy with Christmas things; is there anything I can bring you from the store?" "No, unless you can get some wax candles, I've only home-made tallow ones, and I'd like to light the parlor up if the folks do come that we expect, and it is a long time since we used the tall brass candle-sticks, they're bright and shining now, and it would be a sort of a welcome, even if we do have a roaring fire of pine knots; it's all laid ready, but I'm shivering here standing here while you're getting off, bring good news John, there'll be letters from the children anyway, and from the folks up country, or if they're coming, maybe they won't write" and they kissed good-bye, as though they were young lovers, as even old folks will when they're so much alone; Mr. Fleming drove off, while his wife shaking the light snow

from the shawl she had thrown over her head, went inside saying to herself, "Its always good luck to have snow fall on Christmas, grand-pa used to say and I've noticed it often." Busy with preparations for the evening meal, and humming an old lullaby song to herself, as she went in and out giving directions to the housemaid, and putting some flowers from the house plants into a vase or two for the table, the time flew fast, and looking up at the clock striking the hour, (such an old familiar friend it had stood in that same room more than fifty years) she saw that it was past the time John should be at home, and lifting the heavy curtains, noticed how the snow was blowing, and she called to Dick to see if the chaise was coming up the road, for the good wife was getting very nervous; but before Dick was half way out of the yard his master came driving through the lane to the back door and was in the kitchen shaking his great coat, and calling to his wife to come and take the letters.

Woman-like she looked them over, until she saw the foreign postmark and trembling with excitement, she hurried back to the supper room, and sat down and cried before opening the letter, lest it should be bad news from her boy; John coming in after getting off his wet boots, was astonished to see her tears, and in his usual cheerful way tried to convince her it must be good news, and she broke the seal (a tiny wafer) and her eyes swimming in tears read a few lines, then looking up to her husband intently watching her, said "I knew 't was bad news, I felt it, you read John and tell me, I can't." Taking the letter and looking, "why there's nothing the matter Hettie only, only the boy's married over there and wants us to congratulate him."

"My boy, my pride, my own darling, married and never asked us, never told us, and we all the time expecting him home soon, New Year's maybe, and Rachel what will we do about her, she's always loved him ever since they were children, and we expected they'd marry some day, and settle down here on the farm, same as we have, you know that John." But John was reading the letter though he heard all his wife had to say, and knew 't was what they had calculated on; "well the supper's getting spoilt please ma'am," said Sally, "shall I serve it now?" Seated at the table, Mrs. Fleming pouring the tea with a tremulous hand, her husband trying to cheer her, remarked, "we must let our children choose for themselves, we did you know, and Harry never really proposed to Rachel did he? there was no engagement was there between them?" "No, but 't was an understood thing and I'm afraid she'll break her heart about it; she'll be here tomorrow, and how shall we tell her he is married." "The best thing we can do now is to eat our supper, and may be after that you can finish reading the letter, I confess I don't care much for the kind of match he seems to have made, but we must n't grieve over it, he's married some rich woman over there, who's fallen in love with him." "Not a title I hope, I hate titles and all that flummery," said Mrs. Fleming with a toss of her head. "O, I don't know about that you seem pretty proud of being called the squire's wife, I've noticed,

and what of your grandfather, old Major Wetherspoon?" "Those are not the titles I mean, you know well enough, they're American." "I don't know I guess they originated in the old country." Poor Mrs. Fleming was so 'cut up' as she expressed it that the supper she had taken so much pains to prepare was scarcely tasted by her, though the philosophical squire ate hearty enough after his long ride, and kept telling his wife, all the while, this and that the letter contained, trying to console her, that the wedding was a very grand affair, they had been married in Church, and the bride wore an elegant silk dress with real lace, and such a long train two or three servants to carry it, and her flowers and fan, and when they came out of the Church, a shower of rice was thrown after them, and it was all just like a fairy tale; "and the name Hettie, what do you think it is?" "Her name, why Mrs. Harry Fleming now she's married."

"But she has a name of her own of course, your name is Mrs. John Fleming, but your own name is Hettie, and was Hettie Warner once upon a time, when I first knew you." "My name was (as you say) Mehitable Warner, is hers any worse than that?" No, I guess not worse, but we're used to Mehitable, though you're never called by it." "But my maternal grandmother was, and grandpa never called her Hettie, and in fact said 't was undignified, he believed in long names, Hezekiah Wetherspoon, think of that for a name."

"Yes I confess it was dignified, but you don't seem to care about the name of Harry's wife, however you can read it yourself now you've done crying, do try and take a little supper, no knowing who'll be here yet to night, and you've never opened the letters from Ulica or Newburgh, "Harry's wife's name," the squire repeated slowly, "is Honore Marie Octavia de L'Orme." "Well that beats all, I can't think how she could condescend to unite her money and her grand name, to one like Harry Fleming, if he does paint pictures."

The conversation was interrupted, the great iron knocker on the front door banged, and Dick's voice was heard calling to the horses, for he had heard the wheels crunching in the snow, and Sally opened the door, and the broad front entry was full of people who looked like snow men and women, but Sally carried their wraps off into the kitchen, and soon shaking hands and hearty welcoming was going on in good earnest, and the guests were brought into the warm living room, and Mrs. Fleming forgot her trouble and her letters in fixing supper for her visitors; while the squire lighted the pine knots on the parlor fire, and then he remembered the candles, and brought them out of the capacious pocket of his great coat, and when Mrs. Fleming came in later, the room ablaze with light and the reflection on the walls hung with pictures of Harry's amateur paintings, reminded her of the unread letter and her recent tears. Supper over, the guests were ushered into the "best room" as Squire Fleming insisted upon calling it, though really it was very much of a parlor for a country house.

After seeing the company comfortably seated in the arm chairs and rockers, Mrs. Fleming excused herself and went to see to the sleeping apartments, and while showing Sally how to fix extra bedding and so on, she bethought herself of the letters, and went down stairs