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Aunt Sarah's Portrait and the Frame that Matched

By RUTH SAFFORD, Instructor in English

The Palmer homestead was an old fashioned one standing in the midst of a large orchard. A long narrow hall divided the house midway. On one side was the parlor, a room never warmed in winter and not much used even in summer. Mrs. Palmer had taken pride, nevertheless, in keeping its furnishings up to the neighborhood standard for parlors, and had made many sacrifices to that end. There was the plush parlor set and the hanging lamp with crystal pendants, the Brussels carpet, and the curtains of cheap lace. On the walls were the crayon portraits which Polly hated—stiff, awkward, expressionless faces—bad copies of bad photographs.

"I don't believe daddy would recognize them," Polly privately told her brother. "They look like the pictures in the almanacs of people who were cured of something by taking Somebody's Sarsaparilla."

On the other side of the hall was the long, low room which was the center of their family life. Polly had had a free hand here. The room had needed new wallpaper that fail, and she had chosen and hung it. She had painted the ceiling, the woodwork and chairs, upholstered with cretonne the comfortable old couch and two easy chairs, and hung the windows with fresh curtains of white dimity. On the floor were great rugs which she had braided. Her gold frames filled the wide, low window ledges. Polly had an artist's instinct for color, and the room was a blaze of splendor: the gold ivory white with cheerful touches of old rose in the paper and in the cretonne coverings. Her father and her brothers had been lavish in their praise of the pretty room, and the mother's face lost some of its careworn lines and grew placid when she sat there with her afternoon work.

But Polly herself was not satisfied as yet. She wanted a china cabinet, and she had seen one that day in town—a china cabinet of dark brown mahogany with ledged glass doors so quaint and graceful in line that Polly had surrendered her feminine heart at once. Only it was very expensive. She was sure they had never paid so much for any piece of furniture before. Her mother would never think they could afford to buy it.

The afternoon of the day following their trip to town found Polly in her chamber, kneeling in front of the bureau whose two lower drawers contained her dearest worldly treasure. Grandmother Patton's wedding china. She carefully lifted out the delicate cups and saucers, the sugar bowl and the chubby little cream pitcher. It was beautiful china—fragile, creamy white, with an odd leaf scroll in shades of purplish old rose outlined with gold. She took out the pieces, one by one and set them in the square of yellow light which the late sun threw upon the floor, and sat beside them musing and worshipping. "She was just as old as I—Grandmother Patton was—when she was married, and she used her own money for the chin, all she had earned in three years keeping house for her father. Mother says she didn't have many pretty things afterwards, and she died when mother was born. Dear little Grandmother, I'm glad you had this. Didn't you have courage to buy it? Weren't there any one to tell you that you were terribly extravagant? Or maybe in those days, people did think it well to buy the very best they could afford for their homes, instead of the cheapest they could find.

A plan which had been evolving in Polly's mind all day suddenly became a resolution. "The turkey money is all mine, father says it is. Mother wants me to have a black silk dress just like the one she had when she was a girl. Maybe she wanted a black silk dress, I don't. I do want my china closet down in the living room where we can see it every day. Fred can bring out the cabinet when he goes up town with the apples."

Polly had never in her life before spent any money without consulting her mother, but she drove to town next day with a happy heart. She took with her the velvet-lined case containing the dear old amethyst of Aunt Sarah. The ordering of the crayon portrait was one of her errands and her chief excuse for going.

The next day, and the next, from morning till night, Polly and her brothers picked the apples, and sorted and packed them, and early Saturday morning Fred drove away with the big wagon laden with the fragrant fruit. Polly was busy sweeping and putting the whole house in daintiest order for the reception of the new piece of furniture. She went about her work in a warm and happy frame of mind. Maple leaves of gold and crimson were drifting past the window and October winds sang a pleasant song. It makes one think of homes and firesides all over the world, thought Polly. Her dreams were colored with the hues of the drifting maple leaves. Many a pretty room took shape in her imagination. She saw open fires burning, rugs and jugs and candle lights, and romping, happy children. But always there was a corner where stood the dark mahogany china cabinet with delicate tints of creamy white, old rose and gold gleaming from behind leaded glass doors.

It was nearly noon before Polly heard the rumble of wagon wheels on the drive.
She went out on the veranda to look. Yes, there it was in the wagon! “For the lands sakes, what’s he got?” exclaimed Mrs. Palmer over Polly’s shoulder. “Come and see, mother. It’s something he brought out for me, a cabinet for grandmother’s china.”

Father and the boys lifted the cabinet from the wagon and carried it into the house, and placed it as Polly directed. “Well, Polly, if you aren’t the queerest child,” fluttered Mrs. Palmer, “I am rather odd, but I want to try what it’s pretty. It is going to be nice to have mother’s china out here where we can see it all the time, and handy when we want to use it.”

Christmas was approaching when Mrs. Palmer received notice that her crayon portrait of an “old lady” was ready for delivery. The afternoon of the twenty-fourth of December found her in a little studio partitioned off in an out-of-the-way corner of the department store. She was facing a shabby, dreamy-eyed lady, with bushy hair and delicate hands. “That’s a pretty fine old lady of yours,” he said, when she made known her errand. Mrs. Palmer’s face shone with gratified pride as she answered with gentle dignity, “She was quite a famous old lady, Aunt Sarah was. She was a revolutionary penwoman. People used to say that she had strong hands, smooth and aristocratic, with those tapering fingertips. She had always worked hard with them, too. Oh, they were just the loveliest hands… I can almost feel them touch me now.” Tears filled her eyes and choked her voice. The artist turned away.

“Now about the frame,” he said briskly. “I ran out in one of these white and gold ones if you would really like it better, but I wanted to show you this.” He brought out a simple flat frame of brown mahogany and began putting the picture into it.

“Those are Aunt Sarah’s hands! Just her dear, beautiful hands,” cried the excited little woman. “People used to say that she had strong hands, smooth and aristocratic, with those tapering fingertips. She had always worked hard with them, too. Oh, they were just the loveliest hands… I can almost feel them touch me now.” Tears filled her eyes and choked her voice. The artist turned away.

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Mrs. Palmer caught her breath and hesitated. “It does seem to look more like Aunt Sarah,” she admitted slowly. “I believe I do like it.” It was not easy to give up the massive splendor of white and gold, but—“this is like Polly’s cabinet, and this is what Polly would like”—decided her, and so Aunt Sarah was suitably framed.

Polly’s eyes opened in amazement when she saw the picture. “Why, mother, it’s lovely! I never dreamed it would look like that!”

“Well now, where shall we hang it?” asked Mrs. Palmer turning toward the parlor door.

“Oh, not in the parlor, mother dear. That is too far away. We want her for every day, right out here in the midst of us. Do you know what I would like, mother? Why, I declare, there is a nail there already,” and climbing up on a chair she hung the beautiful portrait in its mahogany frame over the beloved china cabinet, and the two seemed, henceforth, to belong to each other.

“Yes,” said the mother, softly, “that is what Aunt Sarah would like—to be out here in the midst of us, for every day. It’s like having her back for Christmas.”

Hymns for Christmas Day and Every Day

By EDA LORD MURPHY, Associate Professor of Home Economics

It is AN pertinent question to ask whether you have a hymn book in your home?

“Well, let me see,” you answer, “We used to have one. Alice dear, run up to the attic and bring that box by the window there, and see it all the time, and handy when we want to use it.”

They might have a great deal of real enjoyment from singing familiar hymns at home. It is not too late to buy a hymn book this year. (We usually just borrow them from the church, don’t we?) Begin with the old familiar hymns and you’ll find out upon inquiry that almost all the family joining in. If father isn’t very musical he’ll whistle and later he’ll burst forth with a tenor or a bass of which he has never been suspect- ed. Big brother will no doubt advise you to “cut that Sunday stuff” but he’ll end by urging you to play his favorites. If the mother can’t or won’t, he’ll sit down beside you and play the tune with one finger, and in nine cases out of ten he’ll say “Oh, play something we know” (meaning himself of course).

For deep down in each of us there is a real love for familiar hymns—and the more of them we know the more we can enjoy. The other day when our vener- able bishop was here I very rashly said, “I hate new hymns.” He called me to him and said, “Why, my dear, do you realize that nearly all the hymns we sing now are new since my childhood? Wait until you’re as old as I am. I have sung every one of those hymns for seventy years and you’ll welcome the new ones. When I was a boy the most popular Christmas hymn was “Shout the Glad Tidings,” and you can’t get a choir to sing that now.”

He set me to thinking of Christmas hymns in general and several of them in particular. I looked at the dates of some of my favorites. “O Little Town of Bethlehem,” for instance was evidently “new” when our mothers were girls. It was written by Philip Brooks in 1868. It seems, however, as though that one must have been popular from the first, because the words and tune are so perfectly fitted.

Having been brought up on hymns, it is impossible for me to imagine how it would be not to thrill at the sound of certain of them. They appeal so strongly to the imagination. One unconsciously pictures the scene of the first Christmas Eve when the shepherds watched their sheep by night, all seated on the ground,” and yet the words were written in 1702.

The whole world loves “Holy Night, Peaceful Night,” and no one can sing it or listen to it without being stirred anew by the wondrous story. Questions of doctrine appear insignificant compared to the joy that came into the world. Both words and tune were written in 1818.

Those who celebrate the seasons of Advent and Epiphany have a longer time to enjoy Christmas thoughts and to sing Christmas hymns. “From the Eastern plains, when springing blue be the banks of Jordan,‘tis to the holy land, where no sin nor sorrow, evermore shall come. Light of light that shineth Ever the heavenly home Where no sin nor sorrow Evermore shall come. Light of light that shineth Ever the heavenly home Where no sin nor sorrow Evermore shall come. Light of light that shineth Ever the heavenly home Where no sin nor sorrow Evermore shall come.”

Among the family traditions and cus- toms that make wanderers think lovingly of home at Christmas time, none are stronger than memories bound up with music, no gay hotel, no dim, beautiful church, no substitute we can possibly find will take the place of memories like this—a snowy, frosty world outside, a warm and cozy living room with the glow from the fire falling on old and young. Some are talking; some are