

PRICE, 2 CENTS.

SELECTED SKETCH.

CIPHERING JIM.

A HOLIDAY SKETCH.

The teacher had just rapped us to order of a cold winter's morning, a week after the holidays, when the school-room door opened, admitting a youth, who entered with the air of one who had a right, and took a seat in the corner next the door, like a boy who speedily expected to get a better and warmer one nearer to the stove.

The teacher stared; the pupils stared—the former surprised, the girls contemptuous, the boys belligerent, and all curious—each privately censuring his bold, self-sufficient manner, and condemning as highly reprehensible—even had his demeanor been the most humble and servile—his presence among us.

From the oldest to the youngest of the fifty scholars congregated in the new district school-house of the old New England township, all received the new comer coldly. Individual, if not State prejudices, rebelled against his color, and the young matron might shiver by the door, and none pity him that he was cold. My heart was as selfish as the rest, but for my life I could not help looking at him with admiring interest.

A rather slender boy of twelve, a bright yellow-gold hair, as a creole Louisiana would say—prayer book infer, as ninety-nine out of a hundred would do, that the word "creole" implies tainted blood—with small Saxon features, and the finest brow and eyes I ever saw in the child of any race. I mean fine in a phenomenal sense. A massive forehead, square and clear, cut slightly prominent at the temples and full above the eyes, which were the large, mild soft black, peculiar to the African of mixed parentage; the long, silky, jet-black lashes curling back to the eye-lids, left his gaze singularly open and intellectual, and must have impressed the most biased as marking him a lad of more than ordinary promise.

His hair was thick and glossy as black satin, somewhat long and curling at the ends. Such ringlets on the head of a very plain girl would have made her a beauty. The large eyes went slowly around the hushed school-room, taking in each reposeful face in their questioning journey, not timidly, or cringingly, but courageously and self-confidently. A look that said, "I am a negro, but my genius is superior to yours, and genius in my race, the world-wide over, is respected. I carry the right to be here in my head, and let him who can dispute it."

He was poorly dressed, his thin jacket tattered at the elbows, and the patches on the knees of his baggy pants were slowly but surely giving way, the loosened stitches yawning in their desperate attempt to make good their ostensible purpose and keep together both unflattering and different colored sections.

Our teacher, Mr. Stubbs, looked rather nonplussed, his features plainly telling that if his principles were collectively racial, they were not individually, as applied to this particular case at any rate. The boy's large eyes went critically from face to face, like one hardened to the prejudices of popular opinions, and stoutly determined to brave it by returning as the many gazers were sneeringly staring at him.

It was very cold by the door, and the breeze from the cracks and still fluttered the ragged fringe of his old comforter, that was little better than a string. Evidently his studies were limited, for he had but three pieces of school paraphernalia, all told—a writing-book, slate and arithmetic; that he held very tight on his knee and seemed to be very fond of. His boots had given way at the toes, and were worn and uncertain about the heels, looking altogether wretched and water-logged, and as if they had long been exposed to a heavy wet snow-melting on the fox cowhide run in little puddles under the bench and dripped from the frayed hem of his threadbare pants, but neither pupil or teacher offered a warmer seat or said, "Come and sit here; your cold feet by the fire—it is burning for all."

Tom Hart, sitting by me, gave me a sly nudge.

"I say, Dick, don't you know who Mr. Nig is?"

"No, do you?"

"Why, it's acherin' Jim from the Hollow. These school books burnt down last week, and he pokes himself here; darned if I'll go to school with a darkey!"

"But he ain't so very black," I cautiously apologized.

"That's so," assented Tom, "and he is cranky at figures, ciphers clean away from everything in the Hollow, and is Seth Jones' partner—he'll make our old Stubbs scratch his pate to keep up with him."

Tom looked at me, and the answer, for he also, and heaved a sigh which interpreted, meant: "I'll stand the darkey, if he will put Stubbs to his traps." On this last point, the Hollow was four miles distant, the snow two feet deep, and the roads almost unbroken, and taken in connection with his thin, scanty garments, ciphering Jim must have had a rough walk of it; and the dusty feet swinging in the leaky old boots, could but be nearly frozen. And with this thought a little sympathy struggled into existence for the owner of the "tattered" comforter, and I mustered courage to say to Mr. Stubbs:

"He may set on the end of my seat, till he is warm, if you please, sir. He looks chilled." Mr. Stubbs reddened with conscious shame and went over to the object of my pity. In stalling him on the vacant end of my bench, our revered pedagogue wrinkled his arduous brow, and thus interrogated him:

"Is it your intention of becoming a regular scholar of this district?"

"Yes, sir."

Mr. Stubbs was perfectly conversant with the laws of the State on the matter of common schools and wisely swallowed his chagrin.

"Ah, hem! what are studies?"

"Arithmetic and writing," I don't care for anything else and can't learn them."

In the classroom, the arithmetic class was as usual ordered to the blackboard, with more than the ordinary number of knotty algebraical problems on hand; one of which baffled all their numerical skills, and puzzled the brains of the best. I think I can remember it, and for the benefit of those little boys and big boys too, who think they can work out the correct answer between this and next Christmas, we give it in full:

"Five men bought a grindstone together, the diameter of which was five feet and five inches, with a hole in the center three and a half inches square, for which they paid thirty-two (32) dollars; A paying one-third, B one-fourth, C one-fifth, D three twenty-fourths, and E the remainder of the purchase money. Now, how many inches must each owner grind off of the surface to get his share of the stone? After it had been in use three years, the diameter of the stone was found to be twenty-seven and a half inches; and how long will it take to wear out the remainder at the same rate?"

This was a poser, and the boys nibbled their pencils, and crumbled the chalk in hopeless perplexity, and even Mr. Stubbs looked his inability to readily fathom the solution.

The new pupil kept his eyes on the blackboard; and watching him, I fancied that they grew larger and brighter with the momentary increasing concentration of his rapid calculations. In a second he seemed to have mastered the idea, and the play of his fingers over the slate resting on his knees, was somewhat marvelous.

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His lips moved as fast as the stubby bit of pencil, and ten minutes from the time his eye left the blackboard, he slyly held up for my gaze above his answer. I nodded back a smile of exultation that did not escape the keen optics of Tom.

"Did he do it?" was the cautious whisper.

"Yes, and not a third of the figures we supposed."

Tom was indignant.

"Will I like to know what right a nigger has to understand so much about figures? We are cracking our skulls trying to do sums he just works out in the little half of a second."

Jim's quick ear caught the words, and he was not so black but what a crimson tinge flushed hot to his swarthy cheek, and the mild eyes lowered at the rude insult as a white child's might under the same circumstances.

But Tom was only envious, for mathematics was his especial boast, and did not seem to lean across and ask him how he did it.

"Just give us a hint of the way it's done, and I'll be hunky with the class," said Tom, graciously.

You ought to be able to do what a twelve-year old 'nigger' finds easy," said Jim, sarcastically.

Well, James Marshall, if you can, you are the best mathematician in the State. Go to the blackboard and let us see what you can do."

Jim obeyed. It was almost impossible to follow the lightning-like motion of his hand, and when the answer stood plain before us, not one of us could tell how it was done.

Mr. Stubbs had forgotten little Jim's color and gave him a kindly pat on the head.

"Now, how do you do it? how do you arrive at the correct answer?"

"I don't know."

Jim looked helpless, beyond his faculty of numbers he was a decided mediocrity, and for his life could not have comprehensively explained how or why he brought out the complex solution as he did. A hush of amazement followed his shy reply, and Mr. Stubbs asked suggestively:

"Did you ever see the example before?"

"Never, sir."

"Are you sure it is right?"

"I know it is."

"Why?"

"I don't know," again was the startling reply.

"What is your rule? You must have some prescribed method."

"It is one of my own."

"Be so good as to explain it."

"I can't, sir. I cipher as fast in my head as I do with my fingers, and I nearly always throw over half of the figures away."

"And what do you mean by throwing away figures?"

"Why, dividing and subtracting—and the rest in my head—think it out, sir, and put down only the answer; that's as near as I can tell how to do it."

Poor Jim made bad work of attempting to define the mental science of numbers, although to extraordinary gifted in executing what he found it so difficult to explain. This "throwing away of figures" accounted for the power he used visibly—the mind, as he said, ciphering as fast as his fingers.

Once understood, and his system was simple enough where one possessed his immense genius for composition. His mental powers appeared to be infinite, and the rapidly with which he cast up a column of figures three, and even five rows at a time, made us drop our slates in despair, convinced that we were not natural born mathematicians, and could never hope to rival ciphering Jim. He had but one talent besides, and that was a talent of imitation—this was illustrated in his writing. Jim had no established hand of his own; it varied with the copy, and was always an exact counterpart of what his eye was upon; even the slightest fault was faithfully reproduced, and in a week he wrote precisely like Mr. Stubbs; and that worthy gentleman declared that while Jim lived he would always have scruples about swearing to his own autograph.

The little darkey was unanimously voted a wonder; and out of respect for his genius we unanimously concluded to tolerate him. None of us had failed to notice that Jim had no dinner, and that he stood shivering in the entry while we were eating ours; so at recess, mine being not yet exhausted, I took from my basket a liberal slice of bread and butter, and holding it temptingly even with my mouth I said:

"Jim, ain't you hungry?"

"No, I—no much." He wriggled closer against the wall, too proud to own it, although I could see the hunger in his face.

"Don't you think you could go this nice hunk of bread and butter now, Jim, if you tried hard?"

"I guess I could." His mouth fairly watered.

"Well, go in, then." I tossed him the slice, and he did go in with a will.

"And don't you think you could worry down this jolly big apple?" said Tom, giving him a great red apple.

Jim readily undertook the feat, the grateful tears slowly filling the large eyes, to the imminent peril of being absorbed by the fast-vanishing bread and butter.

"It's mighty hard to be called a nigger, if you are used to it, but I'll help you do sums after this," said poor Jim, in a burst of gratitude.

Tom became benevolent as well as complimentary.

"Here is a rousing doughnut; I don't want it. You are a right smart chap, darkey or not, and we will call that quit square."

And after that ciphering Jim met with no unkindness from the most anti-racial of us, for that; but the breaking out of the war suspended remembrance, and the friendless child speedily came to rage and hunger. The people employed to take charge of him returned South, leaving him with a poor family; and in this manner he became thrown alone upon

the world, and for the privilege of going to school, was willing to endure any amount of hardship and want. But they who are active, who and at the present ciphering Jim, although a mere youth, is a first-class bookkeeper in a large New England banking house, at a salary of \$2,000 a year; and, in these latter degenerate days, I am not at all ashamed to say that I went to the same school as darkey Jim Marshall, or to admit that through him I was first led to feel a true sympathy for his race.

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$$\begin{array}{r} 196.50 \\ 22 \\ \hline 393.00 \\ 393.00 \\ \hline \$432.300 \end{array}$$

16 How much money is to be received of \$594.20 its discounting 25 per Cent

$$\begin{array}{r} \$ \text{ ct} \\ 594.20 \\ 148.55 \text{ Discount} \\ \hline \$445.65 \text{ to be received} \end{array}$$

17 How much money is to be received of \$495.62 its discounting 33 1/2 per Cent

$$\begin{array}{r} \$ \text{ ct} \\ 495.62 \\ 165.54 \\ \hline \$330.08 \text{ to be received} \end{array}$$

Required the interest and discount of the following sums at 6 per cent per annum

18 What is the interest and discount of \$496.50 payable in 10 months

$$\begin{array}{r} 6 \text{ mo } \frac{1}{2} \text{ 6 per cent} \\ 4 \text{ " } \frac{5}{12} \\ \hline \$53.79.02 \text{ for 1 year} \\ 26.89.50 \\ \hline \$44.50 \text{ for 10 months} \end{array}$$

19 What is the interest and discount of \$475 payable in 7 months at 6 per cent per annum

$$\begin{array}{r} 6 \text{ mo } \frac{1}{2} \text{ 6 per cent} \\ 1 \text{ " } \frac{1}{12} \text{ 6 per cent} \\ \hline \$52.50 \text{ for 1 year} \\ 26.25 \\ \hline \$30.62.50 \text{ for the interest} \end{array}$$

$$\begin{array}{r} \$ \text{ ct} \\ 496.50 \\ 103.51 \\ \hline 393.00 \end{array}$$

29.59 near enough hands