A CHRISTMAS SILHOUETTE

The Texas sun, as he approached his setting, shoved his red unshaven face through the curtain of grey cloud which he had kept closely drawn all day, to see how the earth had managed without his countenance. Perhaps it gratified him to note how the wide, ghastly prairie lay hard-frozen under the light snow, from which one smile of his would have freed her. Here and there, clumps of cactus or Spanish dagger stood green but forbidding; the dry branches of the leafless mesquites showed odd round waxen masses, like huge bird's nests, except for their colour, which seemed by contrast as green as an emerald.

A well-defined road ran under the snow, straight toward the sunset; against which, as the sky lightened, there grew visible the outline of scattered houses. Near the road, a prairie dog, tinted to match his own burrow, sat on the summit of a newly completed cone-shaped residence and watched with his quick bright eyes the black figure of the Journalist, at first a moving speck along the white road; but growing, as it drew near, longer, darker, and sadder. The prairie dog sat motionless in the focus on the eight-rayed star formed around his burrow by the earth he had thrown out from within; he was new to the world and especially to housekeeping, but his instinct informed him that there was no gun in the hand of the wanderer. Even when the new-comer was almost upon him, he merely gave a twitch of his tail, and a little, short, shrill bark, both of which seemed to be produced by the same machinery, and disappeared like a brown flash, with the pointed exception of a nose and two eyes as sharp as needles.

The Journalist was as new to Texas as the prairie dog; this was evident from his going out for a four-mile tramp in snow weather, or in fact, weather of any sort. But he was writing the Great American Novel; and it was an object to assimilate the local colour of the prairie under skies of all degrees of benignity, certainly, therefore, a snow storm was too rare to lose. Besides, he had no horse, and his finances—for it was not Richard Harding Davis—were too low to permit him to hire one.

He stood still for a moment, with his hands in his pockets, absorbed in the effort to stare the prairie dog out of countenance; at the first motion to draw out one of them, the little animal was gone, though the hand when it appeared held only a pocket-handkerchief.

The Journalist was perched, looking very much out of proportion, in a mesquite tree, struggling to detach one of the curious, deep-green, sphere-like masses to which we have alluded, when the Cowboy rode up and asked whether he liked mistletoe. He was a civilised and generally ameliorated cowboy, who only swore, as a rule, when he was excited, and had not shot a man, or even shot at him, for more than a year.

"I just like such mistletoe as this," said the Journalist, as he sprang to earth. And indeed the berries were as large as New England currants, and were threaded together on tall stems, like quadrupled rows of pearls.

"They kiss under it, in the north, don't they?" asked the Cowboy, with a grin.

"In the north," said the Journalist, as he brushed from his coat a few long, narrow, yellow leaves, "they kiss, as is also the case in the east, west and south, wherever and whenever they can."

"Well, I guess that's about the size of Texas, if it is an empire," said the Cowboy. Wherewith he rode on smiling.

The swift twilight had vanished as he reached the outskirts of the little town; indeed, he had lost at least three minutes, quick as were all his motions, in rifling of its load of mistletoe another mesquite.

"She's from the north," said the Cowboy; "I guess she'll know what it's for; if she don't——" he smiled, "maybe I can teach her."

There was a long row of adobe burrows, politely called houses, on the edge of the town; these were inhabited by Mexicans; before each of them the final taper of the Mexican children's novena had just been lit, for this was Christmas eve. Similar lights twinkled here and

there for some quarter of a mile over the prairie; assuredly the angels, when they should, at midnight, bring again the little Jesus to earth, would understand where to lay him. And to-morrow night there would be fireworks in his honour, but the Cowboy cared for none of these things. The strange waxen texture, the grey-green hue of the burden in his arms, the mystical whiteness of its berries, awoke associations in his mind; but they were not Druidical.

He drew rein, still smiling, before a frame house of some pretension to conventionality, and gave a loud hallo. When a dark-haired girl had peeped from behind a blind at him, she ran out to the gate, with a scarlet shawl thrown over her head. There was a lamp-shade of the same colour over the kerosene lamp in the hall.

"Why papa, back already?—Oh! it's you!" she said.

"If your father," said the Cowboy, smiling always, "is afraid to 'light until he hails the ranch, you must be in the habit of shooting him at sight."

"No," said the dark-haired girl; "he'll be fifty his next birthday. I can aim better than you think."

"I suppose you know what this is," said the Cowboy, who had by this time alighted.

"Artificial mistletoe," said the dark-haired girl, innocently; "real berries never grow so large."

"Not where you was raised," said the Cowboy, for indeed the girl was far from tall. "This is Texas. Do you want it?" and he held the bunch towards her. It was, in diameter, he noticed, just the width of her shoulders.

"Not all of it, it's an empire," said the dark-haired girl.

But she took the mistletoe, and laid it at her feet, on the floor of the gallery that ran along the front of the house.

"I didn't propose to give you all of it," said the Cowboy; "only my share of a ranch out Knickerbocker way—and this!"

Wherewith he laid a spray which he had artfully retained, against the silky darkness of her hair. And then for a moment he perforce ceased smiling; though in his heart reigned peace on earth, as in hers good will to men.

But the Journalist missed this bit of local colour; for he was still half a mile from town, silhouetted blackly against the white prairie.

Katharine Pearson Woods.

THE LANGUAGE OF THE HAND*

The fact that Mr. Heron-Allen's larger work on Cheiromancy has reached its eighth edition, and that "Cheiro's" less formidable volume has made a similar record is of sufficient importance at least to revive or encourage an interest in this class of literature which takes upon itself such an oracular responsibility.

Glancing superficially at the two volumes, one would readily concede that of "Cheiro" to be the more awe-inspiring of the two. Its fantastic black and white cover with the Oriental insignia of star and crescent, has a gruesome skull-and-crossbones effect, suggesting all that is eerie and weird in magic; at once so entrancing to the superstitious, and so hateful to the sceptic. On the other hand, Mr. Heron-Allen's *Manual* is a staid and sober-looking book, bespeaking no frivolity and hinting at contents both serious and exhaustive. Pursuing the investigation, a sincerity of purpose is evident in both volumes; but to Mr. Heron-Allen's must be awarded the right to be considered as a piece of literature aside from its claim as a contribution to science; a claim which the author argues very thoroughly in an elaborate introduction based upon the preface of Adrien Desbarrolles's *Les*

*A Manual of Cheirosophy, Cheirognomy and Cheiromancy. By Edward Heron-Allen. New York: G. P. Putnam's Sons. $1.50.

Cheiro's Language of the Hand. By Cheiro (Comte de Hamong). New York: F. Tennyson Neely.