

# MRS. CHICK

BY VIRGINIA WOODWARD CLOUD

"NOW I'm settled in my own house I reckon I'll have a heap o' company," said Mrs. Chick, looking happily around her bare little room. There was a stove, a pine table, and in one corner a settle that served as a bed. "Mrs. Bell let fall that there geranium from her market-wagon, and it's growin' grand!" The neighbor addressed looked dubiously at the scrubby slip in its close confines of a tomato-can and said nothing. "And Isaac Beck says his mother's got real citronalis,—it smells so sweet, you know,—and she'll give me a slip in the spring. I declare, folks are so kind and attentive! Blessin's pile up and heap on me."

The neighbor looked doubtful. "You do keep real cheerful, Mis' Chick, but seems to me you've had a heap o' trouble this past year, tossed around as you were till you got these two rooms, and they nothin' to brag of, leakin' as they do."

"I just opened Mis' Green's umbrella over my bed," put in Mrs. Chick.

"And the cow dyin'."

"Mis' Wright sent me over a whole quart o' milk."

"And you all crippled up with sciaticky; hardly able to move outer your chair."

"My left leg goes a heap easier this mornin'."

"And all snowed up only last week, and dug outer this hollow, with everybody waitin' to see you dead or smothered."

"Was n't it grand!" Mrs. Chick's small hands clasped the chair-arms in her excitement. "I never spent such a night! My! 't was so still I just kep' quiet and got the feelin' that I was in my coffin for good and all."

"Mercy, I'd ha' been scared, though!" said the other.

"Scared!" Mrs. Chick drew herself up.

"It war n't the time to be scared. 'T was too grand-feelin' for that. A body can get scared when a mouse squeals, if she's a mind to; but as for one's coffin, what's there to be scared of in a place that holds

nothin' but one's self? No, indeed; I just shut my eyes and got the feelin' that I was waitin' for the day o' judgment."

"My land!" breathed the neighbor.

"And 'long toward late mornin', when I heerd the first shovel, I says, 'There's Gabriel!' 'T was just Billy Bates, but the feelin' was the same, and feelin' 's a great thing. Then to be dragged out as 'live as anybody else—"

"You certainly was alive," said the neighbor, with a sniff. "I never seen your like; everybody standin' there worryin' and solemn, and you pulled out in your best mohair and pin, lookin' like you'd never enjoyed yourself as much!"

"Why, they was my layin'-out clothes!" said Mrs. Chick. "A body must wear her best frock for the last. Enjoyed it? I don't want to be bragity, but I would n't ha' missed that feelin' for a coach-ride to Barnwell and back."

"Well, feelin's may be all right in their place, but they ain't always fillin'," said the neighbor, "so I fetched you over some o' them pippins. Thought maybe you could bake 'em."

"Now, ain't that jest as I said!" exclaimed Mrs. Chick. "I do get more favors than enough! I must get ready to make room for those that'll come Christmas. Folks are so good in rememberin' Christmas, and it's only three days off."

The neighbor looked around her again. Then she remarked: "I hope all your relations'll remember you well this Christmas, Mis' Chick. So much has happened to you this year. There's a heap of things they could do, maybe—a cushion for that chair, and a tidy or two; a barrel o' flour by freight would n't hurt, to say nothin' of cans of things. Do you still write 'em letters?"

"Whenever there's a stamp convenient," said Mrs. Chick, working her chair to the table to avoid rising on her painful little limbs. "They're so much company to write. I had a letter only last week from Hannah—that's Brother Ned's widow.



Drawn by E. Noyes Thayer. Half-tone plate engraved by C. W. Chadwick

“MAIL!”

She's so pleased that I 'm doin' so well. She 'll be sure to send a box, for Hannah's well-to-do and a free-handed girl. So's Martha Fitz. They're awful pleased when I write 'em. They say it cheers 'em up to hear of prosperity when there's so much trouble around 'em."

"My goodness, Mis' Chick! Did n't you write 'em about losin' your place and your horse, and breakin' your leg last fall, and your cow dyin', and your taxes, and the fire, and your spring runnin' dry, and you havin' the grippe, and gettin' all crippled up with sciaticky, and bein' snowed up and dug out, and your roof lettin' in snow, and not a mouthful—"

The neighbor stopped short. The bare larder and meager resources might have been added to the list, but Mrs. Chick broke in, weighing an apple in each hand:

"To be sure, I wrote and told 'em all about the snowin' up and diggin' out, and Hannah says it's the most excitin' readin' she's had in a long time, and that most people would ha' got into a heap o' trouble over it. She thinks I escaped wonderful. And they certainly did congratulate me over such an interestin' experience. The same way when my leg was broken. They said it might ha' been my neck, and so it might. They tell me I'm the luckiest woman they ever heard tell of, and I certainly am. I'm real full of gettin' ready for Christmas," added Mrs. Chick, irrelevantly. "I'd try my hand at makin' a pie of these apples if lard was n't so scarce; but I've got a notion that a Brown Betty would be fine. I declare, I get the feelin' for Christmas so strong, and it's a grand feelin'! You come over as soon as you can, Henrietta, and see my things that come."

The neighbor promised and went her way, while Mrs. Chick sat before the fire to plan her Christmas.

When Christmas day arrived, however, the neighbor was too busy to go across to Mrs. Chick's until afternoon. Then she rapped at the door, and it was immediately opened by Mrs. Chick. She was arrayed in her laying-out clothes, and her eyes sparkled with the delight of living. She hobbled to the table, which was carefully covered with newspapers.

"They've all come, every one of them! I covered 'em with papers to keep from a speck of dust."

"I did n't see the expressman stop," re-

marked the neighbor, eying the table suspiciously.

"Mail!" Mrs. Chick carefully removed the papers and disclosed a white surface beneath. "They came by mail!"

The other stared down at the table.

"Well! What are all—well, upon my word, Mis' Chick!"

"Pocket-handkerchiefs!" said Mrs. Chick, triumphantly, "all of 'em. Hannah sent me a whole dozen, and all hem-stitched, too! Martha she sent another dozen, and Tom's widow she sent six with letters on 'em—look! B—that's for Betsy. Cousin Mary Battey she sent three, and Mis' Neal sent two, and here's one from Mis' Petty, up at Barnwell, and another from the preacher's wife up there. Ain't they grand? Hannah says she sent handkerchiefs 'cause they could mail 'em so easy, and so they could. 'T was a mighty sensible thought and saved 'em trouble. Martha says a body who has as many friends as I have needs handkerchiefs—they're so useful at goin' out to tea and to funerals. I do like a nice stiff handkerchief at a funeral!" Mrs. Chick passed her hand proudly over the array of linen. Then the neighbor said:

"Thirty-seven pocket-handkerchiefs. Well, I never!"

"Nor I," said Mrs. Chick, proudly. "I don't want to be braggy, but I don't believe anybody around got so many, and I'll have one fresh for every Sunday."

The neighbor looked around her,—a comprehensive glance that took in the table, empty save for a plate and broken-handled knife; the struggling geranium slip, the pale winter sunlight that left nothing disguised,—and then she said:

"Pocket-handkerchiefs are good in their place; a body can't eat 'em, though."

"Well, I declare, the Christmas feelin' has been so strong that I've not thought much about the eatin' part," said Mrs. Chick. "I've got all these letters to write by and by."

"So I fetched along a piece of roast turkey," added the neighbor. "As I said, feelin's ain't fillin'."

Mrs. Chick was speechless. Then she seized the nearest handkerchief and pressed it to her eyes.

"Oh, Henrietta! To think I should make the first use of 'em by cryin' into 'em! But it's tears of thankfulness, and thankfulness is a grand feelin'!"