

BLACK SHEEP

JACK SHACKELFORD

The greatest problem that comes with Christmas is that of choosing gifts for all of your friends and relatives. This was true of my Christmas two years ago. Nineteen of my relatives were coming to our house to enjoy together that festive occasion. A week before their arrival I began planning what I should give each one. I must commend myself on having been able to take care of the first seventeen in fine style. The last two were the most eccentric of all my relatives. They were just the opposite in character. My Aunt Cud was a strong temperance leader in her little town of Bloomly, while my Uncle Swan was an habitual drunkard. I thought for once in their lives they would receive a gift that would fill their hearts with joy. The very next day I bought Uncle Swan a quart of the best imported whisky that money could buy and Aunt Cud a ticket to the annual meeting of Sandusky's Temperance Leaders. I thought that my other relatives would not appreciate my giving Uncle Swan this "beverage" so I changed the label to read "Cooks Imported East Indian Tea."

Christmas rolled around and with it the exchange of gifts. The last two to be given out were Aunt Cud's and Uncle Swan's.

Horrors! I had put the labels on the wrong packages. The gifts were interchanged. Aunt Cud thought it queer that she received imported tea, but she said nothing. Uncle Swan was too inebriated to know or care what he received. That

was the beginning of a rejuvenation for these two.

That afternoon Uncle Swan found himself in a large meeting room crowded with people. As things got under way the people grew quiet and listened to the speaker. Uncle Swan nearly went to sleep, but now and then he caught a word of the lecture. Every once in a while there came a loud "hic" from the back of the room and everyone would turn around and stare at Uncle Swan sitting placidly chewing his home grown tobacco. Believe it or not, Uncle Swan sat there the entire afternoon listening and ultimately believing in that temperance lecture.

In the meantime Aunt Cud, feeling drowsy after the big Christmas dinner, decided to try some of "Cook's Imported East Indian Tea." She poured herself a glass full and gulped it down.

"Mmmmm. Pretty good. Guess I'll have some more," thought Aunt Cud. So saying she lifted the bottle to her lips and drained it. A warm feeling began to creep over her body and she wanted to laugh. Aunt Cud then let loose a series of "hics" that shook the windows in the house.

It took all seventeen of us two hours to sober her. When Uncle Swan came back from what he called, 'a very inspiring meeting,' he was very much shocked to learn about Aunt Cud. He spent fully an hour lecturing her on the evils of drink.

The effect of this Christmas was evident. Aunt Cud became the "black sheep" of the family and Uncle Swan rose to great heights as a temperance leader.