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Various**

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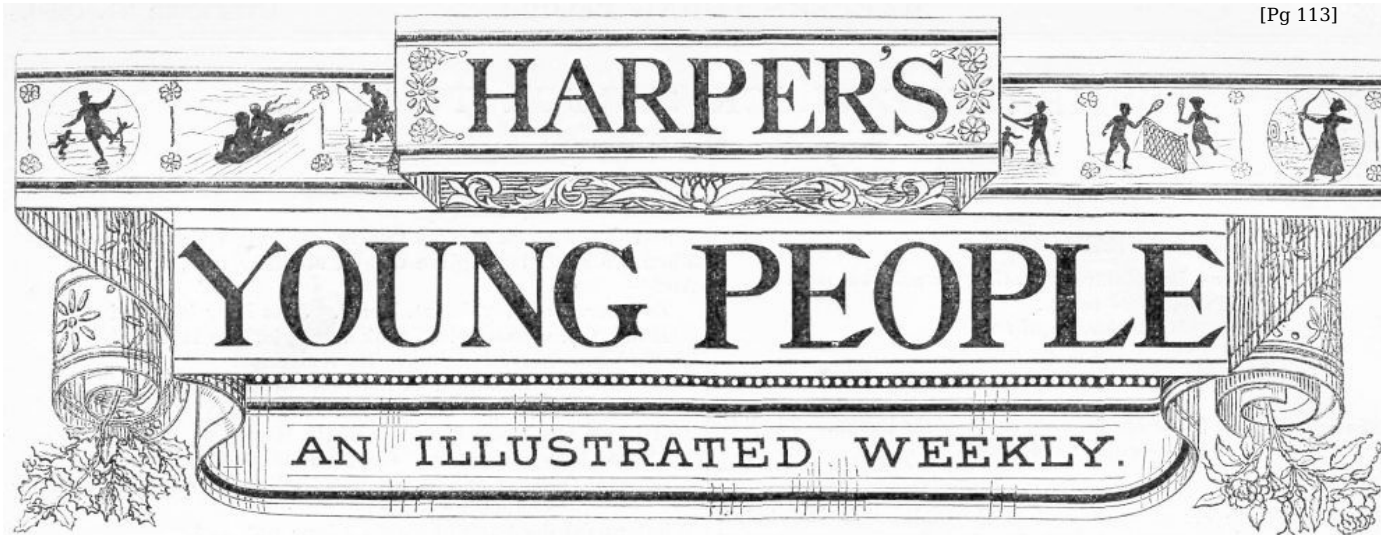
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"WHEN THE CLOCK STRUCK TWELVE."—[SEE NEXT PAGE.]

WHEN THE CLOCK STRUCK TWELVE.

[Pg 114]

A Christmas Play in One Act.

BY EDGAR FAWCETT.

CHARACTERS.

The Baron Beautemps, a wealthy French nobleman.
 Henri, his son, aged twelve.
 Lucienne, his daughter, aged ten.
 Gaspard, serving-man in the château.
 Eloise, maid of the Baroness Beautemps.

(The action passes in the spacious old castle of the Baron. The time is about A.D. 1600.)

SCENE.

A portion of the grand upper hall in the Château de Beautemps. Large antique fire-place at back, in which burns a sleepy wood fire. Tapestryed doors R. and L. Also R. and L., beyond either door, entrances to corridors that communicate with main hall. Large draped window R. of fire-place. Near R. door small cabinet, on which is a silver candelabrum with lighted candle. Near door at L. a similar candelabrum resting on heavy carved chair. As curtain rises, Henri and Lucienne are discovered beside chimney-place in act of hanging up stockings before it. Lucienne wears a costume of brocaded silken stuff reaching to the ground, and a small velvet hood, whence her hair flows in rich abundance. Henri wears doublet with large collar, and knee-breeches.

Lucienne (going to window, drawing curtains, and looking out. She then comes to front of stage).

How cold and still! With what an icy glow
 The stars are shining over the château!
 And yonder, where the chapel roofs rise dark,
 The crusted snow gives out a diamond spark.
 Eleven strokes the great hall clock has rung.
 Well, brother Henri, is your stocking hung?

Henri (joining Lucienne at front of stage).

All's ready, sister; see how slim and white
 Both stockings glimmer in the doubtful light.

I can't help wondering, as I watch them thus,
What gifts the Christinas Saint will bring to us.

Lucienne.

Oh, everything we've wanted for a year!
To me a painted doll in bridal gear;
To you a sword, a cup and ball, a top;
To me, again—

Henri.

Lucienne, I pray you, stop.
Dear sister, I've a secret to confess.

Lucienne (eagerly).

What is it, Henri? Anything I'll guess?
Ah, there! your face reveals it ere you speak:
You want a falcon, beautiful and sleek,
To hunt with in the spring, when field and glade
Hear the sweet bugles of the cavalcade.
Who knows?—Perchance good luck your bird may bring,
Tied to the chimney by a silken string.

Henri.

No, no, Lucienne; in vain your wits would tire
To guess just what it is that I desire.
I want—come closer; let me speak it low—
I want—

Lucienne (in alarm).

Why, Henri, what disturbs you so?

Henri.

The wish to look on that famed Saint who brings
At twelve each Christmas-eve such pretty things;
To watch old Santa Claus, as plain as day,
Steal to this hall in some mysterious way;
To mark his long white beard, his elfish mien,
And see what others have so rarely seen.

Lucienne (agitated).

Oh, Henri, brother, I am filled with dread!
How came so queer a fancy in your head?

Henri.

Call it a whim, freak, folly, if you choose;
Only keep watch with me. You'll not refuse?

Lucienne.

I should not dare! And yet—if I relent—

Henri (kissing her).

Dear, kind Lucienne! I thought you would consent.
Now hear my plan. Although a dangerous one,
Its very spice of danger lends it fun.
Our nurse, Florine, till two o'clock at least
Will dance, most likely, at the village feast.
She's stolen away, and begged me not to tell;
And I, be sure, will keep her secret well.
We to our chambers will meanwhile repair.
And till the clock strikes twelve hold vigil there.
Then we shall both glide out on stealthy feet,
And—

Lucienne.

Feel my heart, Henri. Just hear it beat!

Henri.

Oh, nonsense! Think how glorious it will be
To find him here, and know 'tis really he!
They say that midnight is his favorite hour
To show the merry magic of his power.
And if we spy upon his movements then,
We'll see him here alive. Oh, think, Lucienne!

Lucienne (starting and looking about).

But if your plan by any chance he knew,
What awful deed might Santa Claus not do?
Suppose that quickly as the turn of dice
His anger changed us into cats or mice?
Suppose as reindeers he should make us drag,
With monstrous horns, and feet that never flag,
The tinkling sled in which he journeys forth
Each Christmas-eve, from wild realms of the North?

Henri (laughing).

A doleful penance for so slight a sin!—
Come; they who nothing venture, nothing win.

Lucienne.

But, mind, we'll only peep from either door;
We might indeed repent if we did more.



Henri.

**TRUE, SISTER; FOR A LITTLE WHILE WE PART.
UNTIL THE CLOCK STRIKES TWELVE BE STOUT
OF HEART.**

Henri (kissing her).

True, sister; for a little while we part.
Until the clock strikes twelve be stout of heart.

Lucienne (as they separate).

On kind old Santa Claus to play the spies?

Henri (taking candle from R.).

Our plan is made. Good-night till twelve o'clock.

Lucienne (taking candle from L.).

What noise was that? It gave me such a shock!

Henri (listening).

A wainscot mouse that somehow came to grief.
Good-night.

Lucienne.

Good-night. I'm trembling like a leaf.

[Exeunt Henri and Lucienne at R. and L. doors. Each carries away candle, and the stage is now wrapped in dimness.]

Enter Gaspard and Eloise from R. corridor. Gaspard follows Eloise in slow, attentive way. He wears a doublet of some dull red material, with yarn stockings and low buckled shoes. Eloise wears a dress that reaches above her ankles, and a dainty white apron, into which she occasionally thrusts both hands.]

Eloise.

I pray you, Gaspard, cease these foolish airs,
These love-sick sighs and sentimental stares.
They've thrown Madame already in a pet;
She thinks me quite too young to marry yet.

Gaspard.

Unpitying girl! I scarcely can believe
You'd show such cruelty on Christmas-eve.
I'll hang no stocking ere I rest to-night;
If filled at all 'twould not be filled aright. *[Sighs deeply.]*

Eloise (archly).

And how would you prefer it filled, Sir Tease?

Gaspard.

How save with one kind smile from Eloise!

Eloise.

My smiles are not so cheaply gained as that.
Be off at once, and stop your silly chat!
'Tis nearly twelve—the hour, as rumor tells,
When Santa Claus begins his goblin spells.
Ah, could I once, with these two favored eyes,
The good Saint at his kindly task surprise,
I'd give—

Gaspard (eagerly).

You'd give—well, what, Eloise?—your heart?

Eloise.

Why, certainly. But then you need not start.
There's no occasion to express content
By quite misunderstanding what I meant.

Gaspard (very agitatedly).

I don't misunderstand—oh, not at all.
You meant that if by chance it should befall
Yourself, Eloise, at midnight here to stray,
And look on Santa Claus, you might repay
Such privilege by—

Eloise.

Ah, could I see the Saint,
Speeding his jovial pranks, with visage quaint,
'Twere hard to warn you where my grateful mood
Would place the limit of its gratitude.

Gaspard [aside].

What if to-night, disguised with cunning art,
I should myself enact Kris Kringle's part?

Eloise.

Well, I must hurry on; the hour grows late.



Gaspard.

**STEAL HERE BY TWELVE O'CLOCK, WITH
CAUTIOUS PACE,
AND TURN YOUR LOOK TOWARD YONDER
CHIMNEY-PLACE.**

Gaspard.

One moment, Eloise, I beg you wait.
The genial sprite whom you desire to meet
Perchance your longing gaze may really greet.
Steal here by twelve o'clock, with cautious pace,
And turn your look toward yonder chimney-place,
Then who shall say what marvel yet untold
'Twill be your happy fortune to behold?

Eloise [aside].

The sly deceiver! Would he dare assume
The guise of Santa Claus, and in the gloom
Of this deserted hall delude my sense,

Hoping to dupe me by some bold pretense?
I half believe so. Well, if this were true,
How nicely such deception he should rue!

Gaspard.

You'll come, Eloise?

Eloise.

Perhaps. I can't decide. [*Going toward corridor at R.*]

Gaspard (following her).

By all means let your wish be gratified.
Accept my counsel.—Stop one moment, please.

Eloise (hurrying off).

I'll think of it. Good-night. [*Exit Eloise at R.*]

Gaspard.

Nay, stop, Eloise!
Agree that when the clock strikes twelve you'll fare,
On timorous tiptoe, by the large North stair,
Down to this hall— [*He pauses, looking off R.*]
She's vanished like a dream!
Still, trust to fate, Gaspard, and work your scheme.

[*Exit Gaspard at R., slapping breast confidently.*]

Enter the Baron Beauteemps at L. The Baron is disguised as Santa Claus. He wears a white wig, a dark jerkin, with ruffled breeches reaching a little below the knee; he carries a pack of toys upon his back: he has a long white beard; his shoulders are sprinkled with powdery substance, representing snow. He turns on entering, and looks at the two stockings hung before chimney-place with a fond, happy smile.]

Baron.

Dear spotless little stockings, viewed with joy,
Pure memories of my darling girl and boy,
How tenderly though silently you tell
Of lightsome, pattering footsteps loved so well!

[*Laughs to himself softly.*]

Ah, me! that I, a noble great in rank,
Should thus at midnight play the mountebank!
And all because I guess how young Henri,
With curious eagerness, resolves to see
That mystic Saint of Christmas, whom no eye
Discerns, whom some believe in, some deny!
Zounds! what a foolish father I have grown!
Does Henri sleep, or will he come alone,
Just as the clock strikes twelve, in night array,
This fire-lit hall's weird shadows to survey?
Well, if he comes, the wicked rogue shall find
A Santa Claus quite suited to his mind.—
And yet, while fancying his childish glee,
A strange, unpleasant thought oppresses me:
Suppose it chanced that while I lingered here
The real Kris Kringle should himself appear!
That situation would indeed be fine
For one decked out in mimic robes like mine.
Still, since this garb was easy to obtain
From old ball costumes of our last King's reign,
And since I knew how Henri's heart was set
On seeing the good Saint whom so few have met,
I quietly determined for one hour
To frolic thus, forgetting state and power.

[*Listens intently at R.*]

A movement in the turret overhead.—
Some servant, doubtless, climbing to his bed.
Hark! steps! I'll fly at once—the sound grows near.
Too late. I am seen. Confusion!—who is here?

[*Enter Gaspard at R. He is disguised as Santa Claus. He wears a pair of taffetas breeches uncouthly rolled up to his knees, gray yarn stockings, and an old jacket trimmed with rusty silver buttons. He has a broad hat shading his face, and carries upon his back some sort of huge stuffed sack. He stoops affectedly while walking, and employs the slow, tottering pace of an aged man. Just as he appears on stage, and while the Baron retreats bewilderedly toward L., twelve loud, solemn strokes sound, as if from a distant clock.*]

Gaspard (who has observed the Baron) [aside].

Ah! Heaven, who can it be, in mercy's name?
That pack of toys, long beard, and stooping frame
'Tis Santa Claus, by everything that's queer!

My knees are failing me; I quake with fear.

Baron (watching Gaspard) [aside].

That loaded form—that hesitating gait—
'Tis Santa Claus himself, as sure as fate!
I've not sufficient strength to flee away.
I'm positively frozen with dismay.

[Gaspard and the Baron now eye each other in great comic bewilderment. The Baron gives a nervous cough, and Gaspard starts in ludicrous terror.]

Gaspard [aside].

I'm nearly dead with fright—I choke and pant.—
I'll speak to him—ask pardon. No, I can't.

[Gaspard here gives a heavy groan, at which the Baron starts in great alarm.]

Baron [aside].

Of course he means to do some dreadful thing.
Even now he seems preparing for a spring.

[The Baron here makes a loud shuddering sound, at which Gaspard sinks upon his knees.]

Gaspard [aside].

My legs have both collapsed—I'm most unwell.

Baron [aside].

Ye saints! he's muttering some horrid spell,
Calling some gnome, perchance, with grip of ice,
To shoot me up the chimney in a trice!

[While Gaspard and the Baron regard each other in the dimness with glances of mutual fear, Henri and Lucienne peep forth from doors at R. and L.]

Henri (only perceiving Gaspard at R., and speaking in an excited whisper).

'Tis he! I look on Santa Claus at last.

Lucienne (only perceiving the Baron, her father, at L.).

He's here! And oh, my poor heart beats so fast!

Henri (alluding to Gaspard).

With that large hat, his face I scarce behold.

Lucienne (alluding to the Baron).

He wears no hat to shield him from the cold.

Henri.

How strange he has no beard, as tales declare!

Lucienne.

How long his beard is, and how white his hair!

Henri.

I thought his clothes were snowy—it is not so.

Lucienne.

He's very thickly covered o'er with snow.

Henri (discovering the Baron also).

What! two of them! I can't believe it true.

Lucienne (discovering Gaspard).

Oh dear! I never dreamed there would be two!

Gaspard (rising, and staggering helplessly toward back of stage) [aside].

I feel that he observes me like a lynx;
No doubt of some dark punishment he thinks.
I'll try to escape from his revengeful glare;
Perhaps he'll drag me back, though, by the hair.
He turns his head—pursues me with his eye.
My doom is sealed.—I'm very young to die!

[Enter Eloise at R. She comes slowly and cautiously upon stage. As she does so, Gaspard conceals himself behind the curtain of window at R. of chimney-place. Eloise discovers the Baron, gives a sudden start, and then addresses audience in quick, agitated aside.]

Eloise [aside].

Beyond a doubt Gaspard is waiting there,
In beard and wig disguised with subtle care.
The artful scamp! how easy to perceive
This web of crafty guile he means to weave!
So, so, my clever trickster, you shall meet
Your match to-night in cunning and deceit.

[*Aloud*] (*addressing the Baron.*)

Pray are you Santa Claus? If this be true,
It gives me joy, great Saint, to welcome you.

Gaspard (*half hidden behind curtain*) [*aside*].

What store of courage has the charming jade!
Now on my life, she's not a bit afraid!
She thanks her stars for this fine stroke of luck;
Her curiosity has lent her pluck.

Baron [*aside*].

It's Eloise.—An awkward thing, forsooth,
If this young waiting-maid should learn the truth!
No gossip for a mile but straight would know
That I, their lord, had wandered his château
At midnight, clad more like a circus clown
Than some proud nobleman of high renown.
How *shall* I act? what say? I'm sick with dread.
The minx would doubtless follow if I fled.
Kris Kringle's gone, and I escape his ire,
Yet leave the frying-pan to find the fire.

[*While the Baron speaks this aside, Eloise slowly draws nearer to him, examining his appearance as closely as the dim light will allow. Her manner shows extreme suppressed fun; she now and then places her hand over her mouth, as though to restrain herself from laughing aloud. Meanwhile Gaspard, still half concealed behind curtain, watches very intently what is passing. He seems distressed by the boldness of Eloise. He makes one or two gestures of eager learning, but Eloise entirely fails to perceive his presence. This affords Gaspard opportunity for much comic alarm and generally humorous by-play. The Baron retreats a little to L. as Eloise approaches him from R. At length Eloise addresses him, in a voice of mock gravity.*]

Eloise.

Great Saint of Christmas! pardon, I beseech,
My wish to address you in poor mortal speech.
Yet now, while gazing on your reverend face,
I long to beg of you one special grace.

Gaspard (*with signs of marked surprise*) [*aside*].

Her words arouse in me an interest keen.
"One special grace." What can the vixen mean?

Baron [*aside*].

Was ever man more oddly placed than I?
She'll recognize my voice if I reply.

Eloise.

Ah! treat me not with silent unconcern,
But grant, great Saint, the boon for which I yearn!

Gaspard [*aside*].

What is the boon that she has come to seek?
And why on earth does Santa Claus not speak?

Baron [*aside*].

I must respond; it is my only choice.
Yet *can* I properly disguise my voice?

Henri (*from doorway at R.*) [*aside*].

It's Eloise; some favor she would crave.
Upon my word, she's wonderfully brave.

Lucienne (*from doorway at L.*) [*aside*].

How dare she go as near to him as that?
And where's the Santa Claus who wore the hat?

[*Henri and Lucienne have been standing on the threshold of either chamber in foreground, with only their heads peeping forth from either doorway. They seem immensely concerned and occupied with all that is now going on. A little while previously they have discovered each other's presence, and made mutual signs of astonishment. Henri has lifted two fingers of right hand, thus indicating by expressive pantomime what surprise it has given him to find that there are two Santa Clauses instead of one. Lucienne has responded by similar pantomime.*]

Eloise.

You're silent still. Oh, is it, then, because
You speak some different language, Santa Claus?
I know, for my part, but a single tongue;
I left off going to school when rather young.

[*Aside*] (*with great secret amusement, while she looks toward audience.*)

The wily rascal, he is dumb from fear,
His voice being so familiar to my ear.
I'll make him talk, or else my woman's wit

Is less adroit than I imagine it.

[*Aloud once more, and in a voice of earnest pleading.*]

Majestic Saint! how pitiless you are!
I wished to question you of one Gaspard,
A serving-man in Baron Beautemps' train,
Who loves me, and who grieves at my disdain.

[*Eloise now lifts finger roguishly at audience, and turns sly looks toward the Baron as she does so. Gaspard leans forward from curtains, and listens with deep attention.*]

Baron (speaking in a very gruff, hollow voice, totally unlike his usual tones).

Gaspard? Of him what question would you ask?
To deal with sweethearts never was my task.
If love's coquettish moods your phrase would paint,
'Twere best you should consult another saint.

[*Eloise shows marked surprise as these words are spoken. The voice which the Baron uses evidently arouses her astonishment. But by the time he has ended she is once more looking at audience with same sly expression as before. Meanwhile Henri and Lucienne, as though terrified by the stern voice of him whom they suppose to be Santa Claus, close doors at R. and L., disappearing wholly from stage.*]

Eloise [aside].

He's changed his voice; he's warier than I guessed.
Well, now, till all's revealed I'll never rest.

[*Aloud.*]

Nay, mighty Saint, I tell it to my grief,
This lad, Gaspard, torments me past belief.
In hall or corridor I scarce can pause
But there he waits to accost me, Santa Claus.
His flattery turns me ill; with sigh and groan
He vows that Nature wrought my heart from stone;
Now rude and fierce, now penitent and meek,
He swears to hang himself three times a week;
But most, indeed, my wearied soul regrets
The doleful chant of stupid canzonets
Which night by night below my window's ledge,
Perched like a monkey on a slant roof's edge,
He drones when all the vast château is mute,
Hugging against his breast a crack-stringed lute.

Gaspard [aside, and in tones of great melancholy].

Oh, Eloise, relentless and untrue!
Complained of as a nuisance! and by you!

[*Gaspard covers face with hands, as though overwhelmed by grief.*]

Baron [at first aside].

Good! I have fooled her, and with effort faint.
How easy it is to play the Christmas Saint!
A few more words that neatly shall beguile,
And lo! I'll flit away in ghostly style!

[*Aloud, to Eloise.*]

No more, I pray. 'Tis not for me to deal
With lovers' destinies, their woe or weal.
That here within my presence you should come
But proves you singularly venturesome.
This once to o'erlook your rashness I will deign;
Pardon hereafter you shall seek in vain.
So stern the penalty for deeds thus bold,
Your very blood would curdle were it told;
Both limbs would fail your trembling form beneath,
Both jaws would scarce contain your chattering teeth.

[*The Baron speaks these latter words in a terribly severe tone. Gaspard audibly shivers as he hears them. Eloise recoils and seems at first quite horrified. Then suddenly, as though reminding herself that it is, after all, not Santa Claus, but only her sweetheart disguised for the purpose of deceiving her, she tosses her head and regards the Baron very courageously, placing a hand, in the most saucy way, on each of her hips.*]

Eloise.

No doubt I should be frightened half to death—
Should scream, should stagger, and should catch my breath,
And thus, indeed, I really might behave—
Being not by temperament very brave—
Did I not chance to more than merely guess
The shrewd impostor whom I now address.

Baron [aside].

Impostor? She discovers, then, my sham?
Has she discovered also who I am?

[Aloud, in same voice as before].

Retire in haste, young maid, and wisely shirk
To insult Kris Kringle at his goodly work!

Eloise (with sudden anger, stamping her foot, and, coming much nearer to the Baron).

Retire, indeed! And do you still surmise
I've not the sense to pierce your thin disguise?
I wonder, wicked knave that you appear,
The real Kris Kringle does not find you here,
And soundly punish you for this offense
In due proportion to its impudence.

[Eloise here gives a loud, mocking laugh, and abruptly tears wig from the Baron's head, afterward pulling beard from his face also.]

Of me, Gaspard, I'll teach you to make sport
With mask and mummery of this idle sort.
I'll bid you learn if Eloise will bear
Being juggled with by stratagems unfair.
I'll have you know—



Eloise. AH, HEAVEN! WHAT HAVE I DONE?

Baron. YOU'VE COUNTED ON YOUR GAME
BEFORE 'T WAS WON.

(Discovering that it is the Baron, and showing great consternation.)

Ah, Heaven! what have I done?

Baron (good-humoredly).

You've counted on your game before 'twas won.

[Henri and Lucienne now peep forth cautiously from doors R. and L. They gaze for a moment in amazement at the Baron, and then advance toward him from either side of stage.]

Henri.

Papa, as I'm alive! How strange it seems!

Lucienne.

It's like the way things happen in one's dreams.

[Gaspard, as if thunderstruck, now quits his hiding-place, taking off hat and throwing aside his pack.]

Gaspard (to Eloise).

Ah, then, Eloise, those cruel words you spoke
Were all intended as a harmless joke?

Eloise (agitatedly).

Oh yes, Gaspard. I thought 'twas you disguised.
I never felt so startled—so surprised!

Henri.

'Tis such a disappointment! I could cry!

Lucienne.

I'd help you if you did, Henri.

Baron (caressing both children).

And why?

Henri.

Two Santa Clauses! Think, papa, what fun!
And now you haven't left us even one!

Baron.

Nay, never mind, dear children. We have seen
Two loving hearts grow blithesome and serene;
Made dark misunderstandings melt away
From both, like sombre vapors touched with day.

[*The Baron looks toward Gaspard and Eloise, who hold each other's hands, exchanging smiles of reconciliation.*]

Eloise (with sudden anxiety, addressing the Baron).

Oh, master, will you pardon my rude act?

Baron.

Agreed; but one condition I exact:
Gaspard and you must promise both to keep
My own sly masquerade a secret deep.

Gaspard and Eloise.

We promise, master!

Baron.

Well, so be it; and I
Perchance will well reward you by-and-by.
The Baroness in my hearing lately said
That Eloise was still too young to wed.
But possibly persuasion may invent
Some private means of making her relent.



***Gaspard.* OH, THANKS! A THOUSAND THANKS, BENIGNANT LORD!**

Gaspard (delightedly).

Oh, thanks! a thousand thanks, benignant lord!

Henri (to his father).

Shall Lucienne and myself gain no reward
For keeping silent, as your will decrees,
Like happy Gaspard and his Eloise?

Baron (taking one of the children's hands in each of his own).

Ah, when you wake to-morrow, both shall find
Your stockings with sweet treasures richly lined.
Hie straight to bed, and ere the day return
Let each one here a valued lesson learn:
Gaspard and I shall grant, grown more discreet,
That danger paves the pathway to deceit;
While you, Henri, Lucienne, Eloise, shall own
That oft the unknown had best remain unknown;

Nor strive as now, on Christmas-eve, to delve
In goblin mysteries, while the clock strikes twelve.

[*All join hands and bow, as curtain falls.*]

END OF PLAY.

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NURSERY TILES-"THERE HE IS!"

HOW IT ALL HAPPENED.

[Pg 122]

A Christmas Story.

BY LOUISA M. ALCOTT.

It was a small room, with nothing in it but a bed, two chairs, and a big chest. A few little gowns hung on the wall, and the only picture was the wintry sky, sparkling with stars, framed by the uncurtained window. But the moon, pausing to peep, saw something pretty and heard something pleasant. Two heads in little round night-caps lay on one pillow, two pairs of wide-awake blue eyes stared up at the light, and two tongues were going like mill clappers.

"I'm so glad we got our shirts done in time! It seemed as if we never should, and I don't think six cents is half enough for a great red flannel thing with three buttonholes—do you?" said one little voice, rather wearily.

"No; but then we each made four, and fifty cents is a good deal of money. Are you sorry we didn't keep our

quarters for ourselves?" asked the other voice, with an under-tone of regret in it.

"Yes, I am, till I think how pleased the children will be with our tree, for they don't expect anything, and will be so surprised. I wish we had more toys to put on it, for it looks so small and mean with only three or four things."

"It won't hold any more, so I wouldn't worry about it. The toys are very red and yellow, and I guess the babies won't know how cheap they are, but like them as much as if they cost heaps of money."

This was a cheery voice, and as it spoke the four blue eyes turned toward the chest under the window, and the kind moon did her best to light up the tiny tree standing there. A very pitiful little tree it was—only a branch of hemlock in an old flower-pot, propped up with bits of coal, and hung with a few penny toys earned by the patient fingers of the elder sisters, that the little ones should not be disappointed.

But in spite of the magical moonlight the broken branch, with its scanty supply of fruit, looked pathetically poor, and one pair of eyes filled slowly with tears, while the other pair lost their happy look, as if a cloud had come over the sunshine.

"Are you crying, Dolly?"

"Not much, Polly."

"What makes you, dear?"

"I didn't know how poor we were till I saw the tree, and then I couldn't help it," sobbed the elder sister, for at twelve she already knew something of the cares of poverty, and missed the happiness that seemed to vanish out of all their lives when father died.

"It's dreadful. I never thought we'd have to earn our tree, and only be able to get a broken branch, after all, with nothing on it but three sticks of candy, two squeaking dogs, a red cow, and an ugly bird with one feather in its tail;" and overcome by a sudden sense of destitution, Polly sobbed even more despairingly than Dolly.

"Hush, dear; we must cry softly, or mother will hear, and come up, and then we shall have to tell. You know we said we wouldn't seem to mind not having any Christmas, she felt so sorry about it."

"I must cry, but I'll be quiet."

So the two heads went under the pillow for a few minutes, and not a sound betrayed them as the little sisters cried softly in one another's arms, lest mother should discover that they were no longer careless children, but brave young creatures trying to bear their share of the burden cheerfully.

When the shower was over, the faces came out shining like roses after rain, and the voices went on again as before.

"Don't you wish there really was a Santa Claus, who knew what we wanted, and would come and put two silver half-dollars in our stockings, so we could go and see *Puss in Boots* at the Museum to-morrow afternoon?"

"Yes, indeed; but we didn't hang up any stockings, you know, because mother had nothing to put in them. It does seem as if rich people might think of poor people now and then. Such little bits of things would make us happy, and it couldn't be much trouble to take two small girls to the play, and give them candy now and then."

"I shall when I'm rich, like Mr. Chrome and Miss Kent. I shall go round every Christmas with a big basket of goodies, and give *all* the poor children some."

"P'r'aps if we sew ever so many flannel shirts we may be rich by-and-by. I should give mother a new bonnet first of all, for I heard Miss Kent say no lady would wear such a shabby one. Mrs. Smith said fine bonnets didn't make real ladies. I like her best, but I do want a locket like Miss Kent's."

"I should give mother some new rubbers, and then I should buy a white apron, with frills like Miss Kent's, and bring home nice bunches of grapes and good things to eat, as Mr. Chrome does. I often smell them, but he never gives *me* any; he only says, 'Hullo, chick!' and I'd rather have oranges any time."

"It will take us a long while to get rich, I'm afraid. It makes me tired to think of it. I guess we'd better go to sleep now, dear."

"Good-night, Dolly."

"Good-night, Polly."

Two soft kisses were heard, a nestling sound followed, and presently the little sisters lay fast asleep, cheek against cheek, on the pillow wet with their tears, never dreaming what was going to happen to them to-morrow.

Now Miss Kent's room was next to theirs, and as she sat sewing she could hear the children's talk, for they soon forgot to whisper. At first she smiled, then she looked sober, and when the prattle ceased she said to herself, as she glanced about her pleasant chamber:

"Poor little things! they think I'm rich, and envy me, when I'm only a milliner earning my living. I ought to have taken more notice of them, for their mother has a hard time, I fancy, but never complains. I'm sorry they heard what I said, and if I knew how to do it without offending her, I'd trim a nice bonnet for a Christmas gift, for she *is* a lady, in spite of her old clothes. I can give the children some of the things they want anyhow, and I will. The idea of those mites making a fortune out of shirts at six cents apiece!"

Miss Kent laughed at the innocent delusion, but sympathized with her little neighbors, for she knew all about hard times. She had good wages now, but spent them on herself, and liked to be fine rather than neat. Still, she was a good-hearted girl, and what she had overheard set her to thinking soberly, then to acting kindly, as we shall see.

"If I hadn't spent all my money on my dress for the party to-morrow night, I'd give each of them a half-



dollar. As I can not, I'll hunt up the other things they wanted, for it's a shame they shouldn't have a bit of Christmas, when they tried so hard to please the little ones."

As she spoke she stirred about her room, and soon had a white apron, an old carnelian heart on a fresh blue ribbon, and two papers of bonbons ready. As no stockings were hung up, she laid a clean towel on the floor before the door, and spread forth the small gifts to look their best.

Miss Kent was so busy that she did not hear a step come quietly up stairs, and Mr. Chrome, the artist, peeped at her through the balusters, wondering what she was about. He soon saw, and watched her with pleasure, thinking that she never looked prettier than now.

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Presently she caught him at it, and hastened to explain, telling what she had heard, and how she was trying to atone for her past neglect of these young neighbors. Then she said good-night, and both went into their rooms, she to sleep happily, and he to smoke as usual.

But his eye kept turning to some of the "nice little bundles" that lay on his table, as if the story he had heard suggested how he might follow Miss Kent's example. I rather think he would not have disturbed himself if he had not heard the story told in such a soft voice, with a pair of bright eyes full of pity looking into his, for little girls were not particularly interesting to him, and he was usually too tired to notice the industrious creatures toiling up and down stairs on various errands, or sewing at the long red seams.

Now that he knew something of their small troubles, he felt as if it would please Miss Kent, and be a good joke, to do his share of the pretty work she had begun.

So presently he jumped up, and, opening his parcels, took out two oranges and two bunches of grapes, then he looked up two silver half-dollars, and stealing into the hall, laid the fruit upon the towel, and the money atop of the oranges. This addition improved the display very much, and Mr. Chrome was stealing

back, well pleased, when his eye fell on Miss Kent's door, and he said to himself, "She too shall have a little surprise, for she is a dear, kind-hearted soul."

In his room was a prettily painted plate, and this he filled with green and purple grapes, tucked a sentimental note underneath, and leaving it on her threshold, crept away as stealthily as a burglar.

The house was very quiet when Mrs. Smith, the landlady, came up to turn off the gas. "Well, upon my word, here's fine doings, to be sure!" she said, when she saw the state of the upper hall. "Now I wouldn't have thought it of Miss Kent, she is such a giddy girl, nor of Mr. Chrome, he is so busy with his own affairs. I meant to give those children each a cake to-morrow, they are such good little things. I'll run down and get them now, as my contribution to this fine set out."

Away trotted Mrs. Smith to her pantry, and picked out a couple of tempting cakes, shaped like hearts and full of plums. There was a goodly array of pies on the shelves, and she took two of them, saying, as she climbed the stairs again, "They remembered the children, so I'll remember them, and have my share of the fun."

So up went the pies, for Mrs. Smith had not much to give, and her spirit was generous, though her pastry was not of the best. It looked very droll to see pies sitting about on the thresholds of closed doors, but the cakes were quite elegant, and filled up the corners of the towel handsomely, for the apron lay in the middle, with the oranges right and left, like two sentinels in yellow uniforms.

It was very late when the flicker of a candle came up stairs, and a pale lady, with a sweet sad face, appeared, bringing a pair of red and a pair of blue mittens for her Dolly and Polly. Poor Mrs. Blake did have a hard time, for she stood all day in a great store that she might earn bread for the poor children who staid at home and took care of one another. Her heart was very heavy that night, because it was the first Christmas she had ever known without gifts and festivity of some sort. But Petkin, the youngest child, had been ill, times were very hard, the little mouths gaped for food like the bills of hungry birds, and there was no tender mate to help fill them.

If any elves had been hovering about the dingy hall just then, they would have seen the mother's tired face brighten beautifully when she discovered the gifts, and found that her little girls had been so kindly remembered. Something more brilliant than the mock diamonds in Miss Kent's best ear-rings fell and glittered on the dusty floor as Mrs. Blake added the mittens to the other things, and went to her lonely room again, smiling as she thought how she could thank them all in a sweet and simple way.

Her windows were full of flowers, for the delicate tastes of the poor lady found great comfort in their beauty. "I have nothing else to give, and these will show how grateful I am," she said, as she rejoiced that the scarlet geraniums were so full of gay clusters, the white chrysanthemum stars were all out, and the pink roses at their loveliest.

They slept now, dreaming of a sunny morrow as they sat safely sheltered from the bitter cold. But that night was their last, for a gentle hand cut them all, and soon three pretty nosegays stood in a glass, waiting for dawn, to be laid at three doors, with a few grateful words which would surprise and delight the receivers, for flowers were rare in those hard-working lives, and kind deeds often come back to the givers in fairer shapes than they go.

Now one would think that there had been gifts enough, and no more could possibly arrive, since all had added his or her mite except Betsey, the maid, who was off on a holiday, and the babies fast asleep in their trundle-bed, with nothing to give but love and kisses. Nobody dreamed that the old cat would take it into her head that her kittens were in danger, because Mrs. Smith had said she thought they were nearly old enough to be given away. But she must have understood, for when all was dark and still the anxious mother went patting up stairs to the children's door, meaning to hide her babies under their bed, sure they would save them from destruction. Mrs. Blake had shut the door, however, so poor Puss was disappointed; but finding a soft, clean spot among a variety of curious articles, she laid her kits there, and kept them warm all

night, with her head pillowed on the blue mittens.

In the cold morning Dolly and Polly got up and scrambled into their clothes, not with joyful haste to see what their stockings held, for they had none, but because they had the little ones to dress while mother got the breakfast.

Dolly opened the door, and started back with a cry of astonishment at the lovely spectacle before her. The other people had taken in their gifts, so nothing destroyed the magnificent effect of the treasures so curiously collected in the night. Puss had left her kits asleep, and gone down to get her own breakfast, and there, in the middle of the ruffled apron, as if in a dainty cradle, lay the two Maltese darlings, with white bibs and boots on, and white tips to the tiny tails curled round their little noses in the sweetest way.

Polly and Dolly could only clasp their hands and look in rapturous silence for a minute; then they went down on their knees and revelled in the unexpected richness before them.

"I do believe there *is* a Santa Claus, and that he heard us, for here is everything we wanted," said Dolly, holding the carnelian heart in one hand and the plummy one in the other.

"It must have been some kind of a fairy, for we didn't mention kittens, but we wanted one, and here are two darlings," cried Polly, almost purring with delight as the downy bunches unrolled and gaped till their bits of pink tongues were visible.

"Mrs. Smith was one fairy, I guess, and Miss Kent was another, for that is her apron. I shouldn't wonder if Mr. Chrome gave us the oranges and the money: men always have lots, and his name is on this bit of paper," said Dolly.

"Oh, I'm *so* glad! Now we shall have a Christmas like other people, and I'll never say again that rich folks don't remember poor folks. Come and show all our treasures to mother and the babies; they must have some," answered Polly, feeling that the world was all right, and life not half as hard as she thought it last night.

Shrieks of delight greeted the sisters, and all that morning there was joy and feasting in Mrs. Blake's room, and in the afternoon Dolly and Polly went to the Museum, and actually saw *Puss in Boots*; for their mother insisted on their going, having discovered how the hard-earned quarters had been spent. This was such un hoped-for bliss that they could hardly believe it, and kept smiling at one another so brightly that people wondered who the happy little girls in shabby cloaks could be who clapped their new mittens so heartily, and laughed till it was better than music to hear them.

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This was a very remarkable Christmas-day, and they long remembered it; for while they were absorbed in the fortunes of the Marquis of Carabas and the funny cat, who tucked his tail in his belt, washed his face so awkwardly, and didn't know how to purr, strange things were happening at home, and more surprises were in store for our little friends. You see, when people once begin to do kindnesses, it is so easy and pleasant they find it hard to leave off; and sometimes it beautifies them so that they find they love one another very much—as Mr. Chrome and Miss Kent did, though we have nothing to do with that except to tell how they made the poor little tree grow and blossom.

They were very jolly at dinner, and talked a good deal about the Blakes, who ate in their own rooms. Miss Kent told what the children said, and it touched the soft spot in all their hearts to hear about the red shirts, though they laughed at Polly's lament over the bird with only one feather in its tail.

"I'd give them a better tree if I had any place to put it, and knew how to trim it up," said Mr. Chrome, with a sudden burst of generosity, which so pleased Miss Kent that her eyes shone like Christmas candles, and she said,

"Put it in the back parlor. All the Browns are away for a week, and we'll help you trim it—won't we, my dear?" cried Mrs. Smith, warmly; for she saw that he was in a sociable mood, and thought it a pity that the Blakes should not profit by it.

"Yes, indeed; I should like it of all things, and it needn't cost much, for I have some skill in trimmings, as you know." And Miss Kent looked so gay and pretty as she spoke that Mr. Chrome made up his mind that millinery must be a delightful occupation.

"Come on then, ladies, and we'll have a little frolic. I'm a lonely old bachelor, with nowhere to go to-day, and I'd like some fun."

They had it, I assure you; for they all fell to work as busy as bees, flying and buzzing about with much laughter as they worked their pleasant miracle. Mr. Chrome acted more like the father of a large family than a crusty bachelor, Miss Kent's skillful fingers flew as they never did before, and Mrs. Smith trotted up and down as briskly as if she were sixteen instead of being a stout old woman of sixty.

The children were so full of the play, and telling all about it, that they forgot their tree till after supper; but when they went to look for it they found it gone, and in its place a great paper hand with one finger pointing down stairs, and on it these mysterious words in red ink,

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"Look in the Browns' back parlor!"

At the door of that interesting apartment they found their mother with Will and Petkin, for another hand had suddenly appeared to them pointing up. The door flew open quite as if it was a fairy play, and they went in to find a pretty tree planted in a red box on the centre table, lighted with candles, hung with gilded nuts, red apples, gay bonbons, and a gift for each.

Mr. Chrome was hidden behind one folding-door, and fat Mrs. Smith squeezed behind the other, and they both thought it a great improvement upon the old-fashioned Santa Claus to have Miss Kent, in the white dress she made for the party, with Mrs. Blake's roses in her hair, step forward as the children gazed in silent rapture, and with a few sweet words welcome them to the



little surprise their friends had made.

There were many Christmas trees in the city that night, but none which gave such hearty pleasure as the one which so magically took the place of the broken branch and its few poor toys. They were all there, however, and Dolly and Polly were immensely pleased to see that of all her gifts Petkin chose the forlorn bird to carry to bed with her, the one yellow feather being just to her taste.

Mrs. Blake put on her neat bonnet, and was so gratified that Miss Kent thought it the most successful one she ever trimmed.

She was well paid for it by the thanks of one neighbor and the admiration of another; for when she went to her party Mr. Chrome went with her, and said something on the way which made her heart dance more lightly than her feet that night.

Good Mrs. Smith felt that her house had covered itself with glory by this event, and Dolly and Polly declared that it was the most perfect and delightful surprise party ever seen.

It was all over by nine o'clock, and with good-night kisses for every one the little girls climbed up to bed laden with treasures and too happy for many words. But as they tied their round caps Dolly said,

thoughtfully,

"On the whole I think it's rather nice to be poor when people are kind to you."

"Well, I'd *rather* be rich; but if I can't be, it is very good fun to have Christmas trees like this one," answered truthful Polly, never guessing that they had planted the seed from which the little pine-tree grew so quickly and beautifully.

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When the moon came to look in at the window on her nightly round two smiling faces lay on the pillow, which was no longer wet with tears, but rather knobby with the mine of riches hidden underneath—first-fruits of the neighborly friendship which flourished in that house until another and a merrier Christmas came.

THEN COMES SANTA CLAUS.

O children, little children,
You must be good, because
A few short days bring Christmas-eve,
And then comes Santa Claus.
And somebody will tell him
All that you've said and done
For many a week, and if he's pleased,
Heigh-ho! look out for fun.
So, children, little children,
Be lovely, dears, because
A few short days bring Christmas-eve,
And then comes Santa Claus.

CHRISTMAS AT BETHLEHEM.

BY LYDIA M. FINKELSTEIN.

Bethlehem, the birth-place of our Saviour, is situated about five miles from Jerusalem. It is customary for a great number of the residents of the Holy City, as well as the visitors, to spend Christmas-eve at Bethlehem, as the Roman Catholic Church celebrates it there with great pomp and ceremony. Most of those who belong to that Church go there as worshippers, while many others go simply as spectators of the ceremonies.

Those who intend to walk, as some prefer doing, set out in the morning or early part of the afternoon of the 24th of December, while such as ride never go before the afternoon, and keep on going till midnight. As there are neither coaches nor horse-cars running between these two places, people have to get there on donkeys, mules, camels, or horses, which animals are found in a large square situated in front of the Tower of David, near the Jaffa Gate, through which people usually go to Bethlehem. The muleteers and donkey-boys generally get a pretty accurate idea of the number to be accommodated by asking every one they meet if he intends going. They accordingly arrange their prices. It is best to secure one's steed betimes, lest one may be left to put up with a lame donkey or one-eyed horse. The animals that convey people in the early part of the afternoon have time to return and take another party.

The principal personage who sets out from Jerusalem is the Roman Catholic Patriarch, with his priests and monks, accompanied by the French Consul and suite in full-dress uniforms. This important procession leaves Jerusalem about one o'clock. First comes a cavalcade of mounted police, in uniforms of green braided with red, sent by the Turkish authorities; next come the Kâwasêe, *i.e.*, police allowed by the local government to every Consul and Patriarch as body-guards, usually dressed in the national colors of the Consulate to which they belong. Each carries a long, thick, silver-headed mace, the bottom of which, on such occasions, rests on their stirrups; then follows the Patriarch, gorgeously attired in his purple cloak and Cardinal's hat; alongside of him are the Bishops and Consul, followed by a long train of secretaries, interpreters attached to the Consulate, and monks and priests; lastly comes a long line of those who are

ready to go at that hour, most of them mounted on horses, but some on donkeys, mules, and even camels. Everybody is in good spirits, laughing, chatting, and cracking jokes good-naturedly.

When this variegated procession nears Rachel's Tomb, which is situated on the Bethlehem road, it is met by hundreds of Bethlehemites of both sexes, all in holiday attire, who salute it with firing of guns and pistols, and with songs of welcome; then turning round, they head the procession, singing, drumming, firing, and clapping their hands. In this way they enter Bethlehem, and as they pass through the narrow streets they are greeted with acclamations of joy by all, and with songs of welcome from the windows by the women and children.

Three monasteries and the great complex Church of the Nativity are all under one roof, which covers the stable-cave where Christ was cradled. They all form a great fortress-like edifice, in front of which is a large open square, in which the Turkish soldiers in Zouave uniforms are now ranged on each side of the road through which the procession is going to pass. A procession of priests and monks from the monastery, wearing magnificent robes, and preceded by a large number of chanting choristers gayly attired in red and white garments, meets the Patriarch and company with songs of praise. All dismount, and enter through the low iron door into this fine large building, which was built in the eleventh century, and are met by the hospitable friars, who show the way to the dining saloon, where the long tables are set with tempting refreshments. After the travellers have refreshed themselves, their respective rooms are shown them.

The Church of the Nativity is a splendid high structure, and was first built by the Empress Helena in the fourth century. In the fifth century it was devastated; but it was restored by the Emperor Justinian in the year 630.

There are services going on all the evening, but the grand service begins about midnight. The church is brilliantly lit with thousands of wax tapers, and is so crowded that there is scarcely standing room, and almost every worshipper carries a lighted wax taper. During the service, which is conducted by the Patriarch, some monks appear, dressed in sheep-skins, representing the shepherds. Suddenly a song of glorious melody bursts out from the assembled crowd of priests—that grand and majestic strain the "Gloria."

The service continues till three o'clock in the morning, when it is ended by a procession, singing, headed by the Patriarch carrying a waxen image representing the Saviour in a golden crib, which is taken down into the grotto, *i.e.*, the place or manger where it is supposed that Christ was born. This grotto is under the church, to which there are two descents; the one from the north side has a descent of sixteen steps, and the southern one has thirteen steps. Here there is a small low arch, over which can be seen, though somewhat defaced by time, a representation in mosaic of the birth of our Saviour, with which it was decorated by the Crusaders in the twelfth century. Around this arch, hanging almost to the ground, are fifteen gold lamps, which are kept burning night and day; four of them belong to the Roman Catholics, five to the Armenians, and six to the Greeks. A large marble slab covers the floor of the arched recess, in the middle of which is a round space displaying a stone of bluish color, which is said to be a jasper; this is surrounded by a large silver star, having this inscription on its broad border: "Hic de Virgine Maria Jesus Christus natus est." At a distance of about ten feet southeast from this arch a descent of three steps brings you into the Oratory of the Manger, which is about eight feet long by seven broad; here you see a manger hewn in the rock. At the east end of this oratory there is an altar dedicated to the Wise Men, for it is supposed to be the spot where they worshipped Jesus and offered Him their gifts. The roof and walls of the grotto are gracefully draped with crimson figured satin; the curtains are left open here and there, giving the spectator an opportunity to see the natural rock. Suspended from the ceiling are beautiful gold and silver lamps, which are always kept burning.

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When the Patriarch descends into this grotto another ceremony is performed—laying the image into the manger and wrapping it in swaddling-clothes; then another beautiful strain of praise is sung, and the bells chime the glad tidings that a Saviour is born. The monks, and priests here turn and embrace each other, saying, "Peace! peace!" the assembled crowd do the same, and saying to each other, in the beautiful expression so natural to the Orientals, "Is S-alaam kul siné ou nahna s-almean," *i.e.*, "Peace! peace!—may we be long spared to celebrate this great rejoicing!"



SEEN IN A DREAM.

BY M. E.

Into the dream-land, the wonderful dream-land,
 Where the fairies that once lived in fairy-land throng,
 And sugar-plum trees bloom both summer and winter,
 And the sleep-time is short and the play-time is long,
 Journeyed our darling, and there she beheld him
 Who never was seen by the light of the sun—
 Old Santa Claus, brave in green wreaths and red berries,
 His merry eyes sparkling with mischief and fun.

With a shout of fat laughter he showered around her
 I really can't tell you how many nice things:
 Books, dollies, and oranges, tea-sets and apples,
 Nuts, balls, and gay ribbons, and pictures and rings;
 Like rain it came pouring, that shower of treasures,
 And the bright moonlight lent it full many a gleam.
 Oh! never brought Christmas a Santa Claus jollier
 Than the jolly old Santa Claus seen in a dream!

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A Christmas Carol
BY HOWARD FYLE

<p style="text-align: center;">1</p> <p>God rest ye all good People, That harken to our lay, And hear the word, That Christ our Lord, Was born upon this day.</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">3</p> <p>When Angels sang to Shepherds, That kept their flocks that day, And bade them seek, Where mild and meek, The infant Jesus lay.</p>
<p style="text-align: center;">2</p> <p>We lift our voices gladly, And gladly we do sing, Of that same night, That shined to light, The promise He did bring.</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">4</p> <p>So when our life grows older, And brings its winter's night, May Angels sing, And to us bring Our Lord His truth and light.</p>

With Animation. Music by CHAS. F. ROSEN.



God rest ye, all good Peo - ple, That hark - en to our lay, And
 hear the word, That Christ our Lord Was born up - on this day.

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