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*** START OF THE PROJECT GUTENBERG EBOOK LITTLE FOLKS' CHRISTMAS STORIES AND PLAYS ***



LITTLE FOLKS' CHRISTMAS
STORIES AND PLAYS

Little Folks' Christmas Stories and Plays

Edited by
ADA M. SKINNER



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CHRISTMAS TIME

"I have always thought of Christmas time ... as a good time; a kind, forgiving, charitable, pleasant time; the only time ... when men and women seem by one consent to open their shut-up hearts freely ...; and I say, God bless it!"

CHARLES DICKENS

A FOREWORD

The selections in *Little Folks' Christmas Stories and Plays* emphasize the joy expressed by "good will toward men" and the abundant life suggested by "peace on earth." Some of the stories and legends will appeal to the child's interest because they are filled with the spirit of fun and jollity which is always associated with Christmas merrymaking; other selections affirm the spiritual blessings which the birth of the Christ Child brought to the children of men.

The young reader's enjoyment is enhanced and his interest quickened if he can begin to read his book without the aid of an interpreter. Therefore the stories and poems in this volume are arranged in two groups: Part I includes those selections which are simple enough in theme and form to be read by the child; Part II is made up of more complex stories and poems, which the story-teller may read aloud or relate to the young listener.

My thanks are due to the following authors and publishers who have allowed reprints from their works: Maud Lindsay for permission to use "The Promise"; Richard Thomas Wyche for "A Boy's Visit to Santa Claus"; Ruth Sawyer for "The Christmas Kings"; Mrs. Richard Watson Gilder for permission to use the poem, "The Christmas Tree in the Nursery," by Richard Watson Gilder; Mary Stewart for "The Finding of the Treasure"; Raymond MacDonald Alden for "In the Great Walled Country"; Edmund Vance Cooke for "Going to Meet Santa Claus"; Alma J. Foster for her translation of "Cosette" by Victor Hugo; L. Frank Baum and *The Delineator* for "Kidnaping Santa Claus"; Emma A. Schaub for her translation of "Christmasland" by Heinrich Seidel; Margaret Deland and Moffat Yard & Company, publishers, for permission to use the poem, "While Shepherds Watched their Flocks by Night"; Milton Bradley Company for "The Christmas Cake" from *Mother Stories* by Maud Lindsay; A. Flanagan Company for the selection, "The Stars and the Child," from *Child's Christ Tales* by Andrea Hofer Proudfoot; the Pilgrim Press for "The Visit of the Wishing Man," from *The City that Never was Reached* by J. T. Stocking; The Macmillan Company for a selection from *Serapion Brethren* by E. Th. Hoffmann; Dr. Washington Gladden and the Century Co. for "The Strange Adventures of a Wood Sled"; the *Contemporary Review* for "A Florentine Legend of Christmas" by Vernon Lee; the Packer Institute of Brooklyn for the adaptation of the mystery play, "The Star in the East," and to Abbie Farwell Brown and Houghton Mifflin Co. for the selection, "A Blessing."

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PART I

STORIES CHILDREN CAN READ

LITTLE FOLKS' CHRISTMAS STORIES AND PLAYS

CHRISTMAS AT THE HOLLOW TREE INN^[1]

ALBERT BIGELOW PAINE

Once upon a time, when the Robin, and Turtle, and Squirrel, and Jack Rabbit had all gone home for the winter, nobody was left in the Hollow Tree except the 'Coon and the 'Possum and the old black Crow. Of course the others used to come back and visit them pretty often, and Mr. Dog, too, now that he had got to be good friends with all the Deep Woods people, and they thought a great deal of him when they got to know him better. Mr. Dog told them a lot of things they had never heard of before, things that he'd learned at Mr. Man's house, and maybe that's one reason why they got to liking him so well.

He told them about Santa Claus, for one thing, and how the old fellow came down the chimney on Christmas Eve to bring presents to Mr. Man and his children, who always hung up their stockings for them, and Mr. Dog said that once he had hung up his stocking, too, and got a nice bone in it, that was so good he had buried and dug it up again as much as six times before spring. He said that Santa Claus always came to Mr. Man's house, and that whenever the children hung up their stockings they were always sure to get something in them.

Well, the Hollow Tree people had never heard of Santa Claus. They knew about Christmas, of course, because everybody, even the cows and sheep, knows about that; but they had never heard of Santa Claus. You see, Santa Claus only comes to Mr. Man's house, but they didn't know that, either, so they thought if they just hung up their stockings he'd come there, too, and that's what they made up their minds to do. They talked about it a great deal together, and Mr. 'Possum looked over all his stockings to pick out the biggest one he had, and Mr. Crow he made himself a new pair on purpose. Mr. 'Coon said he never knew Mr. Crow to make himself such big stockings before, but Mr. Crow said he was getting old and needed things bigger, and when he loaned one of his new stockings to Mr. 'Coon, Mr. 'Coon said, "That's so," and that he guessed they were about right after all. They didn't tell anybody about it at first, but by and by they told Mr. Dog what they were going to do, and when Mr. Dog heard it he wanted to laugh right out. You see, he knew Santa Claus never went anywhere except to Mr. Man's house, and he thought it would be a great joke on the Hollow Tree

people when they hung up their stockings and didn't get anything.

But by and by Mr. Dog thought about something else. He thought it would be too bad, too, for them to be disappointed that way. You see, Mr. Dog liked them all now, and when he had thought about that a minute he made up his mind to do something. And this is what it was—he made up his mind to play Santa Claus!

He knew just how Santa Claus looked, 'cause he'd seen lots of his pictures at Mr. Man's house, and he thought it would be great fun to dress up that way and take a bag of presents to the Hollow Tree while they were all asleep and fill up the stockings of the 'Coon and 'Possum and the old black Crow. But first he had to be sure of some way of getting in, so he said to them he didn't see how they could expect Santa Claus, their chimneys were so small, and Mr. Crow said they could leave their latchstring out downstairs, which was just what Mr. Dog wanted. Then they said they were going to have all the folks that had spent the summer with them over for Christmas dinner and to see the presents they had got in their stockings. They told Mr. Dog to drop over, too, if he could get away, and Mr. Dog said he would, and went off laughing to himself, and ran all the way home because he felt so pleased at what he was going to do.

Well, he had to work pretty hard, I tell you, to get things ready. It wasn't so hard to get the presents as it was to rig up his Santa Claus dress. He found some long wool out in Mr. Man's barn for his white whiskers, and he put some that wasn't so long on the edges of his overcoat and boot tops and around an old hat he had. Then he borrowed a big sack he found out there, too, and fixed it up to swing over his back, just as he had seen Santa Claus do in the picture. He had a lot of nice things to take along. Three tender young chickens he'd borrowed from Mr. Man, for one thing, and then he bought some new neckties for the Hollow Tree folks all around, and a big striped candy cane for each one, because candy canes always looked well sticking out of a stocking. Besides all that, he had a new pipe for each, and a package of tobacco. You see, Mr. Dog lived with Mr. Man, and didn't ever have to buy much for himself, so he had always saved his money. He had even more things than that, but I can't remember just now what they were; and when he started out, all dressed up like Santa Claus, I tell you his bag was pretty heavy, and he almost wished before he got there that he hadn't started with quite so much.

It got heavier and heavier all the way, and he was glad enough to get there and find the latchstring out. He set his bag down to rest a minute before climbing the stairs, and then opened the doors softly and listened. He didn't hear a thing except Mr. Crow and Mr. 'Coon and Mr. 'Possum breathing pretty low, and he knew they might wake up any minute, and he wouldn't have been caught there in the midst of things for a good deal. So he slipped up just as easy as anything, and when he got up in the big parlor room he almost had to laugh right out loud, for there were the stockings sure enough, all hung up in a row, and a card with a name on it over each one telling whom it belonged to.

Then he listened again, and all at once he jumped and held his breath, for he heard Mr. 'Possum say something. But Mr. 'Possum was only talking in his sleep, and saying, "I'll take another piece, please," and Mr. Dog knew he was dreaming about the mince pie he'd had for supper.

So, then he opened his bag and filled the stockings. He put in mixed candy and nuts and little things first, and then the pipes and tobacco and candy canes, so they'd show at the top, and hung a nice dressed chicken outside. I tell you, they looked fine! It almost made Mr. Dog wish he had a stocking of his own there to fill, and he forgot all about them waking up, and sat down in a chair to look at the stockings. It was a nice rocking chair, and over in a dark corner where they wouldn't be apt to see him, even if one of them did wake up and stick his head out of his room, so Mr. Dog felt pretty safe now, anyway. He rocked softly, and looked and looked at the nice stockings, and thought how pleased they'd be in the morning, and how tired he was. You've heard about people being as tired as a dog; and that's just how Mr. Dog felt. He was so tired he didn't feel a bit like starting home, and by and by—he never did know how it happened—but by and by Mr. Dog went sound asleep right there in his chair, with all his Santa Claus clothes on.

And there he sat, with his empty bag in his hand and the nice full stockings in front of him all night long. Even when it came morning and began to get light Mr. Dog didn't know it; he just slept right on, he was that tired. Then pretty soon the door of Mr. 'Possum's room opened and he poked out his head. And just then the door of Mr. 'Coon's room opened and he poked out his head. Then the door of the old black Crow opened and out poked his head. They all looked toward the stockings, and they didn't see Mr. Dog, or even each other, at all. They saw their stockings, though, and Mr. 'Coon said all at once:

"Oh, there's something in my stocking!"

And then Mr. Crow says: "Oh, there's something in my stocking, too!"

And Mr. 'Possum says: "Oh, there's something in all our stockings!"

And with that they gave a great hurrah all together, and rushed out and grabbed their stockings and turned around just in time to see Mr. Dog jump right straight up out of his chair, for he did not know where he was the least bit in the world.

"Oh, there's Santa Claus himself!" they all shouted together, and made a rush for their rooms, for they were scared almost to death. But it all dawned on Mr. Dog in a second, and he commenced to laugh and hurrah to think what a joke it was on everybody. And when they heard Mr. Dog laugh they knew him right away, and they all came up and looked at him, and he had to tell just what he'd done and everything; so they emptied out their stockings on the floor and ate some of the presents and looked at the others, until they almost forgot about breakfast, just as children do on Christmas morning.

Then Mr. Crow said, all at once, that he'd make a little coffee, and that Mr. Dog must stay and have some, and by and by they made him promise to spend the day with them and be there when the Robin and the Squirrel and Mr. Turtle and Jack Rabbit came, which he did.

And it was snowing hard outside, which made it a nicer Christmas than if it hadn't been, and when all the others came they brought presents, too. And when they saw Mr. Dog dressed up as Santa Claus and heard how he'd gone to sleep and been caught, they laughed and laughed. And it snowed so hard that they had to stay all night, and after dinner they sat around the fire and told stories. And they had to stay the next night, too, and all that Christmas week. And I wish I could tell you all that happened that week, but I can't, because I haven't time. But it was the very nicest Christmas that ever was in the Hollow Tree, or in the Big Deep

Woods anywhere.

THE PROMISE^[2]

MAUD LINDSAY

There was once a harper who played such beautiful music and sang such beautiful songs that his fame spread throughout the whole land; and at last the king heard of him and sent messengers to bring him to the palace.

"I will neither eat nor sleep till I have seen your face and heard the sound of your harp." This was the message the king sent to the harper.

The messengers said it over and over until they knew it by heart, and when they reached the harper's house they called:

"Hail, harper! Come out and listen, for we have something to tell you that will make you glad."

But when the harper heard the king's message he was sad, for he had a wife and a child and a little brown dog; and he was sorry to leave them and they were sorry to have him go.

"Stay with us," they begged; but the harper said:

"I *must* go, for it would be discourtesy to disappoint the king; but as sure as holly berries are red and pine is green, I will come back by Christmas Day to eat my share of the Christmas pudding, and sing the Christmas songs by my own fireside."

And when he had promised this he hung his harp upon his back and went away with the messengers to the king's palace.

When he got there the king welcomed him with joy, and many things were done in his honor. He slept on a bed of softest down and ate from a plate of gold at the king's own table; and when he sang everybody and everything, from the king himself to the mouse in the palace pantry, stood still to listen.

No matter what he was doing, however, feasting or resting, singing or listening to praises, he never forgot the promise that he had made to his wife and his child and his little brown dog, and when the day before Christmas came, he took his harp in his hand and went to tell the king good-by.

Now the king was loath to have the harper leave him, and he said to him: "I will give you a horse as white as milk, as glossy as satin, and as fleet as a deer, if you will stay to play and sing before my throne on Christmas Day."

But the harper answered, "I cannot stay, for I have a wife and a child and a little brown dog; and I have promised them to be at home by Christmas Day to eat my share of the Christmas pudding and sing the Christmas songs by my own fireside."

Then the king said, "If you will stay to play and sing before my throne on Christmas Day, I will give to you a wonderful tree that summer or winter is never bare; and silver and gold will fall for you whenever you shake this little tree."

But the harper said, "I must not stay, for my wife and my child and my little brown dog are waiting for me, and I have promised them to be at home by Christmas Day to eat my share of the Christmas pudding and sing the Christmas songs by my own fireside."

Then the king said, "If you will stay on Christmas Day one tune to play and one song to sing, I will give you a velvet robe to wear, and you may sit beside me here with a ring on your finger and a crown on your head."

But the harper answered, "I will not stay, for my wife and my child and my little brown dog are watching for me; and I have promised them to be at home by Christmas Day to eat my share of the Christmas pudding, and sing the Christmas songs by my own fireside." And he wrapped his old cloak about him, and hung his harp upon his back, and went out from the king's palace without another word.

He had not gone far when the little white snowflakes came fluttering down from the skies.

"Harper, stay," they seemed to say,
"Do not venture out to-day."

But the harper said, "The snow may fall, but I must go, for I have a wife and a child and a little brown dog; and I have promised them to be at home by Christmas Day to eat my share of the Christmas pudding and sing the Christmas songs by my own fireside."

Then the snow fell thick and the snow fell fast. The hills and the valleys, the hedges and hollows were white. The paths were all hidden, and there were drifts like mountains on the king's highway. The harper stumbled and the harper fell, but he would not turn back; and as he traveled he met the wind.

"Brother Harper, turn, I pray;
Do not journey on to-day,"

sang the wind, but the harper would not heed.

"Snows may fall and winds may blow, but I must go on," he said, "for I have a wife and a child and a little brown dog; and I have promised them to be at home by Christmas Day to eat my share of the Christmas pudding and sing the Christmas songs by my own fireside."

Then the wind blew an icy blast. The snow froze on the ground and the water froze in the rivers. The harper's breath froze in the air, and icicles as long as the king's sword hung from the rocks by the king's highway. The harper shivered and the harper shook, but he would not turn back; and by and by he came to the forest that lay between him and his home.

The trees of the forest were creaking and bending in the wind, and every one of them seemed to say:

“Darkness gathers, night is near;
Harper, stop! Don’t venture here.”

But the harper would not stop. “Snows may fall, winds may blow, and night may come, but I have promised to be at home by Christmas Day to eat my share of the Christmas pudding and sing the Christmas songs by my own fireside. I must go on.”

And on he went till the last glimmer of daylight faded, and there was darkness everywhere. But the harper was not afraid of the dark.

“If I cannot see I can sing,” said he, and he sang in the forest joyously:

“Sing glory, glory, glory!
And bless God’s holy name;
For’t was on Christmas morning
The little Jesus came.

“He wore no robes. No crown of gold
Was on His head that morn;
But herald angels sang for joy
To tell a King was born.”

The snow ceased its falling, the wind ceased its blowing, the trees of the forest bowed down to listen, and lo! dear children, as he sang the darkness turned to wondrous light, and close at hand the harper saw the open doorway of his home.

The wife and the child and the little brown dog were watching and waiting, and they welcomed the harper with great joy. The holly berries were red in the Christmas wreaths; their Christmas tree was a young green pine; the Christmas pudding was full of plums; and the harper was happier than a king as he sat by his own fireside to sing:

“O glory, glory, glory!
We bless God’s holy name;
For’t was to bring His wondrous love
The little Jesus came.

“And in His praise our songs we sing,
And in His name we pray:
God bless us all for Jesus’ sake,
This happy Christmas Day.”

A BOY’S VISIT TO SANTA CLAUS^[3]

RICHARD THOMAS WYCHE

Once upon a time there was a little boy who talked a great deal about Santa Claus. He talked to his father, his mother, his brother and sisters, until it was Santa Claus at the breakfast table, Santa Claus at dinner, and Santa Claus at supper. This little boy had been told that far away in the Northland lived Santa Claus. He was sitting by the fire one day, watching the embers glow, and seeing castles in the glowing embers. “There is Santa Claus’s house,” he said, “the great building covered with snow. Why can’t I go to see him?”

The little boy had worked and had saved some money. He took the money and went down to the depot, bought a ticket, and before his father or mother knew about it was gone to see Santa Claus. He traveled a long time on the train, and by and by reached the end of the railroad. He could go no farther on the train, for there was a great wide ocean, but people crossed the ocean and so must the little boy, or at least a part of it, in order to reach Santa Claus’s land. There was a great ship lying in port soon to sail over the seas, and along with many people who went aboard the ship, went the little boy. Soon every sail was spread and out from the port went the ship, leaving far behind them the town.

The ship sailed and sailed a long time, and finally land came in sight. They had reached an island lying somewhere far out in the Mid seas. Some of the people went ashore, and so did the little boy. But what a funny land it was to the little boy! All the people were little people. The grown men were not taller than the little boy, and they rode little ponies that were not larger than dogs. Then the little boy asked, “What land is this? Does Santa Claus live here?” And they said, “No.

“This is the land that lies east of the sun
And west of the moon.
You have not come too soon.
Northward you must go,
To the land of ice and snow.”

And so one day the little boy found a ship that was going to sail to the Northland, and in this ship he went. The ship sailed and sailed a long time until it finally came to where the sea was all frozen over, to the land of icebergs and snow fields. The ship could go no farther, so what do you suppose the little boy did then? He was in the land of the reindeer, and over the snow fields he went in search of Santa Claus.

One day, as he was traveling over the snow fields to find Santa Claus’s house, he saw not far away what at first seemed to be a hill, but soon he saw that it was not a hill, but a house covered with ice and snow. “That must be Santa Claus’s house,” he said. Soon the little boy was standing in front of the great building

whose towers seemed to reach the sky. Up the shining steps he went and soon he was standing in front of the door. The little boy saw no doorbell and so he knocked on the door. No one answered, and then louder he knocked again. Still no one answered. He began to feel afraid; perhaps this was the house of a giant. If Santa Claus lived there, he might be angry with him for coming, but once more he knocked. And then he heard a noise far down at the other end of the hall. Some one was coming. Then suddenly the latch went "click," and the door stood wide open, and who do you suppose was there? Santa Claus? No; a little boy with blue eyes and a bright, sweet face. Then the little boy said, "Good morning. Does Santa Claus live here?" And the other little boy said, "Yes. Come in, come in. I am Santa Claus's little boy." He took him by the hand and said, "I am very glad to see you."

Then the two little boys walked down the long hallway, doors on this side and doors on that, until they came to the last door on the left-hand side. On this door Santa Claus's little boy knocked, and a great voice said, "Come in." He opened the door and walked in, and who do you suppose was there? Santa Claus? Yes, there was Santa Claus himself; a great, big, fat man sitting by the fire, with long, white beard, blue eyes, and the merriest, cheeriest face you ever saw. Then Santa Claus's little boy said, "Father, here is a little boy who has come to see you." Santa Claus looked down over his spectacles and said, "Well, how are you? I am mighty glad to see you. Yes, yes, I know him. I have been to his house on many a night and filled up his stocking. How are Elizabeth and Louise and Katherine?" Over on the other side of the fireplace sat Mrs. Santa Claus. She was a grandmother-looking woman, with white hair and gold-rimmed spectacles. She was sitting by the fire knitting; she put her arms around the little boy and kissed him.

Then the two little boys sat down in front of the fire and talked together. By and by, Santa Claus's little boy said to the other little boy, "Don't you want to go over the building and see what we have in the different rooms? This building has a thousand rooms." And the little boy said, "Who-o-o-oe." And Santa Claus's little boy said, "Yes, and something different in every room."

Then they went into a large room, and what do you suppose was in there? Nothing but doll babies; some with long dresses and some with short; some with black eyes and some with blue. Then into another room they went, and it was full of toys, wagons and horses; another room was full of story books; another room was a candy kitchen where Santa Claus made candy; another room was a workshop where Santa Claus made toys for the children. Then they went into a long, large room, the largest of them all, and in this room were a great many tables. On these tables were suits, cloaks and hats, and shoes and stockings for the children.

The little boy wanted to know what they did with so many clothes, and Santa Claus's little boy said, "We take these to the little children who have no father or mother to make them clothes." And so they went through all the rooms of the great building, except one, which was away upstairs in the corner. What was in this room no one would tell the little boy, nor would they take him into the room. And the little boy wondered what was in the room.

The little boy stayed at Santa Claus's house several days, and he had a splendid time. Some days the two little boys would slide down the hill on a sled, some days they would hitch up the reindeer and go sleighing, some days they would go into the candy kitchen and help Santa Claus make candy, or into the workshop and help him make toys.

But one day something happened. Santa Claus came to the little boy and said, "I am going away to-day for a little while; my wife and my little boy are going with me. Now," he said, "you can go with us or you can stay here and keep house for us while we are gone." The little boy thought to himself that Santa Claus had been so good to him that he would stay and keep house while Santa Claus was away. So he said he would stay, and then Santa Claus gave him a great bunch of keys and said, "Now you can go into all the rooms and play, but you must not go into that room upstairs in the corner." The little boy said, "All right," and with that Santa Claus, his wife, and his little boy went down the steps, got into the sleigh, wrapped themselves up in furs, popped the whip, and away they went! The little boy stood and watched them until they disappeared behind the snow hills.

Then he turned and went back into the house. He felt like a little man in that great house all by himself. From room to room he went. He went into the game room and rolled the balls. Some of the balls were so large that they were as high as the little boy's head. They were of rubber, and if you would drop one from the top of the house it would bounce clear back to the top. The little boy went into the candy kitchen and ate some of the candy. He went into the workshop and worked on some toys, then into the library and read some of the books, then into the parlor and banged on the piano.

But after a while, the little boy was tired, and he said, "I wish Santa Claus would hurry and come back." He was lonely. And so he thought he would go up on the housetop and look out to see if he could see Santa Claus coming home. Up the steps he went. When he reached the top, there was another flight. Up these he went and still another flight; up, up, he went until it seemed he had gone a thousand steps. But, finally, he came out on top.

The little boy stood there with his hand on the railing and looked out, but all he could see were the snow fields, white and glistening. Santa Claus was not in sight. He could see the track over the snow that the sleigh had made, but that was all.

Then down the steps he came, and it just happened that he came by the room that Santa Claus told him he must not go into. As he passed, he stopped in front of the door and said to himself, "I wonder what they have in that room, and why they did not want me to go in?" He took hold of the knob and gave it a turn, but the door was locked. Then he shut one eye and peeped through the keyhole, but he could see nothing; it was all dark. Then he put his mouth at the keyhole and blew through it, but he could hear nothing. Then he put his nose there and smelled, but he could smell nothing. "I wonder what they have in the room!" he said. "I believe I will see just for fun which one of these keys will fit in the lock."

The little boy had in his hand the great bunch of keys. He tried one key and that would not fit, then he tried another and another and another, and kept on until he came to the last key. "Now," he said to himself, "if this key does not fit I am going." He tried it, and it was the only key on the bunch that would fit. "Now," he said, "I shall not go into the room, but I will just turn the key and see if it will unlock the lock. It may fit in the lock and then not unlock the lock." He turned the key slowly and the latch went "click, click," and the door

flew wide open. What do you suppose was in the room? It was all dark; the little boy could see nothing. He had his hand on the knob and it seemed to him that his hand was caught between the knob and key, and somehow, as the door opened, it pulled him in. When he stepped into the room, he felt a breeze blowing and, more than that, as he stepped down he found the room did not have any bottom; just a dark hole.

Well, as the little boy stepped over into the room, he felt himself falling, away down, down, down yonder. He shut his eyes, expecting every moment to strike something and be killed. But, before he did, some one caught him by the shoulders and shook him and said, "Wake up! Wake up!" He opened his eyes, and where do you suppose the little boy was? At home. It was Christmas morning, and his father was calling him to get up. The sun was shining across his little bed. He looked toward the fireplace, and there all the stockings were hanging full. The little boy had been to see Santa Claus, but he went by that wonderful way we call "Dreamland."

THE CHRISTMAS KINGS

RUTH SAWYER

When the Christ Child was born in Bethlehem of Judea, long years ago, three kings rode out of the East on their camels bearing gifts to him. They followed the Star, until at last they came to the manger where he lay—a little, newborn baby. Kneeling down, they put their gifts beside him: gold, frankincense, and myrrh; they kissed the hem of the little, white mantle that he wore, and blessed him. Then the kings rode away to the East again; but before ever they went they whispered a promise to the Christ Child.

And the promise? You shall hear it as the kings gave it to the Christ Child, long years ago.

"As long as there be children on the earth, on every Christmas Eve we three kings shall ride on camels—even as we rode to thee this night; and even as we bore thee gifts so shall we bear gifts to every child in memory of thee, thou holy Babe of Bethlehem."

In Spain they have remembered what the Christmas kings promised; and when Christmas Eve comes, each child puts his *sapatito*—his little shoe—between the gratings of the window that they may know a child is in that house, and leave a gift.

Often the shoe is filled with grass for the camels; and a plate of dates and figs is left beside it; for the children know the kings have far to go and may be hungry.

At day's end bands of children march out of the city gates—going to meet the kings. But always it grows dark before they come. The children are afraid upon the lonely road and hurry back to their homes; where the good *madres* hear them say one prayer to the Nene Jesu, as they call the Christ Child, and then put them to bed to dream of the Christmas kings.

Long, long ago, there lived in Spain, in the crowded part of a great city, an old woman called Doña Josefa. The street in which she lived was little and narrow; so narrow that if you leaned out of the window of Doña Josefa's house you could touch with your fingertips the house across the way; and when you looked above your head the sky seemed but a string of blue—tying the houses all together. The sun never found its way into this little street.

The people who lived here were very poor, as you may guess; Doña Josefa was poor, likewise. But in one thing she was very rich; she knew more stories than there were feast days in the year—and that is a great many. Whenever there came a moment free from work; when Doña Josefa had no water to fetch from the public well, nor gold to stitch upon the altar cloth for the Church of Santa Maria del Rosario; then she would run out of her house into the street and call:

"*Niños, niñas*, come quickly! Here is a story waiting for you."

And the children would come flying—like the gray *palomas* when corn is thrown for them in the Plaza. Ah, how many children there were in that little street! There were José and Miguel, and the *niños* of Enrique, the cobbler,—Alfredito and Juana and Esperanza,—and the little twin sisters of Pancho, the peddler; and Angela, Maria Teresa, Pedro, Edita, and many more. Last of all there were Manuel and Rosita. They had no father; and their mother was a *lavandera* who stood all day on the banks of the river outside the city, washing clothes.

When Doña Josefa had called the children from all the doorways and the dark corners, she would sit down in the middle of the street and gather them about her. This was safe, because the street was far too narrow to allow a horse or wagon to pass through. Sometimes a donkey would slowly pick its way along, or a stupid goat come searching for things to eat; but that was all.

It happened on the day before Christmas that Doña Josefa had finished her work, and sat as usual with the children about her.

"To-day you shall have a Christmas story," she said; and then she told them of the three kings and the promise they had made the Christ Child.

"And is it so—do the kings bring presents to the children now?" Miguel asked.

Doña Josefa nodded her head: "Yes."

"Then why have they never left us one? The three kings never pass this street on Christmas Eve; why is it, Doña?"

"Perhaps it is because we have no shoes to hold their gifts," said Angela.

And this is true. The poor children of Spain go barefooted; and often never have a pair of shoes till they grow up.

Manuel had listened silently to the others; but now he pulled the sleeve of Doña Josefa's gown with coaxing fingers: "I know why it is the kings bring no gifts to us. See—the street—it is too small, their camels could not pass between the doorsteps here. The kings must ride where the streets are broad and smooth and

clean; where their long mantles will not be soiled and torn, and the camels will not stumble. It is the children in the great streets—the children of the rich—who find presents in their *sapaticos* on Christmas morning. Is it not so, Doña Josefa?"

And Miguel cried: "Does Manuel speak true; is it only the children of the rich?"

"Ah, *chiquito mio*, it should not be so! When the promise was given to the Nene Jesu, there in Bethlehem, they said, 'to every child,'—yes, every little child."

"But it is not strange they should forget us here," Manuel insisted. "The little street is hidden in the shadow of the great ones."

Then Rosita spoke, clasping her hands together with great eagerness: "I know; it is because we have no shoes, that is why the kings never stop. Perhaps Enrique would lend us the shoes he is mending—just for one night. If we had shoes the kings would surely see that there are little children in the street, and leave a gift for each of us. Come, let us ask Enrique!"

"Madre de Dios, it is a blessed thought!" cried all; and like the flock of gray *palomas* they swept down the street to the farthest end, where Enrique hammered and stitched away all day on the shoes of the rich children.

Manuel stayed behind with Doña Josefa. When the last pair of little brown feet had disappeared inside the *sapateria* he said softly:

"If some one could go out and meet the kings—to tell them of this little street, and how the *niños* here have never had a Christmas gift, do you not think they might ride hither to-night?"

Doña Josefa shook her head doubtfully. "If that were possible,—but never have I heard of any one who met the kings on Christmas Eve."

All day in the city people hurried to and fro. In the great streets flags waved from the housetops; and wreaths of laurel, or garlands of heliotrope and mariposa hung above the open doorways and in the windows. Sweetmeat sellers were crying their wares; and the Keeper-of-the-City lighted flaming torches to hang upon the gates and city walls. Everywhere was merrymaking and gladness; for not only was this Christmas Eve, but the King of Spain was coming to keep his holiday within the city. Some whispered that he was riding from the north, and with him rode his cousins, the kings of France and Lombardy; and with them were a great following of nobles, knights, and minstrels. Others said, the kings rode all alone—it was their wish.

As the sun was turning the cathedral spires to shafts of gold, bands of children, hand in hand, marched out of the city. They took the road that led toward the setting sun, thinking it was the East; and said among themselves: "See, yonder is the way the kings will ride."

"I have brought a basket of figs," cried one.

"I have dates in a new *panuela*," cried another.

"And I," cried a third, "I have brought a sack of sweet limes, they are so cooling."

Thus each in turn showed some small gift that he was bringing for the kings. And while they chatted together, one child began to sing the sweet Nativity Hymn. In a moment others joined until the still night air rang with their happy voices.

"Unto us a Child is born,
Unto us a Gift is given.
Hail with holiness the morn,
Kneel before the Prince of Heaven.
Blessed be this Day of Birth,
God hath given his Son to earth.
Jesu, Jesu, Nene Jesu,
Hallelujah!"

Behind the little hills the sun went down leaving a million sparks of light upon the road.

"Yonder come the kings!" the children cried. "See, the splendor of their shining crowns and how the jewels sparkle on their mantles! They may be angry if they find us out so late; come, let us run home before they see us."

The children turned. Back to the city gates they ran; back to their homes, to the good *madres* watching for them and their own white beds ready for them.

But one they left behind them on the road: a little, bare-limbed boy whose name was Manuel. He watched until the children had disappeared within the gates, and then he turned again toward the setting sun.

"I have no gift for the kings," he thought, "but there is fresh, green grass beside the way, that I can gather for the camels."

He stopped; pulled his hands full, and stuffed it in the front of the little blue *vestido* that he wore. He followed the road for a long way until heavy sleep came to his eyes.

"How still it is upon the road! God has blown out his light and soon it will be dark. I wish I were with the others, safe within the city; for the dark is full of fearsome things when one is all alone.... Mamita will be coming home soon and bringing supper for Rosita and me. Perhaps, to-night, there will be an almond *dulce* or *pan de gloria*,—perhaps.... I wonder will Rosita not forget the little prayer I told her to be always saying. My feet hurt with the many stones; the night wind blows cold; I am weary, and my feet stumble with me.... Oh, Nene Jesu, listen! I also make the prayer: 'Send the three kings before Manuel is too weary and afraid!' "

A few more steps he took upon the road; and then, as a reed is blown down by the wind, Manuel swayed, unknowingly for a moment, and slowly sank upon the ground, fast asleep.

How long he slept, I cannot tell you; but a hand on his shoulder wakened him. Quickly he opened his eyes, wondering, and saw—yes, he saw the three kings! Tall and splendid they looked in the starlight; their mantles shimmered with myriad gems. One stood above Manuel, asking what he did upon the road at that late hour.

He rose to his feet—thrusting his hand inside the shirt for the grass he had gathered: "It is for the

camels, *señor*; I have no other gift. But you—you ride horses this Christmas Eve!"

"Yes, we ride horses; what is that to you?"

"Pardon, *señores*, nothing. The three kings can ride horses if they wish; only—we were told you rode on camels from the East."

"What does the child want?" The voice was kind but it sounded impatient; as though the one who spoke had work waiting to be done, and was anxious to be about it.

Manuel heard and felt all this, wondering, "What if there is not time for them to come, or gifts enough!" He laid an eager, pleading hand upon one king's mantle. "I can hold the horses for you if you will come this once. It is a little street and hard to find, *señores*; I thought, perhaps, you would leave a present—just one little present—for the children there. You told the Christ Child you would give to every child, don't you remember? There are many of us, *señores*, who have never had a gift—a Christmas gift."

"Do you know who we are?"

Manuel answered joyfully: "Oh, yes, *Excelencias*, you are the Three Christmas Kings, riding from Bethlehem. Will you come with me?"

The kings spoke with one accord: "Verily, we will."

One lifted Manuel on his horse; and silently they rode into the city. The Keeper slumbered at the gates; the streets were empty. On, past the houses that were garlanded they went unseen, and on through the great streets; until they came to the little street at last. The kings dismounted. They gave their bridles into Manuel's hand; and then, gathering up their precious mantles of silk and rich brocade, they passed down the little street. With eyes that scarce believed what they saw, Manuel watched them go from house to house; saw them stop and feel for the shoes between the gratings—the shoes loaned by Enrique the cobbler; and saw them fill each one with shining goldpieces.

In the morning Manuel told the story to the children as they went to spend one golden *doblón* for toys and candy and sugared cakes. And a gift they bought for Doña Josefa, too: a little figure of the Holy Mother with the Christ Child in her arms.

And so, the promise made in Bethlehem was made again, and to a little child; and it was kept. For many, many years—long after Manuel was grown and had *niños* of his own—the kings remembered the little street, and brought their gifts there every Christmas Eve.

THE CHRISTMAS CAKE^[4]

MAUD LINDSAY

It was a joyful day for the McMulligan children when Mrs. McMulligan made the Christmas cake. There were raisins to seed and eggs to beat, and pans to scrape, and every one of the children, from the oldest to the youngest, helped to stir the batter when the good things were mixed together.

"Oh, mix it, and stir it, and stir it and taste;
For ev'rything's in it, and nothing to waste;
And ev'ry one's helped—even Baby—to make
The nice, brown, sugary Christmas cake,"

said Mrs. McMulligan, as she poured the batter into the cake pan.

The Baker who lived at the corner was to bake the Christmas cake, so Joseph, the oldest boy, made haste to carry it to him. All the other children followed him, and together they went, oh, so carefully, out of the front door, down the sidewalk, straight to the shop where the Baker was waiting for them.

The Baker's face was so round and so jolly that the McMulligan children thought he must look like Santa Claus. He could bake the whitest bread and the lightest cake, and as soon as the children spied him they began to call:

"The cake is all ready! 'T is here in the pan;
Now bake it, good Baker, as fast as you can";

"No, no," said the Baker, "'T would be a mistake
To hurry in baking the Christmas cake.
I'll not bake it fast, and I'll not bake it slow;
My little round clock on the wall there will show
How long I must watch and how long I must bake
The nice, brown, sugary Christmas cake."

The little round clock hung on the wall above the oven. Its face was so bright, and its tick was so merry, and it was busy night and day telling the Baker when to sleep and when to eat and when to do his baking. When the McMulligan children looked at it, it was just striking ten, and it seemed to them very plainly to say:

" 'T is just the right time for the Baker to bake
The nice, brown, sugary Christmas cake."

The oven was ready, and the Baker made haste to put the cake in.

"Ho, ho," he cried gayly, "now isn't this fun?
'T is ten o' the clock, and the baking's begun,
And 'tickity, tickity,' when it strikes one,
If nothing should hinder the cake will be done."

Then the McMulligan children ran home to tell their mother what he had said, and the Baker went on with his work. It was the day before Christmas, and a great many people came to his shop to buy pies and cakes, but no matter how busy he was waiting on them, he never forgot the McMulligans' cake, and every time he looked at the clock, it reminded him to peep into the oven.

So well did he watch it, and so carefully did he bake it, that the cake was done on the stroke of one, just as he had promised, and he had scarcely taken it out of the oven when the shop door flew open; and in came the McMulligan children, every one of them saying:

"The clock has struck one. The clock has struck one.
We waited to hear it—and is the cake done?"

When they saw it they thought it was the nicest, brownest, spiciest cake that was ever baked in a Baker's oven. The Baker himself said it was a beautiful cake, and if you had been at the McMulligans' on Christmas Day, I am sure you would have thought so too.

Joseph carried it home, walking very slowly and carefully, and all the other children followed him, out of the Baker's shop, down the sidewalk, straight home where Mrs. McMulligan was waiting for them. She was smiling at them from the window, and when they spied her they all began to call:

"Hurrah for our Mamma! She surely can make
The nicest and spiciest Christmas cake!"

"Hurrah for the Baker! Hurrah for the fun!
Hurrah for our Christmas cake! Now it is done!"

THE DOLL'S WISH

ANNA E. SKINNER

The children liked the tiny shop around the corner better than any of the stores on the main street of the town. It was a doll shop! No wonder the little boys and girls loved to look in the show window. There they saw all kinds of dolls,—rubber babies, fat kewpies with roguish eyes, doll soldiers, tiny Japanese ladies dressed in flowered silk kimonos, little Eskimo boys in pointed hoods and woolly coats, Dutch dolls in wooden shoes and snow-white caps, brown-eyed dolls with rich dark hair, blue-eyed dolls with golden curls.

Nothing could look lovelier than the little shop at Christmas time when the ground was white with snow. Then many of the dolls wore their gayest dresses, and when the lights were turned on, the little show window sparkled like fairyland.

One night, at about twelve o'clock, a brown-haired doll with bright dark eyes said, "Oh! how glad I am the lights are turned out at last! I'm sure at least five hundred people stopped in front of this window to-day."

"It has been a long day," said the soldier boy who stood near her. "Even a soldier gets tired once in a while."

"It is only a few days now until Christmas. I do wonder where we shall all be this time next week," whispered a wide-eyed kewpie.

"Well, I hope I shall be in a pleasant, beautiful home," said a lovely doll, smoothing out her pale blue silk dress. "A lady who wore a rich fur coat looked at me a long while this morning."

"Some of us are sure to go to rich homes. You and I are worth a good deal of money. Indeed, there is only one doll in the show window more expensive than we are," answered the golden-haired maiden in white lace.

"I suppose you mean the large doll dressed in pink satin?"

"Yes; I heard several children call her the most beautiful doll of all."

"Did you notice the shabby looking little girl who stood before the window a long time this morning?" asked the doll in blue.

"I did!" answered the soldier boy. "She carried a cunning looking little dog in her arms. If I should go where that silky-haired dog lives my soldier clothes would be ruined in about ten minutes."

"Well, I should be very unhappy, I'm sure, in that little girl's home. She must be very poor."

"I liked her sweet face very much," said the most beautiful doll, who was dressed in pink satin. "She was very kind to the little dog."

"A cozy place is my choice," said the lass who wore wooden shoes. "I hope I shall live where everything is kept warm and cheerful."

"Yes, that is really where you belong, I suppose," said the Eskimo boy. "These clothes will be too warm if I am taken to one of those houses where the rooms are all as hot as a summer's day."

"Where should you like to go?" asked the little Dutch maiden.

The Eskimo boy thought for a moment, and then said, "I hope I shall live with some romping boy who will take me with him when he makes a snow man. That would be jolly!"

"Oh, do you think so?" asked the tiny doll dressed in green gauze.

"That I do," he answered. "I'm from the north, where there is nothing but ice and snow."

"I would rather stand here in the show window than on a parlor mantel," pouted little Kewpie.

"Never mind, dear," said the Japanese doll, "I think you are to go to a lovely little girl. I saw one looking at you this afternoon, and she clapped her hands with delight when she saw you."

"Where do you think you will go?" asked Kewpie.

"I'm afraid that I shall be chosen for some queer little person. You see my style is quite different from

that of other dolls. I hope I shall be allowed to wear kimonos. They are very comfortable."

"Perhaps you will be added to some one's collection of dolls from all nations," said the soldier boy.

"Oh, I hope not," spoke up the most beautiful doll of all. "If you were one of a large collection I'm sure you wouldn't be loved very much, because collections are kept chiefly for show."

"You haven't told us yet where you would like to go," said the doll in white lace. "No doubt some very rich person will buy you. I heard the shopkeeper say that you are the costliest doll of all. We are all wondering where you would like to go."

"I am longing to go to some little girl who will love me with all her heart," said the most beautiful doll. "I don't care how humble the home is where I live, but I want to be loved."

"How strange!" was the answer.

"I hope we shall all be satisfied," said Kewpie, yawning.

"We shall soon know," sighed the soldier boy. "Good night to all!"

"Good night! Good night!"

A hard snowstorm did not keep the people away from the doll shop the next morning.

Among those that crowded the store was an old gentleman with a fine, generous face.

"Show me a pretty doll," he said.

"There are some beauties in the window, sir," answered the shopkeeper. "Come and look at them."

"I'll take the large one dressed in pink," said the gentleman. "I'm going to send it to a dear little girl who did me a great kindness. My little dog strayed a long distance from home. She found him, and carried him to me. I'm sure her kind heart will love a doll."

In the afternoon an old gentleman knocked at the door of a very humble home and said, "I have brought a gift to the little girl who took the trouble to carry my lost dog home to me. Please give it to her on Christmas Day."

And so the most beautiful doll's wish came true.

THE CHRISTMAS SPRUCE TREE

(Norwegian Legend)

ANNA VON RYDINGSVÄRD

Among the tall trees in the forest grew a little spruce tree. It was no taller than a man, and that is very short for a tree.

The other trees near it grew so tall and had such large branches that the poor little tree could not grow at all.

She liked to listen when the other trees were talking, but it often made her sad.

"I am king of the forest," said the oak. "Look at my huge trunk and my branches. How they reach up toward heaven! I furnish planks for men from which they build their ships. Then I defy the storm on the ocean as I do the thunder in the forest."

"And I go with you over the foaming waves," said the tall straight pine. "I hold up the flapping sails when the ships fly over the ocean."

"And we warm the houses when winter comes and the cold north wind drives the snow before him," said the birches.

"We have the same work to do," said a tall fir tree, and she bowed gracefully, drooping her branches toward the ground.

The little spruce tree heard the other trees talking about their work in the world. This made her sad, and she thought, "What work can I do? What will become of me?"

But she could not think of any way in which she could be useful. She decided to ask the other trees in the forest.

So she asked the oak, the pine, and the fir, but they were so proud and stately they did not even hear her.

Then she asked the beautiful white birch that stood near by. "You have no work to do," said the birch, "because you can never grow large enough. Perhaps you might be a Christmas tree, but that is all."

"What is a Christmas tree?" asked the little spruce.

"I do not know exactly," replied the birch. "Sometimes when the days are short and cold, and the ground is covered with snow, men come out here into the forest. They look at all the little spruce trees and choose the prettiest, saying, 'This will do for a Christmas tree.' Then they chop it down and carry it away. What they do with it I cannot tell."

The little spruce asked the rabbit that hopped over the snow, and the owls that slept in the pines, and the squirrels that came to find nuts and acorns.

But no one knew more than the birch tree. No one could tell what men did with the Christmas trees.

Then the little spruce tree wept because she had no work to do and could not be of any use in the world.

The tears hardened into clear, round drops, which we call gum.

At last a boy came into the forest with an ax in his hand. He looked the little tree all over. "Perhaps this will do for a Christmas tree," he said. So he chopped it down, laid it on a sled, and dragged it home.

The next day the boy sold the tree, and it was taken into a large room and dressed up with popcorn and gilded nuts and candles. Packages of all sizes and shapes, and tiny bags filled with candy, were tied on its branches.

The tree was trembling with the excitement, but she stood as still as she could. "What if I should drop some of this fruit," she thought.

When it began to grow dark, every one left the room and the tree was alone. It began to feel lonely and to think sad thoughts.

Soon the door opened and a lady came in. She lighted all the candles.

How light and glowing it was then!

The tree had never even dreamed of anything so beautiful!

Then the children came and danced about the tree, singing a Christmas song. The father played on his violin, and the baby sat in her mother's arms, smiling and cooing.

"Now I know what I was made for," thought the spruce tree; "I was intended to give joy to the little ones, because I, myself, am so small and humble."

A LITTLE ROMAN SHEPHERD^[5]

CAROLINE SHERWIN BAILEY

His name was Bruno and he lived a long, long way from here on the Roman Campagna. His house was a pointed hut thatched with straw, and back of it was the fold where the sheep lived, and then, for miles and miles, there was no other living thing for a little boy to see. There was no one to play with; there was nothing for a little boy to do but tend the sheep and milk the goats and wish, oh, so hard, that he might go on that long Appian Way to the gate of St. Sebastian and to Rome, on the other side.

Piccola had told him about Rome. Piccola's father bought wool and sold it to the traders at Rome. Twice a year Piccola and her father came out to the Campagna at shearing time. The father haggled over the *lira* he must pay Bruno's father. Piccola and Bruno sat under an olive tree, their hands tightly clasped, as Piccola told Bruno of Rome.

"You should see it at the *fiesta* of Christmas," she exclaimed. "Every shop is full of lights in the evening and the flower carts stand at all the corners. There is a manger and Babe in the chapel and," Piccola's voice was rich with wonder, "there is a *box that talks* in a shop on the Corso."

"I don't believe you; how could it talk? What makes it talk?" Bruno asked; but this Piccola could not tell.

"It *talks*—that is all I know," she said, "and it *sings*," and she might have told more but her father came and she must say good-by to Bruno. In a moment he could see nothing of Piccola but the flash of her little scarlet and green skirt and the blue cornflower she wore in her black braids. Then there was only a cloud of dust to hide the yellow cart wheels, and Piccola was gone—to Rome where there was a box that would talk and sing.

There came long, sweet, all-alike days for Bruno and the sheep. The wheat grew yellow and heavy to breaking with sweetness and Bruno watched the harvesters. The olives ripened, and the grapes, and the figs. Then the sun set earlier, and the nights were chilly with frost, and Bruno and his father put warm cloaks made of skin over their blue smocks.

"It is near the *fiesta* of Christmas," said Bruno one day. "I have never been to Rome. Will you take me there to hear the talking box on the Corso, father? It both speaks and sings."

"No," Bruno's father was quick in his reply, being a hard man after many lonely years. "The ewe lambs are ailing, and I cannot leave them. And there are no singing boxes in Rome."

So Bruno followed the old sheep and the lambs to their grassy hill and helped to drive them home at night until it was the eve of the Christmas *fiesta*. On this eve, he locked the gate of the fold and turned to go into the hut. His father would be dozing, perhaps, for the cold dusk had crept over the great Campagna and one star shone out in the purple sky. It hung, pointing, over Rome. As Bruno looked up at it, he heard a sound of far-away bells. They might be the bells of Rome. Oh, beautiful Rome, with its gay, bright streets, and its flower carts, and its magic box that could sing and turn loneliness into music!

Bruno pulled the hood of his cloak over his head. His bare feet flashed over the fields of dry grass and wheat stubble. He found the old Appian Road and raced along it in the path of starlight. He was running away. He was going to Rome. For an hour he ran.

He had gone so far and so fast, and his ears rang so with the singing Christmas bells that, at first, he did not hear it—the bleating of a foolish little ewe lamb. Then it came again, and Bruno stopped. The lamb lay under a bunch of dried brown stalks, its flesh torn by thistles and its eyes dull with fear because it had lost its mother.

"Stupid! Why did you run away? I can't take you home!" Bruno stamped one little brown foot, "I'm going to Rome for Christmas, do you hear? I won't take you home—" but as he spoke, he stooped down and lifted the trembling, fearful little creature in his arms and turned back toward the fold.

The star path stretched at Bruno's back now. Ahead were black shadows, and a biting wind whirled small stones that cut his face and made mocking sounds as it scurried through the ruined arches of the aqueduct. He lost the road, and stiff cactus thorns cut his slim ankles. The lamb was heavier with each step. He wouldn't cry; no Roman lad cries, his father had told him; but he couldn't find his way. The little shepherd boy dropped to the ground. He could hear the Christmas bells; no, it was a clear, sweet voice coming from a polished wood box that sang him to sleep.

When he opened his heavy eyelids, Piccola's dancing eyes met his. What a gay little Christmas sprite she looked in her warm crimson hood and cloak! Bruno, himself, lay in his father's arms and Piccola's father was lifting the strayed lamb into the two-wheeled yellow cart, a lantern in one hand.

"We had to go to Albano with wool, and on the way back I begged father to stop for you, Bruno, to go back to Rome for Christmas. We couldn't find you. Your father came with us to look for you, and the lamb told us where you were."

"My brave little Roman lad!" It was Bruno's father who stroked his head with long, thin fingers. "We will return with the lamb to the fold and find warm milk for you. Then you may go to Rome for the *fiesta* with the little *signorina*."

"And we're going to *buy* a box that talks," added Piccola, happily.

"And sings!" smiled back Bruno as he looked toward the Christmas star and the gate of St. Sebastian.

THE CHRISTMAS TREE IN THE NURSERY^[6]

RICHARD WATSON GILDER

With wild surprise
Four great eyes
In two small heads
From neighboring beds
Looked out—and winkt
And glittered and blinkt
At a very queer sight
In the dim dawn-light.

As plain as can be
A fairy tree
Flashes and glimmers
And shakes and shimmers.
Red, green, and blue
Meet their view;
Silver and gold
Sharp eyes behold;
Small moons, big stars;

And jams in jars,
And cakes and honey
And thimbles and money;
Pink dogs, blue cats,
Little squeaking rats,
And candles and dolls
And crackers and polls,
A real bird that sings,
And tokens and favors,
And all sorts of things,
For the little shavers.

Four black eyes
Grow big with surprise,
And then grow bigger,
When a tiny little figure,
Jaunty and airy,
A fairy, a fairy!
From the treetop cries,
"Open wide, Black Eyes!
Come, children, wake now!
Your joys you may take now."

Quick as you can think
Twenty small toes
In four pretty rows,
Like little piggies pink,
All kick in the air—
And before you can wink
The tree stands bare!

THE STARS AND THE CHILD

ANDREA HOFER PROUDFOOT

Long, long ago—so long that even the old gray hills have forgotten—the beautiful stars in the sky used to sing together very early every morning, before any of the little people of the world were up. Their songs were made of light, and were so clear and strong that the whole heaven would shine when they sang.

One morning, as the stars sang and listened to each other, they heard beautiful music coming swiftly toward them. It was so much louder and sweeter than their own that they all stopped and listened and wondered. It came from far above them, from out the very deepest blue of the sky. It was a new star, and it sang an entirely new song that no one had ever heard before.

"Hark, hark!" the stars cried. "Let us hear what it is saying."

And the beautiful star sang it over and over again, and its song told of a lovely Babe that had come on earth—a Babe so beautiful that it was the joy of the whole world. Yes, so beautiful that when you looked at it you saw real light streaming from its face.

Every little child in the world has light in its face if we but know how to see it; but this little one had so very much that its mother wondered as she looked down upon her lap and saw it there. And there were shepherds there to look at the Babe, and many other people saw it and could not understand.

But the one beautiful star knew—yes, it knew all about it; and what do you think it knew? Why, that this Child was God's own Child, and was so good and loving that the whole world when it heard of it would want to know how to be so, too.

This one beautiful star traveled on and on, telling all the way what it knew of the Child, and its light fairly danced through the sky, and hung over the very place where the little one lay.

THE STRANGER CHILD^[7]

FRIEDRICH RÜCKERT

(Translated from the German by Frances Jenkins Olcott)

'Twas Christmas Eve and, birdlike over the snow, flew a little stranger child. It ran along the sparkling ground. Its face beamed with gladness. It listened to the merry chimes of the Christmas bells and clapped its hands for joy.

It frolicked in the bright beams of light that fell from a cottage window, and, peeping in, saw the Christmas tree hung full of shining light and glittering gifts, and it watched the little children play about the tree.

"Oh, where," cried the little stranger child, "where is my candles' light? And why is there no tree for me, nor pretty toys? Once in my house my dear mother decked my tree! Oh, little children, may I not come in to see your tree and play with you?"

Then with frail hand the stranger child knocked on the window and the door, but no one heard the sound. Then down in the cold, white snow the little one sat, and wept.

"O Christ Child, the children's Friend, I have no one to love me! Oh, why hast thou forgotten to send me a little tree with lights on every bough?"

And the little stranger child, with cold hands, drew its white cloak closer around its silken hair and pretty eyes so clear and blue.

Then came another pilgrim child. He held in His hand a shining light, and in a sweet, mild voice, like gentle music, he soothed the little stranger child.

"I am the Christmas Friend. Once I was a little child. Just now I heard your pleadings, and have come to deck a tree for you more beautiful than any tree ever before seen. Here in the open air is your Christmas tree, my little flower." And the little stranger child looked up—far up—into the deep, deep sky, and saw there a glorious tree. Stars hung among its branches, and angels sang songs of joy around it.

And the little child smiled with joy, and troops of radiant beings descended and lifted the little one in their arms. They bore him to the Christ Child's house, which is sweeter far than any home that earth can give.

THE STAR SONG

ROBERT HERRICK

I

Tell us, thou clear and heavenly tongue,
Where is the Babe that lately sprung?
Lies he the lily banks among?

II

Or say, if this new Birth of ours
Sleeps, laid within some ark of flowers,
Spangled with dew-light, thou can'st clear
All doubts, and manifest the where.

III

Declare to us, bright star, if we shall seek
Him in the morning's blushing cheek,
Or search the beds of spices through,
To find Him out?

STAR

No, this ye need not do;
But only come and see Him rest,
A Princely Babe, in's mother's breast.

THE VISIT OF THE WISHING MAN^[8]

JAY T. STOCKING

It was Christmas night at Castle Havenough in the Land of Nothing Strange. It had been a day of gifts and guests, and now the king and queen had gone to a great dinner in the banquet hall, and the young prince and princess were left alone to spend the rest of the day as they chose. A great fire blazed in the fireplace. It cracked and roared and chuckled as the young prince and princess threw in pitchy sprays of evergreen. The Christmas tree across the room, bespangled with tinsel and tassels and sheen, now glowed in the light of the fireplace and gleamed and twinkled and sparkled as if every twig were set with rubies and diamonds. The floor, the chairs, the table—everything—were heaped high with gifts, for this young prince and princess had received everything that they had wished for. And it was almost always so,—whatever they wished for, they received. It seems strange to us, indeed, that this young prince and princess were not always or altogether happy. But it was not strange at all in the Land of Nothing Strange.

Before the king went out to the great banquet, he called the prince and princess to his side and putting his arms about their slender shoulders, said, "My children, I hope you have had a happy day and have received everything that you desire. If not, I promise you that if you can agree exactly on what you wish, and will tell me, if money can purchase it, it shall be yours."

"But cannot money purchase everything, father?"

"No, my son, not quite everything."

"But if money cannot purchase it, father?"

"Then, princess, I will try and get it for you in some other way."

"And if you cannot?"

"Well—then I will tell the Wishing Man."

And with that he was off. But not until he had told them that since this was Christmas Day they might stay up just as late as they wished.

Just as late as they wished! Why, this was the very best Christmas gift of all! Because not even princes and princesses, you know, can sit up always, or often, just as late as they wish.

Just as late as they wished! What in the world would they do? Why, everything, of course, in all that time. But first of all they must decide whether there was anything more that they wished and whether they could agree upon their wish.

So they threw themselves upon the floor at full length before the fire, upon the great white bearskin with the head that snarled and showed his long, gleaming, harmless teeth as if he would eat just one more thing. With their chins resting upon their hands, and their elbows on the floor, and the fire throwing lights and shadows on their faces, they lay and talked.

"You wish first," said the prince, who had not quite made up his mind what he wished, and wanted time to think. "You are the younger, and you are a girl. What do you wish?"

"Well, I wish that all the snow were sugar and all the mud were chocolate. Don't you?"

"No, of course not. Why, you couldn't coast! The runners would stick, and if you ran and fell upon your sled you would go heels over head, and like as not you would break your neck. Besides, there wouldn't be any sugar in summer, and there would be no chocolate except when it rained."

"I never thought of that," said the princess. "What do *you* wish?"

"I wish that—that—my Christmas stocking were as tall as this house and I had to take a ladder to get up to it and another ladder to get down into it. Don't you?"

"Why, no, of course not."

"Why not?"

"Why, because the Christmas stocking is just the same size as all your other stockings, and if your Christmas stocking were as big as the house, all your other stockings would be as big as the house, and you never could get one on; and if you did get it on it would go clear over your head."

"That's so," said the prince; "I never thought of that. Well, what *do* you wish?"

"Well, I wish—that every day was Christmas, and there wasn't any school. Don't you?"

"No! If there wasn't any school, you'd be a dunce. And who wants to be a dunce? I'll tell you what *I* wish."

"What?"

"I wish that every day was just as nice as Christmas, but different. Different, you know, but just as nice. That's what I wish."

"So do I."

And so they agreed upon their wish,—that every day should be like Christmas—different, but just as nice. And they would tell that wish to their father in the morning.

"But do you suppose that money can purchase it, prince?"

"I don't know. I—I'm afraid it can't. But father said he would tell the Wishing Man. I wonder what he looks like; I should like to see him."

"So should I."

Just then there was a commotion in the fireplace. It sounded as if the wood had fallen forward on the andirons. And so it had. But something else had happened. On the backlog, which was blazing fiercely, there sat a funnier little man than you would see in going around the world. He was red from the top of his cap to the tip of his boot; his coat, which was flung over his little red wings, was red. His face was red, but perhaps that was just a reflection from the coals of the fire. You would think that he would have burned up or that he would have jumped out of the fireplace in a hurry. But he didn't do anything of the sort. It seems very

strange, but it was not strange at all in the Land of Nothing Strange. As he sat there upon that blazing backlog, his hands upon his knees, with the flames leaping around him, and his feet resting down in the red-hot coals, you would have said that this was the most comfortable seat that he had ever found in all his life.

"Well?" the little man drawled.

"Well?" drawled the prince and princess, as they drew back on their elbows and sat up in amazement.

"Well? I'm here."

"Who's here?" asked the prince.

"Why, *I* am here. You said you would like to see what I looked like, and so I have come. *I'm* here."

"Are you the Wishing Man?" asked the princess.

"That's my name." And then he broke into a snatch of a song:

"I have wishbones on my fingers,
I have myst'ry in my eyes;
My clothes are lined with four-leaf clovers
And are stained with magic dyes.

"I have pockets full of rabbits' feet,
And amulets and charms;
Just for luck I pick up horseshoes;
I have tattoos on my arms.

"I know a world of wonders,
And if you would believe,
I have fortunes in my wallet
And surprises up my sleeve.

"I come from a distant country,
Away up near the sky,
From the golden palace, Overhead,
In the land of Wonder Why.

"I'm the best of friends of children,
And I'll help *you* if I can;
Now tell me what your wishes are,
For I'm the Wishing Man."

They told him that they had decided to wish that every day should be just as nice as Christmas—different, but, then, just as nice.

"That is a good wish," said the Wishing Man. "I hope that you will get it, but you never can tell."

"You never can tell! Arn't you the Wishing Man? Don't you know? Don't you give folks their wishes?"

"Oh, no! I am not wise enough for that. The Angel of Blessings does that. I merely go through the world and carry to him all the wishes that I hear people make."

"How do you carry them?" asked the prince.

"Oh, right here," and he pointed to a little jeweled box that he had at his belt. "Right here. You see I have a padlock on it and I never lose a wish."

"Are you the only wishing man in the world?" asked the princess.

"Oh, bless my soul, no! If I were, do you think I would have time to sit here on this nice cool seat and chat with you? There are a great many of us, but we all look just alike, we are all dressed just alike, and we are all twins."

That seems strange, but it was not strange at all in the Land of Nothing Strange.

"My country is the country of Wonder Why. I come here every morning, and I stay till I have my little box full of wishes, and then I take it back. By the way, I see that it is full now, and your wish is right on top. Would you like to go with me to see the Angel of Blessings? Those who talk with him are most apt to have their wishes granted. Many folks do not get their wishes just because they do not seem to understand how to get them. Would you like to go with me?"

"Is it very far?" asked the prince. "Could we get back before bedtime?"

"Oh, yes, with time to spare."

"Shouldn't we be cold?" asked the princess.

"No, we would fly very fast, and we shouldn't have time to shiver more than once before we got there. Come, then, get on my back," and he tucked his red coat between his little red wings, which he shook out, and made ready to fly.

"Now part your hair in the middle so you won't be any heavier on one side than on the other. Step right in here; the fire won't hurt you. Now, prince, put your right arm around my neck like this, and hold on to my left wing with your left hand,—so, and princess, put your left arm around my neck and hold on to my right wing with your right hand,—so. Now, ready."

Up they went, and off they went, through the frosty air, faster than the fastest aëroplane. Below them lay the beautiful white snow; above them hung the beautiful white stars. They had just shivered once and were nearly ready to shiver again when the Wishing Man folded his red wings and they landed upon the doorstep of the golden palace, Overhead, in the Land of Wonder Why.

The Wishing Man took them by the hand, one on either side, walked up the white marble steps, opened the great doors, which swung at a touch, and stepped inside. This was the palace, Overhead. Anybody could see that this was the House of Wishes. Why, there was everything here that anybody had ever wished for or ever could wish for. Down the side here at the right there were great possessions. There were carloads of gold heaped up, and carloads of silver heaped up, and there were houses—every kind of house—and there

were farms that reached away just as far as the sun shone, and there were gardens in which there was every kind of flower that anybody had ever seen grow in any place in the world. Over on the other side were things to wear and things to eat; there were gowns and furs and hats and suits, and beyond these there were bricks of ice cream as big as ice cakes,—just for one! And plum puddings as big as your head,—just for one! And whole mince pies that you could eat and never see anything afterward. Before them, across the room, were the very best things of life, the very best of all, just plain something to eat, happy days and sleepy nights, and good friends,—just the things that men like most. These things that I have mentioned were simply what you could see right in the first rows, but behind these things at the right and left and over in front,—there is nobody who ever lived who could tell you all that was there, because, as I have told you, there was everything that anybody had ever wished for, and everything that anybody *could* ever wish for.

Now, right in the center of the hall, to which a golden carpet ran, there was a platform, and upon the platform a great white desk, bright as the moon, and at the desk, clothed in white, sat the Angel of Blessings. At the right of the Angel of Blessings stood his messengers. He called them pages. The line was sometimes short and sometimes long. They wore no uniform. Some were rich and some were poor, some had beautiful clothes and some had ragged clothes, but the face of every one shone like a star, and it was their duty to carry blessings and wishes to people who had got their wish.

Upon that golden carpet, that ran from the door to the platform, the little red Wishing Men were continually passing each other as they came up to the desk to leave their wishes and went out again to listen for more. All day, all night, they came and went, came and went, and all day and all night the Angel of Blessings, clad in white, at the great white desk, opened the wishes and read them. Sometimes he shook his head sorrowfully, and even frowned; sometimes he smiled and nodded! When he frowned or looked sorrowful it meant that the wish was lost, and he dropped it into the huge waste-basket at his left and it fell to the bottom of the earth. But when he smiled and nodded, it meant that the wish was granted, and he handed it to one of his pages waiting at the right, who fell upon one knee, took the wish, and carried it to the wisher.

The Wishing Man took the prince and the princess by the hand, walked along the golden carpet to the great white desk upon the platform, and announced the visitors to the Angel of Blessings: "Prince and Princess Havenough from the Land of Nothing Strange." Then the prince and princess, who, of course, had been trained in court, made their most beautiful bow, but spoke no word until the Angel of Blessings had spoken to them. The Wishing Man laid upon the desk the wish which they had made and which he had carried in his little golden casket, and then he retired with many a bow until the Angel should summon him again.

"Prince and Princess Havenough," said the Angel as he read the wish and smiled, "it is a good wish. It will be granted, on *one* condition—that you will be my pages, carry my blessings, and take the wishes which I send to those who have their wishes granted. Will you be my pages?"

"Must one go very far, Mr. Angel?" asked the prince, "because we are small; we have never traveled far; we don't know where many places are."

"Oh, not at all, prince," said the Angel; "merely to the Land of Nothing Strange—to your home, to your friends, to your acquaintances. Will you be my pages?"

"We will, Mr. Angel," and they bowed.

"Then stand here at my right. I may have some commissions for you now. Let me look at these wishes which have just been brought to me. Here is a wish from a little boy in the Land of Nothing Strange, not far from Castle Havenough. He wishes that he had a pair of skates; he hasn't any; all his friends have some."

"He may have a pair of mine," said the prince. "I will take them to him."

"Good!" said the Angel; "his wish is granted." And he handed the wish to the prince with the name and the address of the wisher.

"Let me see; here is a wish from a little girl in the Land of Nothing Strange, not far from Castle Havenough. She wishes that she had a doll. She asked Santa Claus for one last night and he didn't bring it today. He must have forgotten it. She wants one very much."

"She may have one of mine! I have very many," said the princess.

"Good!" said the Angel; "it is granted."

And he handed the wish to the princess, with the name and the address of the wisher.

"Here is another," said the Angel. "It is from the teachers and the servants of Castle Havenough. They wish that they were happier,—that the prince and the princess were somewhat more thoughtful and kind. Shall their wish be granted?"

"We will try, Mr. Angel."

"Good! And here is one from the royal house. I see the seal. Why, it is from the King and Queen of the Land of Nothing Strange. 'We wish that our son and daughter were more dutiful, thoughtful, loving, and kind.' Shall the wish be granted, pages?"

"We will try, Mr. Angel."

"Good! That is enough for to-night. To-morrow I shall have some more blessings for you to carry. Every day I will send you some, so long as you are in my service. And I promise you that every day will be as happy as Christmas,—different, but just as nice. Wait a minute." And then he wrote something on a card and handed it to them,—he called it their

COMMISSION

"Be it known to all those who may read this short line,
That the prince and the princess are pages of mine;
They carry my blessings, will seek what you wish,
Will be kind and regardful, polite, unselfish.
For wages, I now and hereafter decree,
Their days shall be happy as happy can be."

Then he pressed a little golden button, and the Wishing Man came and took the prince and princess by

the hand and led them down the golden carpet to the great door, and in less time than it takes to tell you they were back again, and down again upon the skin of the great white bear, which still lay snarling and showing his teeth at the flickering fire.

The Wishing Man wanted to be off, but the prince and princess asked him so eagerly to sing again that he finally consented to sing what he had sung before,—“Just by way of encore,” he said:

“I have wishbones on my fingers,
I have myst’ry in my eyes;
My clothes are lined with four-leaf clovers
And are stained with magic dyes.

“I have pockets full of rabbits’ feet,
And amulets and charms;
Just for luck I pick up horseshoes,
I have tattoos on my arms.

“I know a world of wonders,
And if you would believe,
I have fortunes in my wallet
And surprises up my sleeve.

“I come from a distant country,
Away up near the sky,
From the golden palace, Overhead,
In the land of Wonder Why.

“I’m the best of friends of children,
And I’ll help *you* if I can;
Now tell me what your wishes are,
For I’m the Wishing Man.”

And then he was gone.

It may be that it was a very long, tiresome journey to the palace; it may be that the cold had made the prince and princess very sleepy; it may have been due to something else. At any rate, when the servants came at ten o’clock and opened the door softly, the prince and princess lay fast asleep before the fire, which was burning very low, and the clock was tick-tock, tick-tocking very loud indeed.

What the prince and princess told the king in the morning, how long they were pages of the Angel of Blessings, how many people they carried blessings to, I cannot tell; I never heard. But this I know: that night, and for many days after, the servants and the teachers said that it seemed to them the prince and princess were kinder than usual, and the king and the queen not long after were heard to say they never in their lives *had* seen the prince and princess so loving and so happy.

KRISS KRINGLE^[9]

THOMAS BAILEY ALDRICH

Just as the moon was fading
Amid her misty rings,
And every stocking was stuffed
With childhood’s precious things,

Old Kriss Kringle looked around,
And saw on the elm-tree bough,
High hung, an oriole’s nest,
Silent and empty now.

“Quite like a stocking,” he laughed,
“Pinned up there on the tree!
Little I thought the birds
Expected a present from me!”

Then old Kriss Kringle, who loves
A joke as well as the best,
Dropped a handful of flakes
In the oriole’s empty nest.

THE STAR OF BETHLEHEM

ELEANOR L. SKINNER

The radiant star in the East had done its work. It had guided the shepherds and the Wise Men to the manger where the heavenly Child lay in Mary’s arms. The people, who had watched its light with solemn wonder, and had whispered to each other about its beauty and meaning, had gone to rest. Suddenly in the eastern sky there was a breaking up of the glorious light into millions of shining points. A shower of silver and gold fell to the earth.

An old man with a long white beard saw the wonder. "The star in the East has gone!" he sighed. "The glory of the skies has vanished!"

Morning dawned. Happy little children ran to the fields to gather flowers. The sunny meadows glistened with hundreds of little star-like blossoms.

"How beautiful!" cried the children, clapping their little hands for joy. "Let us gather some flowers, and take a gift to the Mother and little Babe."

They filled their arms with the starry blossoms and started to the manger. On their way they met the old man with the long white beard. He stopped for a moment and looked at the happy children. A strange light came into his eyes; he bowed his head and whispered, "The star of Bethlehem has burst into blossoms! The glory of the skies has come to abide on earth!"

NUTCRACKER AND MOUSE KING

EDWARD THEODOR WILLIAM HOFFMANN

It was Christmas Eve. Marie and Fritz sat cuddled together in a corner of the back parlor, for they had not been permitted during the whole day to go even into the small drawing room, much less into the best drawing room into which it opened. The deep evening twilight had come and they began to feel almost afraid. Seeing that no Christmas candles were brought in, Fritz whispered to his sister Marie, who was just seven, that he had heard rattlings and rustlings going on all day in the closed room, as well as distant hammerings, and that not long before, a little dark looking man with a big box under his arm had gone slipping and creeping across the floor. He well knew that this little man was no other than Godpapa Drosselmeier. At this news Marie clapped her little hands for gladness and cried:

"Oh, I do wonder what pretty things Godpapa Drosselmeier has been making for us this time!"

Godpapa Drosselmeier was anything but a nice looking man. He was little and lean, with a great many wrinkles on his face, a big patch of black plaster over his right eye, and not a hair on his head. He wore a fine white wig, made of glass. But he was a very, very clever man, for he knew and understood all about clocks and watches, and could make them himself. So when one of the beautiful clocks in Fritz and Marie's home was out of sorts and couldn't sing, Godpapa Drosselmeier would come, take off his glass periwig and his little yellow coat, put on a blue apron, and begin to stick sharp-pointed instruments into the inside of the clock. Of course, whenever he came he always brought something delightful in his pockets for Marie and Fritz—perhaps a little man who could roll his eyes and make bows and scrapes, most comic to behold, or a box out of which a little bird would jump. But for Christmas time he had invariably prepared some especially wonderful invention.

"Oh! what can Godpapa Drosselmeier have been making for us this time!" Marie said again.

"I'm sure this time," said Fritz, "it must be a great castle, a fortress, where all sorts of pretty soldiers are drilling and marching about, then other soldiers come to try and get into the fortress, upon which the soldiers inside fire away at them with cannon until everything bangs and thunders like anything."

"No, no," said Marie. "Godpapa Drosselmeier once told me about a beautiful garden with a lake in it, and beautiful swans swimming about with great gold collars, singing lovely music. And then a lovely little girl comes down through the garden to the lake, and calls the swans and feeds them with shortbread and cake."

"Swans don't eat cake and shortbread," Fritz cried, "and Godpapa Drosselmeier couldn't make a whole garden."

The children went on trying to guess what he might have in store for them this time. Marie told Fritz that her biggest doll had altered very much. She was more clumsy and awkward than ever, for she tumbled on to the floor every two or three minutes. Fritz said that a good fox was lacking in his collection of animals, and that his army of soldiers was quite without a cavalry, as his papa well knew. But the children knew that their elders had all sorts of charming things ready for them. They remembered, too, that the Christ Child at Christmas time took special care of their wants and knew best what gift would bring them true happiness.

Marie sat in thoughtful silence; but Fritz murmured quietly to himself: "But for all that, I do want a fox and some hussars."

It was now quite dark. Fritz and Marie, sitting close together, did not dare to utter another word. They felt as if there were a fluttering of gentle, unseen wings around them, while a very far-away music could be heard. Then a bright gleam of light passed quickly across the wall and the children knew that the Christ Child was being borne away on shining clouds to other happy children. At this moment a silvery bell rang out "Kling-ling! Kling-ling!" the doors flew open, and a brilliant light came streaming from the drawing room.

"Oh! Oh!" cried the children, clapping their hands.

But papa and mamma came and took their hands, saying, "Come, now, darlings, and see what the blessed Christ Child has brought for you."

The two children stood speechless, with brilliant glances fixed on all the beautiful things before them. After a while Marie, with a sigh, cried, "Oh! How lovely! How lovely!" and Fritz gave several jumps of delight. The children had certainly been very, very good, for never had so many beautiful and delightful things been provided for them as at this Christmas. The great Christmas tree on the table bore many apples of silver and gold, and all its branches were heavy with bud and blossom, consisting of sugar almonds, many tinted bonbons, and all sorts of charming things to eat. In all the recesses of its branches hundreds of little tapers glittered like stars! How many beautiful things there were! Marie gazed at the loveliest dolls, and all kinds of toys, and a little silk dress, with many tinted ribbons, hung from a projecting branch. "Oh, the lovely, lovely dress," she cried. Fritz, in the meantime, had had two or three trials around the table to see how his new fox could gallop. "I believe it's a wild beast," he said, "but that's no matter. I can frighten him already." He set to work to muster his new hussars, well equipped in red and gold uniforms with real silver swords and mounted on such shining white horses that you would have thought them of pure silver.

When the children had become a little quieter there came another tinkling of a bell, and they knew that Godpapa Drosselmeier would show them his Christmas presents, which were on another table, against the wall, concealed by a curtain. When this curtain was drawn, what did the children behold?

On a green lawn, bright with flowers, stood a beautiful castle with a great many shining windows and golden towers. A chime of bells was going on inside it, doors and windows opened, and you saw very small ladies and gentlemen with plumed hats and long robes, walking up and down in the rooms.

Fritz stood looking at the beautiful castle, his arms leaning upon the table. In a little while he said, "Godpapa Drosselmeier, let me go into your castle."

"That can't be done, little Fritz," was his answer. "The castle is not as tall as yourself, golden towers and all."

"Well, then, make the man with the green cloak, who is always looking from the window, walk about with the others."

"And that can't be done, either," said his godpapa once more; "it can't be altered, you know."

"Oh," said Fritz, "it can't be done? Very well, if your little creatures in the castle can only always do the same thing, they're not very much!" So he went back to his Christmas table to play with his hussars.

Marie, too, was soon tired of the little castle people, though she did not like to show it as her brother did. At last, however, she also crept back to the table where the Christmas presents were laid out, for she had just noticed there among Fritz's soldiers an excellent little man, standing still and modest as if he were waiting patiently until some one should notice him. In regard to his appearance, there was much that was objectionable, for his body was rather too tall and stout for his little thin legs, and his head was a great deal too large. But the elegance of the little gentleman's costume showed him to be a person of taste and cultivation. He had on a very pretty violet hussar's jacket, and the loveliest little boots ever seen. It was certainly funny that, dressed in such style as he was, he wore a rather absurd short cloak on his shoulders which looked as if it were made of wood and on his head he wore a miner's cap. Nevertheless, as Marie kept looking at this little man she saw more and more clearly what a sweet disposition was legible on his countenance. His green eyes spoke only kindness, and the nicely curled white cotton beard on his chin drew attention to the sweet smile which his bright lips always expressed.

"Oh, papa, dear," cried Marie at last, "whose is that most darling little man beside the tree?"

"That little fellow, my dear, will work hard for you all; he's going to crack nuts for you." With that, Marie's father took him from the table, and when he raised the wooden cloak the little man opened his mouth. Marie put in a nut, and with a crack the little man bit it in pieces. He had to crack a great many nuts. Marie picked out the smallest ones, but Fritz gave him all the biggest and hardest nuts he could find. But all at once there was a crack! crack! and three little teeth fell out of Nutcracker's mouth; and his chin became loose and shaky.

"Ah! my poor Nutcracker!" Marie cried as she gathered up the lost teeth, bound a pretty white ribbon about his poor chin, and wrapped the poor little fellow tenderly in her handkerchief. In this way she held him, rocking him like a child in her arms, as she looked at her picture books.

Marie and Fritz were allowed to keep their playthings in the glass cupboard in the sitting room. Fritz soon tired of playing with his hussars and placed them on the upper shelf, and Marie put her dolls in the beautiful doll's room on the lower shelf. It had become almost midnight, and their mother had aroused the children to go to bed. Fritz obeyed, but Marie begged for just a little while longer, saying she had such a number of things to see to and promising that as soon as ever she had got them all settled she would go to bed at once. Marie was a good girl and her mother allowed her to remain a little longer with her toys, but fearing lest Marie should be too much occupied with her new doll and other playthings to think of the lights, her mother put all of them out, leaving only the lamp which hung from the ceiling and which shed a soft light over everything.

As soon as Marie was alone she carefully unbound the ribbon around Nutcracker's head and examined his wounds.

"Oh, my darling Nutcracker," she said, "I'll take the best care of you, for I am really fond of you. Your teeth shall be put back and your shoulder made right again." She took him in her arms again, went to the cupboard, and said to her new doll:

"Clara, you will give up your bed to this poor, sick, wounded Nutcracker, I'm sure." Miss Clara in her Christmas dress looked very disdainful, but Marie took the bed and moved it forward, laid Nutcracker carefully upon it, and placed them on the upper shelf near the village in which Fritz's hussars were resting. She was about to close the cupboard door when—hark! there began a low, soft rustling and rattling all around, behind the stove, under the chairs, behind the cupboards. The clock on the wall warned louder and louder, but it could not strike. Marie looked at it, and saw that the big gilt owl which was on the top had drooped its wings so that they covered the whole of the clock. And the warning of the clock kept growing louder and louder, with distinct words: "Clocks, stop ticking. Mousey king's ears are fine. Prr-prr! Only sing 'poom, poom.' Bells go chime! Soon rings out the fated time!"

Marie grew terribly frightened and was going to rush away as quickly as she could when she noticed that Godpapa Drosselmeier was up on top of the clock instead of the owl.

"Godpapa Drosselmeier," she called out as soon as she composed herself. "What are you doing up there, you naughty, naughty godpapa?"

But then there began a strange scampering and squeaking everywhere, all about, and presently there was a sound of running and trotting as of thousands of little feet behind the walls, and at the same time thousands of little lights began to glitter out between the chinks of the woodwork. But they were not lights, no, no,—little glittering eyes; and Marie said that everywhere mice were peeping and squeezing themselves out through every chink. Presently they were trotting and galloping in all directions all over the room.

Marie was not afraid of mice, and she could not help being amused by this sight. She stood watching the mice come from all directions when suddenly there came a sharp and terrible piping noise and seven mouse heads with seven shining crowns upon them, rose through the floor and behind them wriggled a mouse's

body on which the seven heads had all grown. Then the whole army of mice shouted in full chorus and went trot, trot, trot! right up to the cupboard—in fact, to Marie who was standing beside it.

Half frightened, Marie leaned back against the cupboard door and there was a klirr, klirr, klirr! What was happening? Right behind Marie a movement seemed to commence in the cupboard and small, faint voices began to be heard, saying:

“Come, awake, measures take,
Out to the fight, out to the fight;
Shield the right, shield the right,
Arm and away, this is the night,”

and bells began ringing as prettily as you please.

“Oh, that’s my little peal of bells,” cried Marie, and she went nearer and looked in. Then she saw that there was a bright light in the cupboard and everything there was astir. Dolls and little figures of all kinds were running about together and struggling with their little arms. All at once Nutcracker rose from his bed, cast off the bed clothes and sprang with both feet to the floor (of the shelf), calling out:

“Knack, knack, knack:
Stupid mousey pack.”

And with this he drew his little sword, waved it in the air, and cried: “My trusty followers, are you ready to stand by me in the battle?”

Instantly, three clowns, one pantaloons, four chimney sweeps, and a drummer cried, “Yes, yes, we follow you, Nutcracker,” and then they threw themselves down from the upper shelf after the brave Nutcracker.

“But what is going to happen now?” thought Marie. At this moment Nutcracker sprang down, and the squeaking and piping commenced again, worse than ever. Under the big table the mouse army was massed under the command of the terrible mouse king. What was to be the result?

“Beat the *generale*, drummer,” called out Nutcracker. Immediately the drummer began to roll his drum in the most splendid style so that the windows of the glass cupboard rattled and resounded. Then there began a cracking and a clattering inside, and Marie saw all the lids of the boxes in which Fritz’s army was quartered burst open and the soldiers came out and jumped down to the bottom of the shelf, where they formed up in good order. Nutcracker hurried up and down the ranks, speaking words of encouragement. Then turning to Pantaloon, who was looking rather pale and wobbling his long chin, he said:

“I know you are a brave and experienced general. I intrust you, Pantaloon, with the command of the cavalry and artillery. You can do without a horse; your own legs are long and you can gallop as fast as it is necessary. Do your duty!”

Immediately Pantaloon put his long, lean fingers to his mouth and gave a piercing whistle that rang as if a hundred little trumpets had been sounding lustily.

Then there began a tramping and neighing in the cupboard, and Fritz’s new, glittering hussars marched out and came to a halt on the floor. They marched past Nutcracker by regiments, with flags flying and bands playing; then they wheeled into line and formed at right angles to the march. And now boomed Fritz’s cannon with a pum, pum, pum! shooting sugarplums constantly under the mice. Poom, poom! again, and a fine fire of gingerbread nuts went into the enemy’s ranks, scattering the mice in all directions. Still the mice displayed continually more forces. Their little silver balls, which they delivered with great precision, went even inside the glass cupboard. You’ve no idea of the hurly-burly that went on. It went prr-prr-pooof, piff, boom-booroom! Pantaloon had made several most brilliant cavalry charges and covered himself with glory. But Fritz’s hussars were pelted by the mice’s silver balls, which made bad spots on their red waistcoats. This made them hesitate and hang back for a time. Pantaloon made them take ground to the left, and in the excitement of the moment they all wheeled round and marched home to their quarters.

“The reserves shall come out!” cried Nutcracker, who hoped that more troops would come out from the glass cupboard. And there did, in fact, advance some brown gingerbread men and women, with gilt faces, hats, and helmets, but they fought so clumsily that they never hit any of the mice and soon knocked off the cap of Nutcracker himself. Poor Nutcracker was now hard pressed and closely surrounded by enemies. He tried to jump the bottom ledge of the cupboard, but his legs were not long enough.

“A horse! A horse! My kingdom for a horse!”

At that moment two of the enemies seized him by his wonder cloak, and the king of the mice went rushing up to him, squeaking in triumph.

Marie could contain herself no longer. “Oh, my poor Nutcracker!” she sobbed. She took off her left shoe, without distinctly knowing what she was about, and threw it as hard as she could into the thick of the enemy, straight at mouse king. Instantly everything vanished and all was silence. But there stood Nutcracker, with his sword in his hand. He fell upon one knee and said, “It was you, and you only, dearest lady, who inspired me with knightly valor. To you alone I owe my life. If you will take the trouble to follow me for a few steps, what glorious and beautiful things I could show you. Oh, do come with me, dearest lady!”

TOYLAND

“I will go with you, dear Nutcracker,” said Marie, “but it mustn’t be far, and must not be for long, because, you know, I haven’t had any sleep yet.”

“Then we will go by the shortest way,” said Nutcracker, “although it is perhaps the most difficult.”

He went on in front, followed by Marie, till he stopped before the big old wardrobe which stood in the hall. Marie was surprised to see that, though it was generally shut, the doors of it were now wide open. Her father’s fur traveling cloak hung in front. Nutcracker climbed up this cloak by the edgings and trimmings, and got hold of the big tassel which was fastened at the back of it by a thick cord. He gave this tassel a tug, and a pretty little ladder of cedar wood let itself quickly down through one of the armholes of the cloak.

“Step up that ladder, if you’ll be so kind,” said Nutcracker. Marie did so. But as soon as she had gone up

through the armhole, and began to look out at the neck, a dazzling light came streaming on to her, and she found herself standing on a lovely sweet-scented meadow, from which millions of sparks were streaming upward like the glitter of beautiful gems.

"This is Candy Meadow where we are now," said Nutcracker. "But we'll go in at that gate there."

Marie looked up, and saw a beautiful gateway on the meadow, only a few steps off. It seemed to be made of white, brown, and raisin-colored marble; but when she came close to it she saw it was all of baked sugar-almonds and raisins, which—as Nutcracker said when they were going through it—was the reason it was called Almond and Raisin Gate.

Presently the sweetest of odors came breathing round her, streaming from a beautiful little wood on both sides of the way. There was such a glittering and sparkling among the dark foliage that one could see all the gold and silver fruits hanging on the many-tinted stems, and these stems and branches were all ornamented and dressed up in ribbons and bunches of flowers.

"Oh, how charming this is!" cried Marie.

"This is Christmas Wood," said Nutcracker.

"Ah," said Marie, "if I only could stay for a little! Oh, it is so lovely!"

Nutcracker clapped his little hands, and immediately there appeared a number of little shepherds and shepherdesses, and hunters and huntresses, so white and delicate that you would have thought they were made of pure sugar, although they had been walking about in the wood. They brought a beautiful golden easy-chair for Marie, and invited her to take a seat. As soon as she did so the shepherds and shepherdesses danced a pretty ballet, for which the hunters and huntresses played the music on their horns, and then they all disappeared amongst the thickets.

"Had we not better go on a little farther?" asked Nutcracker.

"Oh, I'm sure it was most delightful," said Marie, as she stood up and followed Nutcracker, who was going on, leading the way. They walked by the side of a sweet babbling brook, which seemed to be what was giving out all the perfume which filled the wood.

"This is Orange Brook," said Nutcracker, "but, except for its sweet scent, it is nothing like as fine a water as the River Lemonade, a beautiful broad stream which falls—as this one does—into Almond-milk Sea." And, indeed, Marie soon heard a louder splashing and rushing, and came in sight of the River Lemonade, which went rolling along in swelling waves of yellowish color, between banks covered with herbage and underwood. A short distance farther, on the banks of this stream, stood a nice little village. The houses were all dark brown, with gilded roofs so gay that one might suppose that they were plastered over with lemon peel and shelled almonds.

"That is Gingerbread Valley on the Honey River," said Nutcracker. "It is known for the good looks of its people, but they are very short-tempered, because they suffer so much from toothache. So we will not go there, nor, indeed, visit all the little towns and villages or country. Let us be off to the capital."

He stepped quickly onwards, and Marie followed him until they came to a great lake which kept broadening and broadening out wider and wider and on which the loveliest swans, white as silver—with colors of gold—were floating everywhere. Nutcracker clapped his little hands and the waves of the lake began to sound louder and splash higher, and at once there came a large shell barge made of precious stones of every color and drawn by two dolphins with scales of gold. It carried her and Nutcracker over the lake.

Oh, how beautiful it was when Marie went onward there over the waters in the shell-shaped barge, with the rose perfume breathing around her, and the rosy waves splashing! But she could not restrain a cry of admiration and astonishment as she now found herself all of a sudden before a castle, brightly lighted and splendid with a hundred beautiful towers. Here and there upon its walls were rich bouquets of violets, narcissus, tulips, and carnations. The great dome as well as the roofs of the towers were set all over with thousands of sparkling gold and silver stars.

"Aha!" said Nutcracker, "here we are at Marzipan Castle at last."

Marie was lost in admiration of this magic palace. The fact did not escape her that the roof was wanting to one of the tallest towers, and that little men, upon a scaffold of sticks of cinnamon, were busy putting it on again. But before she had time to ask Nutcracker about this, beautiful music was heard and out came twelve little pages with lighted clove sticks, which they held in their little hands as torches. After them came four ladies about the size of Marie's Christmas doll, but so gorgeously and brilliantly dressed that Marie saw in a moment they could be nothing but princesses. They embraced Nutcracker most tenderly, and cried at once, "O dearest prince! Beloved brother!"

Nutcracker seemed deeply affected. Then he took Marie by the hand and said, "Here is the noble preserver of my life. Had she not thrown her slipper in the nick of time, I should have been captured by the enemy."

Then they embraced Marie and said, "Ah! Noble preserver of our beloved royal brother! Come into the castle and rest yourself while we prepare some food."

Marie and Nutcracker were conducted into the castle, and while the princesses were setting forth a dainty repast, Nutcracker related the adventures of his fight with the mouse king. He told how everything would have gone against him if Marie had not come to his rescue. During all this time it seemed to Marie as if what Nutcracker was saying kept growing more and more indistinct, and going farther and farther away. Presently she saw a silver mistiness rising up all about, like clouds in which the princesses, the pages, Nutcracker, and she herself were floating. And a curious singing and buzzing and humming began, which seemed to die away in the distance, and then she seemed to be going up—up—up, as if in waves constantly rising and swelling higher and higher, higher and higher and higher. And then came a prr—poof! and all was gone.

That was a crash and a tumble!

However, Marie opened her eyes, and, lo and behold, there she was in her own bed!

Of course, you see how it was. Marie, confounded and amazed by all the wonderful things she had seen,

had fallen asleep at last in Marzipan Castle, and no doubt the princesses themselves had carried her home and put her to bed.

A VISIT FROM ST. NICHOLAS

CLEMENT C. MOORE

'Twas the night before Christmas, when all through the house
Not a creature was stirring, not even a mouse;
The stockings were hung by the chimney with care
In hopes that St. Nicholas soon would be there;
The children were nestled all snug in their beds,
While visions of sugarplums danced through their heads;
And mamma in her kerchief, and I in my cap,
Had just settled our brains for a long winter's nap,
When out on the lawn there arose such a clatter,
I sprang from my bed to see what was the matter.

Away to the window I flew like a flash,
Tore open the shutters and threw up the sash.
The moon on the breast of the new-fallen snow
Gave a luster of midday to objects below,
When, what to my wondering eyes should appear,
But a miniature sleigh, and eight tiny reindeer,
With a little old driver, so lively and quick,
I knew in a moment it must be St. Nick.

More rapid than eagles his coursers they came,
And he whistled, and shouted, and called them by name:
"Now, *Dasher!* now, *Dancer!* now, *Prancer* and *Vixen!*
On, *Comet!* on, *Cupid!* on, *Donder* and *Blitzen!*
To the top of the porch! to the top of the wall!
Now, dash away! dash away! dash away all!"
As dry leaves that before the wild hurricane fly,
When they meet with an obstacle, mount to the sky;
So up to the housetop the coursers they flew,
With a sleigh full of Toys, and St. Nicholas too.

And then, in a twinkling, I heard on the roof
The prancing and pawing of each little hoof,
As I drew in my head, and was turning around,
Down the chimney St. Nicholas came with a bound.
He was dressed all in fur from his head to his foot,
And his clothes were all tarnished with ashes and soot;
A bundle of Toys he had flung on his back,
And he looked like a peddler just opening his pack.
His eyes—how they twinkled! his dimples how merry!
His cheeks were like roses, his nose like a cherry!

His droll little mouth was drawn up like a bow,
And the beard on his chin was as white as the snow;
The stump of a pipe he held tight in his teeth,
And the smoke it encircled his head like a wreath;
He had a broad face and a little round belly,
That shook, when he laughed, like a bowl full of jelly.
He was chubby and plump, a right jolly old elf,
And I laughed when I saw him, in spite of myself;
A wink of his eye and a twist of his head,
Soon gave me to know I had nothing to dread;
He spoke not a word, but went straight to his work,
And filled all the stockings; then turned with a jerk,
And laying his finger aside of his nose,
And giving a nod, up the chimney he rose;
He sprang to his sleigh, to his team gave a whistle,
And away they all flew like the down of a thistle.
But I heard him exclaim, ere he drove out of sight,
"*Happy Christmas to all, and to all a good night!*"

CHRISTMAS IN MANY LANDS

TIME: Christmas Eve

PLACE: A living room in a German cottage. A Christmas tree stands at one side. As the curtain rises, a small boy and girl in German costume are trimming the tree and singing.

HANS and GRETCHEN sing:

Santa Claus to-morrow comes,
Bringing gifts in plenty;
Drums and trumpets, guns—a score,
Flags and sabers and still more,
Yes, a whole great army corps—
Would it might be plenty!

Bring us, dear old Santa Claus—
Do not pass us blindly—
Musketeer and grenadier,
Grizzly bear with panther near,
Horse and donkey, sheep and steer—
Bring us all these kindly.

HANS: I wish St. Nicholas would hurry up and come! I think he is dreadfully slow.

GRETCHEN: He won't come while we're here, I'm afraid. Besides, he has so far to travel! Only think how many places he has to go!

HANS: Does he visit all the little children all over the world?

GRETCHEN: Why, of course! (*Slowly.*) At least, I suppose so.

HANS: Do all the children have Christmas trees?

GRETCHEN: Oh! I hope so. Wouldn't it be too bad not to have a tree on Christmas?

HANS: *I think it would be fun to have an airship and go about the world to-night and see what all the little children are doing.*

GRETCHEN: Where would you like to go?

HANS: I'd like to fly over the sea and visit Cousin Heinrich in America.

GRETCHEN: I'd be afraid to fly so far. I'd go to Holland; it's such a little way.

HANS: Oh! I'd fly up in the mountains of Switzerland.

GRETCHEN (*thoughtfully*): I think I'd rather have the children come and tell us about their Christmas. I'd be afraid in an airship.

HANS (*eagerly*): Let's shut our eyes and wish they would come. They'll be sure to if we wish hard on Christmas Eve. We'll have a Christmas party!

(Both children shut their eyes and are silent. A fairy enters. She is dressed in white, spangled with gilt. She has a star on her forehead and carries a wand. She dances about the stage, singing; then stands in front of the children. She waves her wand over them, and they open their eyes.)

GRETCHEN (*rising in surprise*): Who are you, Fairy?

FAIRY: I am the Christmas fairy, and I have come to answer your wish. I grant all the wishes that good children make on Christmas Eve.

HANS (*earnestly*): Oh, dear Fairy, will children really come from America and from Switzerland and from Holland to tell us about their Christmas?

FAIRY: They will come because you wished it, and from other countries as well. (*She dances around the room once more, and vanishes. Hans and Gretchen run to the door and look after her. They clap their hands and dance around the room for joy.*)

HANS: We're really going to have a Christmas party! Let's go on trimming the tree. (*While they are doing this, they finish the song.*)

But, indeed, you know our need,
Know our heart's desires;
Children, father, and mamma!
You know, too, our grandpapa!
Yes, we all are waiting—ah!
Waiting, you know, tires!

(The sound of a bell is heard and a little girl enters, ringing a Swiss bell. She is dressed in a Swiss costume.)

SWISS CHILD: I come from the lofty mountains of Switzerland to give you greeting. (*The two children run to welcome her.*)

HANS: Did you come in an airship?

SWISS CHILD: No; the Christmas fairy brought me. What a beautiful tree!

HANS: Yes; it's our Christmas tree. Don't you have one? Doesn't St. Nicholas bring you presents?

SWISS CHILD: No; the Christmas Lady^[10] comes to us. She wears a white gown and a red cap, and she carries a basket of toys on her back. But only good children get toys. She brings a switch for the bad ones, and they must keep it all the year and get whipped whenever they are naughty!

GRETCHEN: I'm so glad St. Nicholas has a wife to help him. It would be so hard for him to get along by himself. Let's sing a little till the other children come.

(They dance slowly around the tree, singing. While they are singing, a hard clacking of wooden shoes is heard at the door. The children stop to listen, and a little Dutch girl enters. She carries a wand with a star on the end and has a basket of sweetmeats on her arm.)

GRETCHEN (*coming to greet her*): Here is our little neighbor. I'm so glad you have come. Do the children in Holland have a Christmas Eve like ours?

DUTCH CHILD: We don't have a pretty tree like that, and we don't hang our stockings before the fire. Good St. Nicholas comes to visit us in the evening. He brings toys for the good children and a *big birch rod* for the naughty ones. When he comes in, every one joins in this song of welcome:

Welcome, good St. Nicholas, welcome,
Bring no rod for us to-night;
While our voices bid thee welcome,
Every heart with joy is light.

Then we recite verses and play games for a while. As St. Nicholas goes away he scatters sweetmeats on the floor. We children scramble for them and try to fill our baskets. Then, after he has gone away, we all go into another room and put our shoes on a table. We always put a bit of hay in each shoe for St. Nicholas's good old horse, Sleipner.

GRETCHEN: Oh! St. Nicholas comes to us with reindeer.

DUTCH CHILD: In Holland he goes about on his good horse, Sleipner. Then we all say "Good-night," and go to bed. While we are asleep St. Nicholas comes back and fills all the shoes. Every one in the house gets presents.

GRETCHEN: Why do you carry that pretty star?

DUTCH CHILD: This is the Star of Bethlehem. The children in Holland walk about the streets early on Christmas Eve and follow one who carries the star. People give the children gifts of money and other things, and these are all given to the poor.

GRETCHEN: I think that is a beautiful Christmas Eve. Will you try to teach us your song of welcome to St. Nicholas? (*The Dutch child sings her song again and the other children sing it after her. They join hands, and dance a simple folk dance in time to the music. As they sing, a sound of sleigh bells interrupts them. A child runs in, dressed in Russian coat and furs. She is glistening with snow.*)

RUSSIAN CHILD: Oh! Your fire looks warm and bright! Christmas is cold, indeed, on the snowy plains of Russia. I am sorry for poor Babouscka to-night.

GRETCHEN: Come up to the fire and get warm, and tell us who Babouscka is. (*All seat themselves around the fire.*)

RUSSIAN CHILD: Babouscka! Don't you know about her? On Christmas Eve every little Russian child expects a visit from a little old woman called Babouscka. Long, long ago, on Christmas Eve, Babouscka was sweeping her house when Three Wise Men came to the door and asked her to go with them to bear gifts to a little child. She said she would go when she had finished sweeping, but they said, "We may not wait. We follow a star." So they went their way. Afterwards Babouscka was sorry she hadn't gone with them. So she started out alone to find the child, and ever since, on Christmas Eve, she wanders about to every house where there are children, seeking the wonderful child the Wise Men talked about. But always, when she asks for the child, the answer is the same, "Farther on! Farther on!"

GRETCHEN: Poor Babouscka! I hope she will find the child sometime. Let's go on with the song. Perhaps some one else will come. (*They continue singing. A French child enters.*)

HANS: Oh! Here comes a little maid of France! I know her by her pretty cap. Come, tell us what you do on Christmas Eve, and who brings your gifts.

FRENCH CHILD: Christmas is a holy time with us. The Christ Child himself brings the gifts. We call him Le Petit Noël.

HANS: Do you hang up your stocking for him to fill?

FRENCH CHILD: No; we put our shoes by the hearth at night and Le Petit Noël comes down the chimney and fills them.

HANS: Your shoes? I'm glad we hang up our stockings—they hold so much more. Wooden shoes won't stretch!

GRETCHEN: What a lovely Christmas party we are having! Just think, here are children from Switzerland, Holland, Russia, and France. I wonder if any more children will come. Let's all dance and sing while we wait. (*They go on with the song. Sound of sleigh bells is heard outside. An English child enters.*)

ENGLISH CHILD: A Merrie Christmas from Merrie England!

HANS: Oh! another guest! How lovely of you to come to our party. Do you have Christmas Eve parties at home?

ENGLISH CHILD: Oh, yes; Christmas Eve is the merriest night of the year with us.

HANS: Tell us all about it. (*The children seat themselves about the hearth, the English child in the center.*)

ENGLISH CHILD: Early in the morning we go to the woods and gather evergreens. Then we trim all the rooms with holly, mistletoe, box, and bay; in the evening we light the great yule log.

GRETCHEN: What's the yule log?

ENGLISH CHILD: Well, it's a big log that we always burn in the fireplace on Christmas Eve. All the family meet together on Christmas Eve, and we have a beautiful tree like yours. Every one gives a present to every one else, and we sing and tell stories and have a happy time. Then early on Christmas morning the waits come round and waken us, singing Christmas carols. At dinner we have a great big plum pudding, and mother puts brandy on it and sets fire to the brandy, and it makes a pretty blue flame.

GRETCHEN: I think that must be a happy Christmas. Who are the waits that sing the carols?

ENGLISH CHILD: They are children who go about from house to house, early on Christmas morning, and sing.

GRETCHEN: Will you sing one of your carols for us?

ENGLISH CHILD: Yes, if you will all help. (*English child sings carol.*)

I saw three ships come sailing in;
On Christmas day, on Christmas day;
I saw three ships come sailing in;
On Christmas day in the morning.

Pray whither sailed those ships all three,
On Christmas day, on Christmas day,
Pray whither sailed those ships all three,
On Christmas day in the morning?

And all the bells on earth shall ring
On Christmas day, on Christmas day,
And all the bells on earth shall ring
On Christmas day in the morning.

(Children join in the refrain. As they finish the carol, a Swedish child enters.)

SWEDISH CHILD: What a beautiful Christmas party! I'm so glad the Christmas fairy brought me.

HANS: Oh, are you another little maid from France?

SWEDISH CHILD: Oh, no; I come from the frozen north—from Sweden.

GRETCHEN: Do you have Christmas 'way up there? And does St. Nicholas go so far on Christmas Eve?

SWEDISH CHILD: Of course we have Christmas, but I never heard of St. Nicholas before.

HANS *(to Gretchen)*: There's another country he doesn't go to, Gretchen. *(To Swedish child.)* Doesn't any one bring the little Swedish children presents on Christmas Eve?

SWEDISH CHILD: Oh, yes; the Christmas gnomes do that! They are a little old man and a little old woman who come to every home in Sweden, bringing gifts for all in the house. The old man carries a bell and the old woman a large basket filled with gifts. In Sweden every one is remembered on Christmas Day, and a sheaf of grain is fastened to a pole at each house so that not even the birds are forgotten.

HANS: Oh, Gretchen, let us put up some grain for the birds to-morrow morning! *(Song is heard outside.)*

GRETCHEN: Hark—some one is singing! *(They all listen. Irish child sings behind the screen.)*

At Christmas time in Ireland
There is feasting, there is song,
And merrily the fife and fiddle play;
And lightly dance the colleens,
And the boys, the evening long,
At Christmas time in Ireland far away!

(Irish child enters, singing.)

Oh, there's nothing half so sweet
In any land on earth
As Christmas time in Ireland far away!

HANS: Christmas time in Ireland!

IRISH CHILD: Yes, Christmas Day is a day of feasting and merriment. Where did you get that pretty tree?

HANS: It's our Christmas tree. Don't you have one?

IRISH CHILD: No; I never saw one before.

HANS: Doesn't St. Nicholas come to you? Don't you get presents?

IRISH CHILD *(shaking her head thoughtfully)*: No.

HANS: Then how can you have a merry Christmas?

IRISH CHILD: No; we don't get gifts at home. We give them to the poor. On Christmas Eve we light the great yule log in the fireplace. Then, while it roars and crackles on the hearth, we sit around and hear the tale that we love so well, of the shepherds who watched their flock by night, and of the Christ Child in the manger. Before we go to bed we put the great candle decked with ribbons in the window so that our welcome may shine out for the Christ Child, should he wander that way. On Christmas morning, of course, we all go to church, and then we come home to the best dinner, and all the young people dance and make merry far into the night.

HANS *(to Gretchen)*: Think of a Christmas Eve without a tree or St. Nicholas or gifts!

IRISH CHILD: But we have the yule log and the story-telling, and we dance and sing.

HANS: Was that one of your Christmas songs you were singing as you came in?

IRISH CHILD: Yes, every one sings that song at Christmas time.

HANS: Won't you sing the rest of it for us?

(Child finishes the song.)

At Christmas time in Ireland,
How the holly branches twine,
In stately hall and cabin old and gray!
And red among the leaves
The holly berries twine—
At Christmas time in Ireland far away!

(Just as she finishes the song, the American child runs in. They all rise to greet her.)

AMERICAN CHILD: I'm late because I had so far to come. The fairy carried me high over the seas from America.

HANS: America! I'm so glad you have come! I wondered what the American children were doing to-night.

AMERICAN CHILD (*looking around*): Why, I think you must do just what we do on Christmas Eve. You have a tree—you put evergreens around—and you hang your stockings up for Santa Claus to fill.

HANS: Santa Claus? St. Nicholas comes to us.

GRETCHEN: He's the same, Hans, only they call him a little different.

DUTCH CHILD: Does he come on his horse?

AMERICAN CHILD: No, he is drawn in a sleigh with eight reindeer. He comes down the chimney and fills our stockings with toys and candy, when we are asleep.

DUTCH CHILD: Doesn't he bring a switch for the bad ones?

AMERICAN CHILD: Oh, no; Santa Claus never leaves anything but toys.

DUTCH CHILD: I wish he wouldn't bring it when he comes to us!

GRETCHEN: Isn't it funny? We all do different things on Christmas Eve. But we all have a happy time and love it, and I'm sure each one of us likes her own way the best. (*Sounds of sleigh bells are heard outside, and children laughing. Gretchen runs to the window and looks out.*) Oh, here are the village children! They have come to our Christmas party. (*The village children run in. All greet each other and join in singing.*)

This tree was grown on Christmas Day,
Hail, old Father Christmas!
Old and young together say,
Hail, old Father Christmas!
Bright the colored tapers shine;
Hail, old Father Christmas!
Bright to-day the love divine.
Hail, old Father Christmas!
Bright and light our Christmas tree,
Hail, old Father Christmas!
Bright and light our hearts must be.
Hail, old Father Christmas!
Dance, then, children, dance and sing,
Hail, old Father Christmas!
All the merry chorus ring.
Hail, old Father Christmas!

PART II

STORIES TO READ AND TELL TO CHILDREN

SELECTION FROM THE BIBLE

LUKE II, 8-20

And there were in the same country shepherds abiding in the field, keeping watch over their flock by night.

And, lo, the angel of the Lord came upon them, and the glory of the Lord shone round about them: and they were sore afraid.

And the angel said unto them, Fear not: for, behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy, which shall be to all people.

For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Saviour, which is Christ the Lord.

And this shall be a sign unto you; Ye shall find the babe wrapped in swaddling clothes, lying in a manger.

And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host praising God, and saying,

Glory to God in the highest,
And on earth peace,
Good will toward men.

And it came to pass, as the angels were gone away from them into heaven, the shepherds said one to another, Let us now go even unto Bethlehem, and see this thing which is come to pass, which the Lord hath made known unto us.

And they came with haste, and found Mary, and Joseph, and the babe lying in a manger.

And when they had seen it, they made known abroad the saying which was told them concerning this child.

And all they that heard it wondered at those things which were told them by the shepherds.

But Mary kept all these things, and pondered them in her heart.

And the shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God for all the things that they had heard and seen, as it was told unto them.

A bright-faced boy stood in the center of a group of ragged children, telling them a story. Behind them were the forlorn shacks of a mining camp, built of odd boards of different colors with tar paper or bits of tin for the roofs. A fluttering line of untidy wash was the only sign of life about the place, for the men were away working in the mines and the women—there were only ten of them in the camp of fifty men—were busy indoors.

It was a desolate scene, but the children seemed to have forgotten it. They were gazing spellbound at the lad in their midst, their minds so full of the picture he was describing that the snowy fields before them and the miserable camp behind them seemed miles away. Instead, they saw what the boy saw as he looked straight before him, gazing into space with a light upon his face as if he were beholding the radiant scene of which he spoke.

"There were angels," he was saying in a clear, thrilling voice, "hundreds of them, all with glistening wings and faces as light as the sunshine. They made the dark night as bright as day, and when the shepherds saw them they were frightened. But the angels said, 'Fear not,' and told them to go to a stable in the city near by, where, lying in a manger, they would find a baby King. So the shepherds hurried up the steep path to the city, carrying the lambs in their arms, and the sky echoed with the angels' song. It was the gladdest night in the whole world."

"But that is not all!" cried the children. "Tell us about the wonderful star and the men on camels."

"Listen," said the story-teller, although every child was already listening with all his might, "listen to what I am going to tell you to-day. It is the most marvelous thing you have ever heard. In ten days Christmas will be here, although the folks at the camp are so busy and lonesome they have forgotten it. But when I asked my mother how we could ever have a Christmas tree in this far-away place like we used to at home, she said that *perhaps*"—here the lad, Carl, paused a moment, and again he gazed into the distance, his face glowing, "perhaps," he continued mysteriously, "the glorious star would shine again *here* to guide, not the wise men on camels, but us—the children—to the birthplace of a little baby!"

"Shall we see the angels too?" questioned a girl, her voice trembling with excitement. "Will the dark sky be bright and full of singing like you said?" demanded another, and "Will the shepherds be there? And the camels? And the men with precious gifts?" asked others.

"Perhaps so," answered Carl; he did not know, he only knew that they must watch every night now for a new glorious star. Of course that would be the beginning of it all, the beginning of the most wonderful Christmas that had happened since the angels sang to the shepherds on the plains of Bethlehem.

A shrill whistle blew, the call for supper, and the children ran back over the snowy path to the big shack where the men met for meals. They were all seated, talking angrily, when the children entered. One of the men, a leader among them, had just read aloud a letter from the owner of the mine. Such a small amount of gold had been found, the letter said, that unless more was discovered within ten days, the mine would be closed. Also, as the miners had been working on part shares, their wages would be very small, barely enough to pay for their trips back to their homes. A murmur of anger and ugly threats ran around the room. The men had traveled to this desolate spot with the dream of going back rich for life and now, after months of hard, dangerous labor, they would return poorer than when they came. Before the eyes of many of them arose pictures of bare homes where their families were struggling bravely against illness and poverty, counting the days until the miners returned with pockets full of gold.

"As beggars we will never go back!" cried one man. "Better blow up the mine with us in it than see our children starve!" cried another, and then the children, whose fathers were the few who had brought their families with them, rushed into the room, their faces bright with the great hope in their hearts. "Ten days from now will be Christmas!" cried one little lad. "And something wonderful will happen then!" cried another. The men turned upon them savagely. "If any child talks of Christmas again, I'll give him a licking that will make him forget the day," exclaimed one man, and another growled, "Ten days from now we'll all be beggars. Is that what you call 'something wonderful' happening?"

To the children, Carl's story began to seem an idle dream. How could a baby King, a glorious Christ Child, come to this miserable spot, or an angel's song ring through a camp where, as the night went on, the noise of fighting and swearing echoed more and more wildly?

With a despairing hope of still finding the gold within ten days, the miners went out to their work morning after morning before dawn, and evening after evening they returned, utterly discouraged. It was small wonder that their faces grew rough and fierce and the children crept fearfully out of their way. Their own fathers were even more wretched than the others, for the small wages would not pay the return trip of a whole family and, after ten days were over, they could not live on with no food in that desolate camp. Starvation stared them in the face, and the coming of Christmas meant nothing to them.

Only Carl's mother thought of it sometimes with a sad little smile, and when Carl questioned her about the star and the baby of whose coming she had spoken, she said softly, "When the Christ Child came His mother also had no clothes in which to dress Him." Then Carl saw tears shining in her eyes and he dared not question her further, although the one thought in his mind day and night was the coming of the young King.

Late every afternoon the children met beside a group of snow-laden fir trees behind the shacks, and once there, the gloom and terror of the camp slipped from them. The snow-covered mountains glittered in the distance, and Carl told them again and again of the shepherds and the angels.

Then late one evening, while the children watched in breathless excitement, a radiant, glowing star shone forth in the evening sky. It was the same star, they all firmly believed, which had led the wise men so many years ago, and at first they thought with Carl that it had come again to lead them to the cradle of the King. All that night they lay awake on their hard cots, quivering with excitement as they listened for the music of the angels' song. But only the wrangling of the men echoed through the darkness, and again the children's bright dreams were overshadowed by the gloom in the lives around them. Still each day they had their hour of happiness beside the ice-hung fir trees, while the star shone forth, and Carl told them of his

hopes. Never for a moment did he doubt that the star would lead them to the blessed birthplace, and as the days went by he added other thoughts to his picture.

"When the wise men came they brought presents for Him," he said one afternoon, "bags of gold, the kind our fathers are looking for, and for which they say they have risked and ruined their lives. Perhaps—perhaps—" his voice was trembling now with the wonder of his hope, "when the Christ Child comes, He may bring to the miners some of the gold the wise men brought to Him!"

The thought was so marvelous that the children planned to tell the men about it, but when they looked up into those grim, lowering faces their hearts failed them and they went quietly to bed.

So nine days slipped by, and the afternoon before Christmas came. The next day, if no gold had been found, the mine would be closed, and the miners went to work that morning in deadly silence, hopeless despair written upon their faces. The snow had fallen heavily all night, and during the day a few flakes still drifted from the gray, leaden sky. The shacks were cold and cheerless and the women, as depressed now as the men, moved heavily about their tasks. Only Carl's mother was not with them, and deep in their own misery no one gave her a thought. The children were huddled in one corner under a ragged bed quilt, while Carl, by the magic of his faith and words, brought color to their cheeks and light to their eyes.

"This is the day He will come," the lad was whispering. "My mother went out into the snow this morning and before she went she kissed me and said, 'The little baby is coming to-day, my son, and where is the home ready to receive him?' I don't know just what she meant, for of course the angels will be waiting to take care of the little King."

"But if it is snowing, how can we see the star?" asked the children, and as if in answer to their question the sun came out brilliantly. Like a fairyland of silver and powdered diamonds the world shone in its mantle of snow and ice, and into it rushed the children, flying over the fields, eager, joyous, expectant. Quickly the short afternoon passed, the sun set in a glory of rose and gold, and then again to the watching children appeared the splendid evening star upon which all their hopes and dreams were centered. It was bigger and brighter than ever before, but it didn't move as the children had been sure it would, and for a moment a puzzled silence fell upon the group. Then Carl, who had been as bewildered as the others, laughed outright. "Look!" he exclaimed joyously, pointing to the old barn beyond the fir trees, where the few camp animals were kept. "It doesn't move because it is here! See, there, right below the star, is the stable. We thought, just as the wise men did, that the star would take us to a palace, but perhaps again the little King is lying in a manger!"

For a moment it all seemed too wonderful to be true. Could the King be there already, lying in the old stable, waiting for them? Then suddenly to the children everything seemed possible. With the glorious star shining in the glowing sky above them, the glittering mountains behind them, and Carl's triumphant voice calling them to follow, faith in the King's coming seemed only natural. With hearts as full of joy as the shepherds' on the Bethlehem plains, the children climbed up the snowy path to the little stable, through whose windows there already shone a golden light. Was it the light from the angels' wings or was it—could it be—the glory which shone around the Christ Child Himself?

Very quietly and reverently the awestruck children opened the door and stepped inside. What did they see?

Nothing at first. Their eyes were blinded by the light of a great fire which burned in the rude stone fireplace, a fire kindled with evergreen branches so that the room was full of the fragrance of Christmas trees. "This is the odor of the frankincense and myrrh," whispered one child. "He must have brought it with Him for us." Then, as their eyes grew accustomed to the brilliant light, they saw in one dim corner the old donkey which drew heavy loads for the miners. Beside him stood one cow, a couple of sheep, and on the rafters over their heads perched a pair of blue pigeons. The children had seen them all before, often, but in the light of the fire, with the star shining above them, the simple animals, the same as those which had surrounded the Christ on the first Christmas, seemed as miraculous as a host of angels. And then, at last, they saw the One for whom they were seeking!

The cow's manger had been pulled out beside the blazing fire and in it, warm and cozy and wrapped in swaddling bands, lay a tiny, beautiful baby. With a gasp of wonder the children knelt in the straw before him. Around his head was no circle of marvelous glory, but his sweet blue eyes opened, big and shining in his tiny face, and to the children he seemed indeed the baby King of whom they had dreamed. Beside him on the straw lay a woman wrapped in a dark cloak. Even Carl did not at first recognize her as his mother. She had crept off that morning to the one peaceful spot in the camp, where her husband had built the great fire for her, and there, with the peaceful animals around him, the little baby boy had been born.

"The Christ Child has come to us," whispered one child blissfully. "The little King is here!" said others softly. "He has brought the fragrance the wise men gave Him," murmured another. "And the joy of Christmas He has brought to us all to last forever," said Carl in his sweet voice. Overwhelmed with the beauty and wonder of the scene, they had forgotten the longed-for gift of gold, and then the door swung open and the children saw Carl's father enter and step across the room to the mother on the hay. His face shone with the glory in which the whole world seemed to be bathed. Was it only the light of the sunset and the blazing fire? Ah, no, his voice rang with gladness as he exclaimed, "Wife, they have found the gold; the mine will give treasure to us all!"

The children clasped their hands in blissful content. They had known it would come with the coming of the little King,—gold for the desperate men, peace for the tired women, happiness for them all,—and it had come true even more wonderfully than they had dreamed.

The star shone through the window in the loft, the last rays of the sunset turned the snow to gold, and within, in the light of the fire, the children knelt, gazing rapturously at the little newborn baby in the manger. So the miners found them. They were returning to the camp jubilant over the newly discovered gold; it would make them all rich, and they planned to celebrate by a night of riotous drinking. But on the way to the shacks they passed the stable. It was strange to see it lighted at this hour, and one man turned aside to see what was happening there. As he stood looking silently through the window another joined him, and another, until the whole crowd stood outside, gazing through the windows, silent and abashed. The kneeling children, the baby

in the manger, the star above them, what did it all mean?

"It is Christmas Eve," murmured one man. "That must be the big Carl's kid," said another, "but even the blessed Lord Jesus Himself couldn't have looked any sweeter."

"Gifts of gold," said the man who was the leader of the gang, and his clear voice reached every miner's ears, "gifts of gold, if I remember rightly, were brought once to the Christ on His first birthday. It's His birthday to-night, though none of us remembered it, and now the gifts of gold have come to us. Who knows whether they have not come from Him, the Lord whom we had forgotten?"

There was silence again, and then as night fell and the stars shone out over that peaceful scene, there entered into the heart of every man, woman, and child there the spirit of the Christ Child.

Later, when the children understood that the baby was Carl's little brother, the wonder was none the less. Possibly they felt the great truth, that the Christ Child is born in every baby who comes into the world, or perhaps they simply felt the glory of His presence, as the men and women around them lost their harsh and gloomy ways and became joyful, tender, compassionate. For from that Christmas Eve until the mine had been worked, and the men had scattered happily to their homes, the camp was a different place. The drinking and fighting ceased, and the men played with the children, shyly at first and then merrily, thinking of "those other kids at home." The women sang over their tasks, and if the music was not as heavenly as the angels' song, it was full of cheer and peace and good will. And so to the children the camp became truly a place in which, on that marvelous Christmas Eve, the Christ Child had been born.

THE MEANING OF THE STAR^[12]

EMMA G. SEBRING

Now when Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judea in the days of Herod the king, behold, there came wise men from the east to Jerusalem, saying, Where is he that is born King of the Jews? For we have seen his star in the east, and are come to worship him.... And, lo, the star, which they saw in the east, went before them, till it came and stood over where the young child was. When they saw the star they rejoiced with exceeding great joy.

And when they were come into the house, they saw the young child with Mary, his mother, and fell down, and worshiped him; and when they had opened their treasures, they presented unto him gifts; gold, frankincense, and myrrh.—*Matthew ii, 1-4; 9-11.*

In every life there is need of a star, the star of an ideal, which shall go before, leading the way until it comes and stands where the Christ is. They who see such a star shall rejoice with exceeding great joy, as they who look upon a heavenly vision. They who follow such a star to the goal where it leads, shall there offer the precious gift of an ennobled and sanctified life.

WHILE SHEPHERDS WATCHED THEIR FLOCKS BY NIGHT

MARGARET DELAND

Like small curled feathers, white and soft,
The little clouds went by,
Across the moon, and past the stars,
And down the western sky:
In upland pastures, where the grass
With frosted dew was white,
Like snowy clouds the young sheep lay
The first best Christmas night.

The shepherds slept; and, glimmering faint,
With twist of thin, blue smoke,
Only their fire's crackling flame
The tender silence broke,
Save when a young lamb raised his head,
Or when the night wind blew
A nestling bird would softly stir
Where dusky olives grew.

With finger on her solemn lip,
Night hushed the shadowy earth,
And only stars and angels saw
The little Saviour's birth;
Then came such flash of silver light
Across the bending skies,
The wondering shepherds woke and hid
Their frightened, dazzled eyes!

And all their gentle sleepy flock
Looked up, then slept again,
Nor knew the light that dimmed the stars
Brought endless peace to men,
Nor even heard the gracious words
That down the ages ring—
"The Christ is born! the Lord has come,
Good will on earth to bring!"

Then o'er the moonlit misty fields,
Dumb with the world's great joy,
The shepherds sought the white-walled town
Where lay the Baby Boy—
And oh, the gladness of the world,
The glory of the skies,
Because the longed-for Christ looked up
In Mary's happy eyes!

THE GREAT WALLED COUNTRY^[13]

RAYMOND MACDONALD ALDEN

Away at the northern end of the world, farther than men have ever gone with their ships or their sleds, and where most people suppose that there is nothing but ice and snow, is a land full of children, called The Great Walled Country. This name is given because all around the country is a great wall, hundreds of feet thick and hundreds of feet high. It is made of ice, and never melts, winter or summer, and of course it is for this reason that more people have not discovered the place.

The land, as I said, is filled with children, for nobody who lives there ever grows up. The king and the queen, the princes and the courtiers, may be as old as you please, but they are children for all that. They play a great deal of the time with dolls and tin soldiers, and every night at seven o'clock have a bowl of bread and milk and go to bed. But they make excellent rulers, and the other children are well pleased with the government.

There are all sorts of curious things about the way they live in The Great Walled Country, but this story is only of their Christmas season. One can imagine what a fine thing their Christmas must be, so near the North Pole, with ice and snow everywhere; but this is not all. Grandfather Christmas lives just on the north side of the country, so that his house leans against the great wall and would tip over if it were not for its support. Grandfather Christmas is his name in The Great Walled Country; no doubt we should call him Santa Claus here. At any rate, he is the same person, and, best of all the children in the world, he loves the children behind the great wall of ice.

One very pleasant thing about having Grandfather Christmas for a neighbor is that in The Great Walled Country they never have to buy their Christmas presents. Every year, on the day before Christmas, before he makes up his bundles for the rest of the world Grandfather Christmas goes into a great forest of Christmas trees, that grows just back of the palace of the king of The Great Walled Country, and fills the trees with candy and books and toys and all sorts of good things. So when night comes, all the children wrap up snugly, while the children in all other lands are waiting in their beds, and go to the forest to gather gifts for their friends. Each one goes by himself so that none of his friends can see what he has gathered; and no one ever thinks of such a thing as taking a present for himself. The forest is so big that there is room for every one to wander about without meeting the people from whom he has secrets, and there are always enough nice things to go around.

So Christmas time is a great holiday in that land, as it is in all the best places in the world. They have been celebrating it in this way for hundreds of years, and since Grandfather Christmas does not seem to grow old any faster than the children, they will probably do so for hundreds of years to come.

But there was once a time, so many years ago that they would have forgotten all about it if the story were not written in their Big Book and read to them every year, when the children in The Great Walled Country had a very strange Christmas. There came a visitor to the land. He was an old man, and was the first stranger for very many years that had succeeded in getting over the wall. He looked so wise, and was so much interested in what he saw and heard, that the king invited him to the palace, and he was treated with every possible honor.

When this old man had inquired about their Christmas celebration, and was told how they carried it on every year, he listened gravely and then, looking wiser than ever, he said to the king:

"That is all very well, but I should think that children who have Grandfather Christmas for a neighbor could find a better and easier way. You tell me that you all go out on Christmas Eve to gather presents to give to one another the next morning. Why take so much trouble, and act in such a roundabout way? Why not go out together, and every one get his own presents? That would save the trouble of dividing them again, and every one would be better satisfied, for he could pick out just what he wanted for himself. No one can tell what you want as well as you can."

This seemed to the king a very wise saying, and he called all his courtiers and counselors about him to hear it. The wise stranger talked further about his plan, and when he had finished they all agreed that they had been very foolish never to have thought of this simple way of getting their Christmas gifts.

"If we do this," they said, "no one can ever complain of what he has, or wish that some one had taken more pains to find what he wanted. We will make a proclamation, and always after this follow the new plan."

So the proclamation was made, and the plan seemed as wise to the children of the country as it had to the king and the counselors. Every one had at some time been a little disappointed with his Christmas gifts; now there would be no danger of that.

On Christmas Eve they always had a meeting at the palace, and sang carols until the time for going to the forest. When the clock struck ten every one said, "I wish you a Merry Christmas!" to the person nearest him, and then they separated to go their ways to the forest. On this particular night it seemed to the king that the music was not quite so merry as usual, and that when the children spoke to one another their eyes did not shine as gladly as he had noticed them in other years; but there could be no good reason for this, since every one was expecting a better time than usual. So he thought no more of it.

There was only one person at the palace that night who was not pleased with the new proclamation about the Christmas gifts. This was a little boy named Inge, who lived not far from the palace with his sister. Now his sister was a cripple, and had to sit all day looking out of the window from her chair; and Inge took care of her, and tried to make her life happy from morning till night. He had always gone to the forest on Christmas Eve and returned with his arms and pockets loaded with pretty things for his sister, which would keep her amused all the coming year. And although she was not able to go after presents for her brother, he did not mind that at all, especially as he had other friends who never forgot to divide their good things with him.

But now, said Inge to himself, what would his sister do? For the king had ordered that no one should gather any presents except for himself, or any more than he could carry away at once. All of Inge's friends were busy planning what they would pick for themselves, but the poor crippled child could not go a step toward the forest. After thinking about it a long time, Inge decided that it would not be wrong, if, instead of taking gifts for himself, he took them altogether for his sister. This he would be very glad to do; for what did a boy who could run about and play in the snow care for presents, compared with a little girl who could only sit still and watch others having a good time? Inge did not ask the advice of any one, for he was a little afraid others would tell him he must not do it; but he silently made up his mind not to obey the proclamation.

And now the chimes had struck ten, and the children were making their way toward the forest, in starlight that was so bright that it almost showed their shadows on the sparkling snow. As soon as they came to the edge of the forest, they separated, each one going by himself in the old way, though now there was really no reason why they should have secrets from one another.

Ten minutes later, if you had been in the forest, you might have seen the children standing in dismay, with tears on their faces, and exclaiming that there had never been such a Christmas Eve before. For as they looked eagerly about them to the low-bending branches of the evergreen trees, they saw nothing hanging from them that could not be seen every day in the year. High and low they searched, wandering farther into the forest than ever before, lest Grandfather Christmas might have chosen a new place this year for hanging his presents; but still no presents appeared. The king called his counselors about him, and asked them if they knew whether anything of this kind had happened before, but they could tell him nothing. So no one could guess whether Grandfather Christmas had forgotten them, or whether some dreadful accident had kept him away.

As the children were trooping out of the forest, after hours of weary searching, some of them came upon little Inge, who carried over his shoulder a bag that seemed to be full to overflowing. When he saw them looking at him, he cried:

"Are they not beautiful things? I think Grandfather Christmas was never so good to us before."

"Why, what do you mean?" cried the children. "There are no presents in the forest!"

"No presents!" Inge said. "I have my bag full of them." But he did not offer to show them, because he did not want the children to see that they were all for his little sister instead of for himself.

Then the children begged him to tell them in what part of the forest he had found his presents, and he turned back and pointed them to the place where he had been. "I left many more behind than I brought away," he said. "There they are! I can see some of the things shining on the trees even from here."

But when the children followed his footprints in the snow to the place where he had been, they still saw nothing on the trees, and thought that Inge must be walking in his sleep, and dreaming that he had found

presents. Perhaps he had filled his bag with the cones from the evergreen trees.

On Christmas Day there was sadness all through The Great Walled Country. But those who came to the house of Inge and his sister saw plenty of books and dolls and beautiful toys piled up about the little cripple's chair, and when they asked where these things came from, they were told, "Why, from the Christmas-tree forest." And they shook their heads, not knowing what it could mean.

The king held a council in the palace, and appointed a committee of his most faithful courtiers to visit Grandfather Christmas, and see if they could find what was the matter. In a day or two more the committee set out on their journey.

They had very hard work to climb the great wall of ice that lay between their country and the place where Grandfather Christmas lived, but at last they reached the top. And when they came to the other side of the wall they were looking down into the top of his chimney. It was not hard to go down this chimney into the house, and when they reached the bottom of it they found themselves in the very room where Grandfather Christmas lay sound asleep.

It was hard enough to waken him, for he always slept one hundred days after his Christmas work was over, and it was only by turning the hands of the clock around two hundred times that the committee could do anything. When the clock had struck twelve times two hundred hours, Grandfather Christmas thought it was time for his nap to be over, and he sat up in bed, rubbing his eyes.

"Oh, sir!" cried the prince who was in charge of the committee, "we have come from the king of The Great Walled Country, who has sent us to ask why you forgot us this Christmas, and left no presents in the forest."

"No presents!" said Grandfather Christmas. "I never forgot anything. The presents were there. You did not see them, that's all."

But the children told him that they had searched long and carefully, and in the whole forest there had not been found a thing that could be called a Christmas gift.

"Indeed!" said Grandfather Christmas. "And did little Inge, the boy with the crippled sister, find none?"

Then the committee was silent, for they had heard of the gifts at Inge's house, and did not know what to say about them.

"You had better go home," said Grandfather Christmas, who now began to realize that he had been awakened too soon, "and let me finish my nap. The presents were there, but they were never intended for children who were looking only for themselves. I am not surprised that you could not see them. Remember, that not everything that wise travelers tell you is wise." And he turned over and went to sleep again.

The committee returned silently to The Great Walled Country, and told the king what they had heard. The king did not tell all the children of the land what Grandfather Christmas had said, but, when the next December came, he made another proclamation bidding every one to seek gifts for others, in the old way, in the Christmas-tree forest. So that is what they have been doing ever since; and in order that they may not forget what happened, in case any one should ever ask for another change they have read to them every year from their Big Book the story of the time when they had no Christmas gifts.

GOING TO MEET CHRISTMAS^[14]

EDMUND VANCE COOKE

"Papa," said the Man Mite, "can you hear Christmas?"

"Can you hear Christmas?" repeated his papa. "Why, I suppose so, in a sort of way. You can hear bells chiming and little boys drumming and little girls blowing horns and people laughing and everybody saying, 'Merry Christmas!' I suppose that's hearing Christmas, isn't it?"

"But I mean can you hear it before it's here?" asked the Man Mite.

"No, I think not," answered papa.

"Well, if you can't hear it, how can you tell it's coming? Can you see it coming?"

"Oh," answered his papa, "I see what you mean now. Well, how can you tell to-morrow is coming? Can you smell it?"

The Man Mite laughed. "Such a silly papa! To-morrow *has* to come so that to-day can be yesterday. You 'splained that to me once yourself."

"Yes? Well, Christmas has to come so that next Christmas can be last Christmas."

"Oh, papa," cried the Man Mite, "you forgot about *this* Christmas, but please don't tell me when this Christmas is coming, because I want it to surprise me. I want it to sneak right up and get here when I don't know it."

"All right," laughed papa, "I shan't tell, and you can go to bed every night *for a week* hoping that the next day will be Christmas."

Which was exactly what the Man Mite did, and for a night or two it was very exciting, but toward the end of the week he began to grow tired of it. It was all very well to go to bed hoping that the next day would be Christmas, but to wake up every morning, and ask, "Where is Christmas?" only to be answered with "Christmas is coming!" was very disappointing.

One night his papa and mamma insisted that he go to bed earlier than usual, so he was very wide awake for a while, and lay there wondering how he could hurry up Christmas. He closed his eyes and tried to imagine how Christmas looked dilly-dallying along the way, as (he remembered with shame) he himself did sometimes when he was sent upon an errand, instead of hastening, as Christmas and a little boy ought to do.

"Christmas is coming! Christmas is coming!" he repeated to himself, "and if it doesn't hurry and hurry up—if it doesn't hurry and hurry up, I'll go to meet it!"

That was a new idea, and the Man Mite lingered on it lovingly. Go to meet it! Why not?

Just how he got himself dressed and out of the house he never distinctly remembered. He afterwards said that he was in such a hurry he didn't have time to remember, but that doesn't sound quite reasonable, does it?

He also says, however, that he remembers running for a long time as fast as he could go. When he stopped to take breath and to look around he found he was in a strange part of the city and there was nobody in the street in any direction. He was lost!

The Man Mite remembered that his papa told him that if ever he was lost he should ask a policeman, but there wasn't a policeman or anybody else in sight. On the corner, though, was a patrol box, and the Man Mite had seen the policeman telephone to the station from the box, so he thought he would do the same thing. As he was trying to open the door he was startled to hear a voice inside exclaim, "Christmas is coming!"

"Which way is it coming, please?" asked the Man Mite, and off popped the top and up popped a Jack-in-the-box with his arms extended.

"Thank you," said the Man Mite, and hastened away in the direction the Jack-in-the-box had pointed. Presently he saw a toy trolley car going in the same direction. "Hello!" he said, "where is that car going?"

"Going to meet Christmas," answered the trolley car; "get inside."

"Thank you," answered the Man Mite, "you're most too small for me to get inside of, but I can sit on top."

He did so, and the car took him to the end of the line, and he was his own conductor and collected his own fare from himself. When the car stopped, it was at the end of a street which ran up against a steep bluff with no elevator or path to help a little boy to get to its top. The Man Mite wondered how he was ever going to get past that bluff, when he saw a climbing-monkey-on-a-string. One end of his string was attached to the top of the bluff and the other was fastened to the ground below.

"Hello," said the monkey, "Christmas is coming, and if you want to go to meet it, you would better crawl up my string. I'll show you how."

"Oh, I can't," said the Man Mite.

"Can't!" mocked the monkey. "I'm only a tin monkey and I can do it. It's easy."

He went up the string hand-over-hand and foot-over-foot, and the Man Mite followed. Much to his surprise, he reached the top without any difficulty, and there he found a toy train of cars, a toy automobile, and a wooden wagon.

"All aboard for the Christmas Limited!" said the little iron brakeman.

"Automobile Air-Line to Santaclausville!" said the tin chauffeur.

"Fast express going to meet Christmas!" cried the tongue of the wagon, and the Man Mite noticed that the wagon *did* have "Express" printed on both its sides.

Now, although the Man Mite would have liked to go on the train or the auto, there was so much more room in the wooden wagon that he got into it, and was surprised that it soon left its companions far behind. It sped along merrily, and its tongue kept up a continuous running talk as well, until it came to the ocean, where a toy boat was floating.

"All aboard for Christmas!" said the captain.

"But your boat is too small, and besides there's not a board in it; it's tin," answered the Man Mite.

"Well, throw us a line and we'll tow you," said the captain.

As the Man Mite had no line, he let him take the tongue of the wagon, and the captain stood at the stern of the boat and hung on.

Though the boat was so small, it pulled the Man Mite through the water in a surprising manner, and the wooden wagon floated and kept the Man Mite dry, but not a word could he get out of it, which was quite a contrast to its manner when on land.

The weather kept getting colder and colder; presently the boat was stuck fast in the ice. Of course the wagon was also frozen tight, and the captain let go of the "line" as he called it.

"There!" cried the wagon angrily. "I knew what you'd bring us into."

"Well, why didn't you say so if you knew so much?" said the captain.

"Say so! Could *you* say so if somebody was pulling you along by the tongue?" demanded the wagon.

The captain replied and the wagon retorted, and the quarrel was becoming very unpleasant, when along came a pair of skates without anybody on them.

"Boat ahoy! Wagon ahoy! Boy ahoy!" cried the skates. "Christmas is coming!"

"Take me along to meet it, please?" asked the Man Mite, and in another moment he was on the skates and skating faster and easier than he had ever skated in his life before. He skated for a long time, and passed fields where plum puddings were growing like pumpkins, trees where candy boys hung like pears, and snowdrifts which upon closer acquaintance proved to be huge frosted cakes. Curiously enough, fields and trees and drifts were all moving and cried out, "We're going to meet Christmas!"

After what seemed to him a long time, much to his surprise and joy he met a boy, seemingly of his own age. The Man Mite was almost sure he had seen his face before, and yet, when he came to look at him again, he was surer still that he hadn't, for certainly he had never seen a boy with a fur cap, fur coat, fur boots, and fur trousers! He noticed, too, that while the boy's face was round and chubby, his hair was white; not merely tow-headed, like Willie Perkins's, and Pete Judson's, but pure white.

"Hello!" said the stranger. "What's your name?"

"They call me Man Mite. What's yours?"

"Santy."

"Santy? What a funny name. Santy what?"

"Santy Claus."

"Santy Claus?" cried the Man Mite. "You can't be Santy Claus. He's a man, and you're just a little boy

like I am."

"Ho! you're thinkin' of my father," answered the boy.

"Your father!" cried the Man Mite, more astonished than ever. Somehow, he had never thought of the possibility of Santy Claus being a father.

"Have you got a mother, too?" he asked, after a moment.

"Yep. Had one ever since I was born. Ain't you?"

"Of *course*," answered the Man Mite, "but I never heard of Mrs. Santy Claus."

"Never heard of your mother neither," answered Santy, Jr.

"Say, now, ain't you fooling me? Are you honestly Santy Claus's little boy?"

"Say yourself," answered the other, "doesn't your father remember when he was little he had a Santy Claus?"

"Yes."

"Didn't your father's father have a Santy Claus?"

"I s'pose so."

"Well, do you suppose it's the same Santy Claus? Somebody's got to keep the business goin'."

"And will you be Santy Claus—the real Santy Claus—when you grow up?" asked the Man Mite.

"Oh, I s'pose so," answered the other, carelessly.

"You s'pose so! Don't you *want* to be?"

"Naw; I want to be the conductor on a dog train. Say, they made the run this year in three months an' two days. Wasn't that flyin'?"

It really didn't seem fast to the Man Mite, so he said: "How far is it?"

"From Arctic C. to Aurora B."

"What do you mean by Arctic C. and Aurora B.?"

"Arctic Circle to Aurora Borealis, of course. That run was an excursion, too. We always go to the Aurora B. for the Fourth. Fine fireworks there."

"The Fourth? Do you celebrate the Fourth?"

"O' course."

"But you're not Americans, are you?"

"No; that's the worst of it. We got to celebrate everything, holidays and saints days and kings' and queens' birthdays, and the whole bunch. That's because we belong to all nations."

"Christmas is the best, isn't it?" smiled the Man Mite.

"Worst o' the lot," said Santy Jr., shortly.

"Why, what makes you think so?" cried the Man Mite.

" 'Cause dad's always away on Christmas and we've cleared everything out of the house to the last ginger-snap to put in folks' stockings and it's the middle of the night and everybody's tired, just like I am now, and wants to go to bed."

"Middle of the night? What *do* you mean?"

"Middle of the north-pole night. If it wasn't for Christmas we could go to bed about half-past October and sleep until a quarter of May, but ma thinks we ought to help pa and then wait up till he comes home. My, but I'm sleepy! Ain't you?"

"Yes," owned the Man Mite, "a little."

"Well, come on and sleep with me. Your mother won't mind. You can get up about a quarter past April and get home early."

While they were speaking, Santy, Jr., was leading the way into the house and to his room. The two boys lay down together on a bed of bearskins, and the Man Mite said, sleepily: "Say, will you please tell me something?"

"Uh-huh," said Santy.

"What makes your hair white?"

"What makes a polar bear's hair white? What makes an arctic fox's hair white? What makes an arctic hare's hair white? Why, hello! there's dad coming back!"

"Coming back from where?"

"Why, from Christmas, of course. You do ask the funniest questions. I believe you're asleep. Your eyes are shut and you talk so stupid."

The Mite Man rubbed his eyes with both hands and strove to open them. Then he heard a voice cry, "Papa! papa!" but instead of its being the voice of Santy, Jr., as he expected, it was the voice of his brother Ben. Then somebody kissed him and called "Merry Christmas!"

"Oh, papa," said the Man Mite as he opened his eyes, "is it *this* Christmas or *next* Christmas?"

He did not stop for an answer to his question. With a shout of joy he sprang out of bed and darted upon a pair of skates, a toy steamboat, a wooden wagon marked "Express." on both sides, and a toy trolley car which was big enough for him to sit upon the roof.

A LEGEND OF SAINT BONIFACE

ELEANOR L. SKINNER

On a wild winter night about twelve hundred years ago the great English missionary Saint Boniface and a

score of faithful followers were traveling through the gloomy forest in a lonely region of Hesse, Germany. They made their way painfully and slowly, for they were obliged to cut a path through the tangled thicket and great twisted branches. The little band had come into the wilderness to share the message of the Prince of Peace with hordes of barbarous savages who believed in witches and werewolves, worshiped false idols, and made sacrifices to pagan gods. In their passionate joy to bring the glad tidings of the gospel, these apostles willingly endured blinding snowstorms and cruel hunger, courageously risked death from wild beasts and murderous savages.

Since noon these faithful Christians had fought their way through the forest. The morning they had spent at Geismar, where Saint Boniface took into Christ's fold almost three hundred pagans. In simplest words the great apostle urged the rude barbarians to give up their false idols and bloody sacrifices. He told them the thrilling story of Christ's birth, death, and resurrection, and the wonderful promise of the Kingdom of Peace. The savages stood listening in breathless silence. Slowly they caught a glimpse of the light of truth, came timidly forward, and knelt at the rude altar where Saint Boniface stood.

"Dost thou think the people of the wilderness will hold to the new faith, father?" asked one of the followers.

"I hope so, lad," answered Saint Boniface. "We must try to keep watch over them. Again and again they must hear the wonderful story. It is hard, indeed, for these pagans to turn from their false idols and worship an all-loving, merciful Father. We must watch and pray."

"When shall we come again to Geismar, father?" asked the youth.

"It will be a year before our band can return to this region. In the meantime, I hope to send other missionaries here," answered the great apostle.

"Dost thou think we are near the monastery, father?" asked the footsore youth.

"I believe we are. If we do not reach it in another hour we must light a fire and lie down under the trees. Courage, lad! This has been a fruitful journey. May the converts hold fast to the glory of Christ!"

A year passed quickly. Saint Boniface and his helpers were again working among the wild children of the forest. Often the great apostle's heart sank when he heard that some of the converts were worshipping their false idols again. A few remained stanch and true to the new faith; others hopelessly confused the old superstitious ideas with the gospel of love and service.

"Thou art not discouraged, father?" whispered the youth, who noticed that Saint Boniface was lost in thought.

"Discouraged? Never!" answered the apostle with flashing eyes. "I am deciding how to strike the next blow at their cruel superstitions."

In a few moments Saint Boniface said: "Let us stop here for a little while. My plan is made. To-night is the pagan yuletide. Several tribes will gather around the thunder-oak of Geismar to offer sacrifices. The priests declare that nothing but human blood will appease the wrath of Thor. Many wavering converts will be there. Come, we will destroy once for all the sacred monarch of the forest. We will show the poor benighted people that the worship of Thor is nothing but a shadow. Our axes are sharp; our arms are strong. God is with us. Come!"

With new inspiration the Christian band pushed on. An hour's hard struggle brought them to the thunder-oak, which stood on a broad low hill near Geismar. There they saw several hundred pagans standing in a semicircle around the gigantic oak. Near the sacred tree burned a dull red fire, and in the light of the flickering blaze the Christians saw an old priest and a little, fair-haired boy.

"It is as I feared," whispered Saint Boniface. "They are ready to make human sacrifice. Forward!"

In a moment all eyes were fixed on the little band of Christians that advanced toward the priest. Some of the pagans recognized the apostle before whom they had knelt one year ago.

"Friends," said Saint Boniface, holding up the cross, "again we come to bring the message of peace from the All-Father. Thor is dead! With our axes we will prove to you that the god of thunder is powerless before the God of Love."

Saint Boniface and a helper, with their wood axes in their hands, stepped up to the great tree. With powerful blows they cut deep gashes into its sides. Suddenly a mighty whirling wind passed over the forest. Thor's oak shuddered, swayed, and fell; it crashed to the ground, and split into four huge pieces.

"The God of Love is mightier than the God of thunder!" declared Saint Boniface with bowed head. "Christ hath conquered Thor."

In deepest silence the tribes stood gazing at the ruined oak. By the side of one of the huge pieces stood a beautiful little fir tree, unharmed by the storm. Saint Boniface raised his voice and cried, "My friends of the forest, show your faith in the true God by building a chapel out of this fallen timber." In a few moments he added: "And behold this little fir tree, with its green leaves and beautiful spire pointing to the stars. It is an emblem of joy and peace, and life-everlasting. Go no more into the dark forest to make sacrifices of blood; take this little tree into your homes and on Christ's blessed birthday gather around it with joyous songs and loving gifts. Call it the tree of the Christ Child."

They took up the little fir tree and carried it to the village. Once more, as they circled about the tree of the Christ Child, Saint Boniface in simple words told them the wonderful story of peace on earth, good will toward men.

COSETTE'S CHRISTMAS EVE

VICTOR HUGO

(Translated by Alma J. Foster)

A long time ago Montfermeil was a peaceful and charming little village in the woods, away from the main roads, and on the way to nowhere.

There the people lived frugally and happily their simple peasant life. Only water was hard to get, because the hill was high. It was necessary to go a long way for it. Indeed, it was hard for each family to get enough for use.

This was the terror of little Cosette.

Cosette was a little girl who had been left by her mother several years before in the care of an innkeeper and his wife named Thénardier. She had proved very useful to these people in two ways. They were regularly paid by the mother for her care, and they used her as a servant. Thus it was that it was Cosette's task to fetch water when needed. As she was terribly afraid of going at night to the spring, she took good care to have plenty of water in the house at all times.

Christmas of the year 1823 had been particularly fine at Montfermeil. There had been neither hail nor snow.

This Christmas Eve several men were sitting around a table in the lower hall of the inn. Cosette was in her usual place on the crosspiece of the kitchen table near the chimney. She was in rags, she had wooden shoes on her little bare feet, and she was knitting stockings by the light of the fire. These stockings were to be worn by the innkeeper's little daughters.

Cosette was dreaming sad dreams; although she was only eight years old she had suffered so much that she felt like an old woman. She was thinking that it was night, dark night, and that she had had to fill so many pitchers that day for the many guests in the inn, that the water tank was quite empty. She took comfort, however, when she remembered that people drank very little water at night. There were many thirsty ones, of course, but they wanted wine.

From time to time one of the guests would look out into the street and exclaim, "It's as black as an oven! Only a cat could find its way to-night without a lantern." Then Cosette trembled.

Suddenly a peddler who was staying at the inn entered, and said in a hard voice, "My horse has had no water to drink."

Cosette came out from under the table.

"Oh, yes, sir," she said, "the horse has had water, a whole pailful, for I gave it to him myself, and I talked to him, too."

"Come, now," said the peddler, "it can't be true that my horse has had enough water."

Cosette slipped back to her place under the table.

"Indeed, if that's so," said Madame Thénardier, "if the horse has not had enough water, he must drink."

Then looking about the room, she said, "Well, where is Cosette?"

She stooped, and saw the child hidden at the other end of the table almost under the men's feet.

"Are you going to come, or no?" cried she.

Cosette crept out of the little hole in which she had hidden herself.

"Now, get something for the horse to drink."

"But there isn't any water," said Cosette feebly.

The woman opened wide the door leading to the street.

"Very well; go and get some."

Then she fumbled in a drawer where were a few coins, and some peppers and onions.

"Here, you little toad," added she, "on your way home get a loaf of bread. Here is the money."

Cosette had a little side pocket in her apron. She took the piece of silver without a word, and put it into the pocket. Then she stood quite still, the pail in her hand, and the open door before her.

"Get along with you!" cried the woman.

Cosette went out. The door was closed behind her.

Cosette went along the crooked and deserted streets on that side of the town. As long as there were houses or even high walls on both sides of her, she walked bravely enough. From time to time she caught sight of a lighted candle through a crack in the shutters; there were light, and life, and people, and this comforted her. However, the farther she went the more slowly she walked. When she had passed the corner of the last house, Cosette stopped. To pass the last shop had been hard, but to pass the last house,—this was impossible. She turned firmly back. Scarcely had she walked a hundred steps when she stopped again. The thought of Madame Thénardier stopped her. Before her stood the picture of the angry woman; behind her all the phantoms of the night and of the wood. Suddenly she turned again to the path to the spring, and started to run. Even while running she felt like crying. The chill of the night and of the forest encompassed her.

There were only seven or eight minutes from the edge of the woods to the spring. Cosette knew the path only too well, having been over it many times every day. She dared not glance either right or left for fear of seeing things in the branches or the bushes. At last she reached the spring.

Cosette did not stop to take breath. It was fearfully dark, but she was used to this spring. She felt with her left hand in the darkness for a young oak that hung over it, by which she used to support herself, found the branch, caught hold of it, and plunged the pail into the water. While doing this, she could not see that her pocket had emptied itself into the spring. The silver coin had fallen into the water; Cosette did not notice it. She drew up the pail almost full, and rested it on the grass. She shut her eyes, then opened them again, not knowing why. Then she counted aloud, one, two, three, and up to ten, and when she had finished she began again. Then she felt the cold in her hands, which she had wet in dipping the water. Suddenly she saw the pail before her. She seized the handle with both hands. It was hard to lift. She had to stop many times to rest,

then she walked on with her head bent forward. The weight of the pail stiffened her little arms. All this was taking place in the heart of a wood, at night, in winter, far from every human eye, and this was a child only eight years old. Now and then she would cry aloud, "Oh, dear me! Oh, dear me!"

Suddenly she felt that the pail was no longer heavy. A hand which seemed immense had seized the handle and lifted it with power. She looked up. A large form, dark and straight, was walking beside her in the gloom. It was a man who had come behind her, whom she had not heard. This man, without a word, had taken hold of the pail she was carrying.

There are instincts for all the meetings of life. The child felt no fear.

The man spoke to her. His voice was grave and almost a whisper.

"Little one, it is very heavy for you, this thing you are carrying."

Cosette looked up and said, "Yes, sir."

"Give it to me," replied the man. "I am going to carry it."

Cosette let go of the pail. The man walked beside her.

"It is heavy indeed!" he said between his teeth. Then he asked, "Little one, how old are you?"

"Eight years, sir."

The man waited a moment before speaking, then said quickly, "You haven't then any mother?"

"I don't know," said the child. Before the man could say any more she added, "I don't think so. The others have one; but I haven't any." After a silence, she said again, "I don't believe I ever had one."

The man stopped; he placed the pail on the ground, stooped over, and put his hands on the child's shoulders, trying to see her face in the darkness.

"What is your name?" said he.

"Cosette."

The man seemed to feel an electric shock. He looked at her again, then he took his hands from her shoulders, raised the pail, and began to walk again.

After a moment he asked, "Little one, where do you live?"

"At Montfermeil, if you know it?"

Again there was a pause, then he began again: "Who is it, then, who has sent you at this hour to bring water from this wood?"

"It's Madame Thénardier."

"What does she do, your Madame Thénardier?"

"She takes care of me," said the child. "She keeps the inn."

"The inn?" said the man. "Well, I am going to sleep there to-night. Show me the way."

"We are going there now," said the child.

The man was walking quite fast. Cosette followed him without any trouble. She wasn't tired any more. Every now and then she looked up at this man with a wonderful peace and trust.

Several minutes passed thus. Then the man began again.

"Hasn't Madame Thénardier any servant?"

"No, sir."

"Are you the only one?"

"Yes, sir."

There was another pause. Then Cosette raised her voice.

"That is, there are two little girls."

"What little girls?"

"Ponine and Zelma."

"Who are Ponine and Zelma?"

"They are Madame Thénardier's little girls."

"And what do they do, these little ones?"

"Oh," said the child, "they have pretty dolls. They play and amuse themselves."

"And you?"

"I? I work."

"All day long?"

The child raised her large eyes full of tears, that were hidden by the night, and answered softly, "Yes, sir."

Then she went on after a moment of silence, "Sometimes, when I have done my work, and they are willing, I play a little."

"What do you play?"

"As I can. They leave me alone. But I have not many toys. I have only a little lead sword not larger than that." The child showed her little finger.

They were now nearing the village; Cosette led the stranger through the street. They passed the baker's, but Cosette never even thought of the bread that she was to buy.

As they came near the inn, Cosette touched his arm timidly.

"What is it, little one?"

"Here we are, very near the house."

An instant later they were at the door of the inn.

Cosette could not resist one last look at a big doll standing in the window of the toy shop; then she knocked.

The door opened. Madame Thénardier stood there, a candle in her hand.

"Ah! it's you! You have taken time enough! You must have been having a fine time."

"Madame," said Cosette trembling, "here is a gentleman who has come to stay."

Madame Thénardier changed very quickly her cross looks for her pleasing grin, and looked eagerly at the newcomer.

"This is the gentleman?" said she.

"Yes, Madame," answered the man as he touched his cap.

Rich travelers are not so polite. This gesture, and the view of the clothes and the bundle of the stranger, which the woman took in with a quick glance, made her change her pleasant grin for her cross looks again. Then she said dryly, "Come in, fellow."

The "fellow" came in. The woman took another glance at him, looked carefully at his coat, which was very shabby, and at his hat, which was quite battered, then turned up her nose and winked her eyes at her husband, who was sitting with the other men. Then he answered with a movement of his finger on the lips which said as plainly as words, "Very poor."

Then the woman cried at once: "Ah, my good fellow, I am very sorry, but I have no room for you."

"Put me anywhere you like," said the man, "in the barn or the stable. I will pay as if I had a room."

"Two francs?"^[15]

"Yes, two francs."

"Very well."

Meanwhile, the man, having left his bundle and stick on a bench, had taken his seat at a table, where Cosette had hurried to place a bottle of wine and a glass. The peddler who had asked for the water had gone himself to take it to the horse. Cosette had taken her place under the kitchen table with her knitting.

The stranger, who had hardly touched the wine that he had poured out, was looking at the child with strange attention.

Cosette was homely. Happy, she might have been pretty. Now, she was thin and pale; she was nearly eight years old, but one would have guessed her hardly six. The whole figure of this child—her manner, her way of moving, the sound of her voice, the stammering speech, her look, her silence, her least gesture—expressed one single idea, fear.

This fear was so great that on reaching the inn, wet as she was, Cosette had not dared to dry herself at the fire, but had gone quietly to work.

The stranger did not take his eyes away from Cosette.

Suddenly Madame Thénardier cried, "Well now, where is the bread?"

Cosette, as she always did when her mistress raised her voice, came quickly from under the table.

She had entirely forgotten the bread. She did, alas! what many children do when frightened; she lied.

"Madame, the baker shop was closed."

"I will find out to-morrow if this is so," said the woman, "and if you are lying I will make you pay for it. Meanwhile, give me the money." Cosette put her hand into her apron pocket. The money was not there.

"Look here! Do you hear me?" said her mistress.

Cosette turned her pocket out. There was nothing there. What could have become of the money?

"Have you lost it, the money," screamed the woman, "or do you want to steal it from me?"

Meanwhile the stranger had fumbled in his vest pocket without being noticed by any one. Cosette was crouching in the corner of the chimney.

"Pardon me, Madame," said the man, "but just a moment ago I saw something bright roll on the floor. Perhaps it was the money."

At the same time, he stooped down and seemed to be searching the floor.

"Exactly so; here it is," said he, rising. And he handed the woman a piece of money.

"Yes, that is it," said she.

It was not the money, for this coin was larger, but the woman thought it all the better for that. She put it into her pocket, and contented herself with a fierce look at the child, saying, "See that this does not happen again!"

Cosette went back again into what the woman called her "kennel."

"By the way, do you wish supper?" said she to the stranger.

He did not reply. He seemed to be thinking deeply.

"What sort of man is this?" she said between her teeth. "He is humbly poor. He has not a cent for supper. I hope he will pay me for his lodging."

Just then a door opened and Eponine and Azelma came in.

They were really two pretty and charming little girls, one with golden-brown curls, the other with long black braids falling down her back. When they entered, their mother said in a scolding tone which nevertheless was full of adoration: "Ah! here you are, you two!" Then drawing them on her lap one after the other, smoothing their hair, tying their ribbons, she at last gave each a little love pat, saying, "Aren't they well dressed now?"

They went and sat down near the corner of the chimney. They had a doll which they turned and turned again on their knees with all sorts of happy prattling. From time to time Cosette raised her eyes from her knitting and looked at them sadly.

The doll of the two sisters was very faded, and quite old and broken, but it did not seem any the less lovely to Cosette who, in all her life, had never owned a doll, *a real doll*, to use a term that all children will understand.

Suddenly the woman, who was passing back and forth in the room, noticed that Cosette was distracted

and that instead of working she was interested in the little ones who were playing.

"Ah! I have caught you!" cried she. "That's how you work!"

The stranger, without leaving his chair, turned to the woman. "Madame," said he, smiling almost timidly, "let the little one play a bit."

She replied sharply: "She must work if she wants to eat. I don't feed her to do nothing."

"What is she making then?" said the stranger, with the soft voice which was such a contrast to his shabby clothes, and his big, broad shoulders.

"Stockings, if you please, stockings for my little girls, who have none and who will soon be barefooted."

The man looked at Cosette's poor little red feet and went on: "When will she finish this pair of stockings?"

"She will take three or four days more, the idle thing."

"And how much will they be worth when they are done?"

The woman looked at him with scorn.

"At least thirty sous," she said.

"Would you sell them for five francs?" said the man.

"Mercy on us!" cried out, with a hoarse laugh, one of the guests who was listening. "Five francs? You bet your life! Five francs!"

Monsieur Thénardier thought it was time for him to say something.

"Yes, sir, if this is your fancy, you may have the stockings for five francs. We never refuse travelers anything."

"You must pay it right down," said the woman, in her short and commanding way.

"I buy this pair of stockings," answered the man, as he drew five francs from his pocket and laid them on the table, "and I pay for them."

Then he turned to Cosette.

"Now your work belongs to me. Play, my little one."

Cosette now laid down her knitting, but she had not left her place. Cosette always moved as little as possible. She had taken from a box behind her a few old rags and a little lead sword, and Cosette had made herself a doll with the sword.

Meanwhile the guests at the table were singing their songs more and more loudly. Cosette, under the table, was looking at the fire which was shining in her fixed eyes; she had begun to rock the sort of doll she had made, and as she rocked it back and forth she sang.

All at once Cosette stopped. She had turned and caught sight of the doll that the children had left for the cat, and which was lying on the floor near the table.

Then she let fall her little sword-doll which only half pleased her, and turned her eyes slowly around the room. The woman was talking to her husband and counting money, the girls were playing with the cat, the travelers were eating and singing, and not one of them was looking at her. She did not have a moment to lose. She crawled out from under the table on her hands and knees, looked again to see that no one was watching, then slipped quickly over to the doll, and seized it. An instant later she was in her place, seated, quiet, and turned so that the doll was in shadow. This happiness of playing with a doll was so rare for her that she was wild with joy.

Not a soul had seen her except the stranger, who was now eating a simple supper. Her joy lasted almost a quarter of an hour.

But in spite of all her care, Cosette did not see that one leg of the doll was sticking out, and that the fire from the chimney lighted it brightly. This red and shining leg coming out of the shadow suddenly struck the eye of Azelma, who said to Eponine: "Look there, sister."

The two little girls stopped, amazed. Cosette had dared take their doll!

Eponine got up, and without leaving the cat, ran over to her mother, and began to pull her skirt.

"Let me alone," said the mother. "What do you want?"

"Mother," said the child, "look there." And she pointed her finger at Cosette.

The woman cried in a voice hoarse with anger, "Cosette!"

Cosette shivered as if the earth had trembled under her. She turned around.

"Cosette!" repeated the woman.

Cosette took the doll and laid it on the floor with a sort of reverence mingled with despair. Then, without taking her eyes away from it, she joined her hands and burst into tears.

In the meantime the stranger had risen. "What is the matter?" said he to the woman.

"Don't you see?" said she, pointing with her finger at the proof of the crime outstretched at Cosette's feet.

"Well, what of that?" replied the man.

"This little wretch has dared to lay her hands on the children's doll!"

"All this noise about that?" said the man. "Why should she not play with this doll?"

"She has touched it with her dirty hands!"

At this Cosette sobbed more than ever.

"Keep still, won't you!" cried the woman.

The man went straight to the street door, opened it, and went out. In a few minutes the door opened again and the man entered, carrying in his arms the wonderful doll of which we have spoken. He laid it down before Cosette, saying, "Take it, little one; this is for you."

It seemed that during the hour he had been there, in the midst of his musing he had noticed the toy shop, so brilliantly lighted that it could be easily seen through the hall window.

Cosette raised her eyes. She had looked upon the man coming to her with this doll as she would have looked upon the sun; she heard the unusual words, "This is for you"; she looked at him; she looked at the doll; then she backed slowly away, and went and hid herself on the floor under the other table in the corner of the wall.

"Well, now, Cosette," said the woman in a voice that she tried to make soft, "why don't you take your doll?"

Cosette had not the courage to creep out of her hole.

"My little Cosette," said the woman, in a caressing tone, "take it. It is yours."

Cosette looked at the doll almost in terror. Her face was still wet with tears, but her eyes began to glow, like the skies at early dawn, with strange rays of joy. What she felt at that moment was a little like what she would have felt if some one had suddenly said to her: "Little one, you are queen of France." It seemed to her that if she touched this doll, thunder would come out of it.

At last she came near it, and murmured timidly as she looked at the woman: "May I take it, then?"

"Yes, indeed," said the woman; "it is yours. The gentleman has given it to you."

"Is it true, sir? Is it really true, that this lovely lady is mine?"

Suddenly she turned and seized the doll with delight. "I'll call you Catherine!" she cried.

That was a queer sight when the rags of little Cosette touched and covered up the doll's pink ribbons and silk.

"Madame," said she, "may I put her on a chair?"

"Yes, my dear," said the woman.

She placed Catherine on a chair, then seated herself on the floor in front of her, and kept perfectly quiet, without one word, in an attitude of devotion.

"Play now, Cosette," said the stranger.

"Yes, I am playing," said the child.

The woman now hastened to send her children to bed, then she begged permission to send Cosette, too. Cosette went to bed, taking her Catherine with her.

THE STRANGE ADVENTURES OF A WOOD SLED

WASHINGTON GLADDEN

"Keeps coming right down, don't it, Bill?"

Bill could not deny it, and did not wish to admit it; therefore, he said nothing.

What was coming down was the snow. It had been falling, thicker and faster, since a little after daylight, and now it was nearly dark. Stumps of trees and gate posts were capped with great white masses of it; here and there a path, cleared up to the back door of a farmhouse, showed on either hand a high bank of it fluted with broom or shovel.

The boy, whose observation about its coming down I have just recorded, was Master Winfield Scott Burnham. He was a slender boy, with a pale face, dark eyes and brown hair, and he sat pressing his face against the pane of a car window, looking with rather a rueful countenance upon the fast-falling snow. The young gentleman sitting opposite to him, whom he made bold to address as Bill, was his big brother, a junior in college, who had long been Win's hero; and he was worthy to be the hero of any small boy, for he was not only strong and swift and expert in all kinds of muscular sports, but he was too much of a man ever to treat small boys, even though they might be his own brothers, roughly or contemptuously.

Just across the aisle, on the other side of the car, sat Win's eldest sister, Grace, who was a sophomore at Smith College; and fronting her on the reversed seat was Win's younger brother, Philip Sheridan.

The reason why these Burnhams happened to be traveling together was this: The Christmas vacation had come, and William and Grace were on their way to their home in Pittsfield, Massachusetts. The two small boys, whose school at home had closed a week earlier than the colleges, had been visiting their cousins in Hartford for a few days; and it was arranged that William should come over from Amherst and join Grace at Northampton, and that the two should wait at Springfield for the little boys, who were to be put on the northern train at Hartford by their uncle. But the trains on all the roads had been greatly delayed by the snow, and it was four o'clock before the noon express, with the Burnhams on board, left Springfield for the west. The darkness was closing in, and the wind was rising, and William had already expressed some fear of a snow-blockade upon the mountain. This remark had made Win rather sober, and he had been watching the snow and listening to the wind with an anxious face.

"How long shall we be going to Pittsfield?" he asked his brother.

"There's no telling," answered Will. "We ought to get there in two hours, but at this rate it will be four, at the shortest."

"That will make it eight o'clock," sighed Win. "I'm afraid the Christmas tree will all be unloaded before that time."

"Yes, my boy; I'm sorry, but you might as well make up your mind to that."

Win started across the car. This disappointment was too big for one. He must share it with Phil.

"Hold on, General!" said William in a low tone. "What's the good of telling him? Let him be easy in his mind as long as he can."

Win sat down in silence. Phil was telling his sister great stories of the Hartford visit, and his gleeful tones resounded through the car. Grace was laughing at his big talk, and they seemed to be making a merry time of it. But the train had just stopped at Westfield, and there was difficulty in starting. The wind howled

ominously, and great gusts of snow came flying down from the roof of the passenger house against the windows of the car. Presently, the two engines that were drawing the train backed up a little to get a good start, and then plunged into the snow.

"Ch—h! Ch—h! ch—ch! Ch-h-h-h-h!"

The wheels were slipping upon the track, and the train suddenly came to a halt.

Back again they went, a little farther, for another start; and this time the two engines, like "two hearts that beat as one," cleared the course, and the train went slowly on up the grade. Grace and Phil had stopped talking, and they now came across, and joined their brothers.

"Aren't you afraid there may be trouble on the mountain, Will?" asked Grace.

"Shouldn't wonder," said that gentleman, shortly.

"But, Will, what in the world should we do if we should happen to be blockaded?"

"Sit still and wait till we were shoveled out, I suppose. You see, we couldn't go on afoot very well."

"Going to be snowed up! That's tiptop!" cried Phil. The boy's love of adventure had crowded out all thoughts of the festival to which they were hastening. "I read in the paper about a train that was snowed up three or four days on the Pacific road, and the passengers had jolly times; the station wasn't very far off, and they got enough to eat and drink, and they had all sorts of shows on the train."

"But I'd rather see the show at the Christmas tree to-night," said Win, "than any show we'll see on this old train. Wouldn't you, Bill?"

"Perhaps so," answered Bill. It was evident that he had reasons of his own for not wishing to be absent from the festival.

Meantime, the train was plowing along. Now and then it came to a halt in a cut which the snow had filled, but a small party of shovelers that had come on board at Westfield usually succeeded, after a short delay, in clearing the track. Still the progress was very slow. A full hour and a half was consumed between Springfield and Russell, and it was almost seven o'clock when the train stopped at Chester.

The boys were pretty hungry by this time, and the prospect of spending the night in a snowbank was much less attractive, even to Phil, than it had been two hours before. At Chester, where there was a long halt, the passengers—of whom there were not many—nearly all got out and refreshed themselves. A couple of sandwiches, a piece of custard pie, a big, round doughnut, and a glass of good milk considerably increased Phil's courage and greatly comforted Win, so that they returned to the car ready to encounter with equal mind the perils of the night.

The snow had ceased to fall, but the wind was still blowing. Two or three more shovelers came on board, and, thus reënforced, the train pushed on. But it was slow work; the grade was getting heavier and the drifts were deeper every mile. But Middlefield was passed and Becket was left behind, and at nine o'clock the train was slowly toiling up toward the summit at Washington, when, suddenly, it came to a halt, and a long blast was blown by the whistles of both engines. Shortly, a brakeman came through the train, and, taking one of the red lanterns from the rear of the last car, hurried down the track with it.

"Where is he going with that lantern?" asked Phil.

"He is going back a little way," said Will. "The lantern is a signal to keep other trains from running into us. That means that we are to stay here for some time. I'll go out and see what's up."

Presently he returned with a sober face, and looking very cold.

"Well, what is it?" they all asked.

"Oh, nothing; there's a freight train in the cut just ahead of us, with two of its cars off the track, and the cut's about half full of snow. If our Christmas goose isn't cooked already, there'll be plenty of time to have it cooked before we get out of this."

"Is it that deep cut just below the Washington station?" asked Grace.

"The same," answered Will; "and it's as likely a place to spend Christmas in as you could find anywhere in western Massachusetts."

"Can't they dig out the snow?" cried Win.

"Oh, yes," said the big brother; "but it's not an easy thing to do; it's got to be done with shovels, and it will take a long time."

"How long?" asked Grace, ruefully.

"Nobody knows. But we shall be obliged to wait for more shovelers and wreckers to come up from Springfield, and I shouldn't wonder at all if we stayed here twenty-four hours."

"Can't you telegraph to father?"

"I'm sorry to say I cannot. I asked about that, but the station man says the lines are down. No; there's nothing to do but bunk down for the night as well as we can, and wait till deliverance comes. We're in a regular fix and no mistake, and we've just got to make the best of it," replied Will.

Just then the rear door of the car opened and a figure appeared that had not been seen hitherto upon the train. It was that of a stalwart man, perhaps fifty-five years old, with long white hair and beard, ruddy cheeks, and bright gray eyes. He wore a gray fur cap and a long gray overcoat, and looked enough like—Somebody that we are all thinking of about Christmas time to have been that Somebody's twin brother.

"Good evenin', friends!" he said, in a very jolly tone, as he shut the car door behind him. "Pleased to receive a call from so many on ye. Merry Christmas to ye all! 'T ain't often that I kin welcome such a big Christmas party as this to my place!"

The good nature of the farmer was irresistible. The passengers all laughed.

"I believe you," said a traveling salesman in a sealskin cap; "and the sooner you bid us good riddance the better we shall like it."

"And you needn't mind about wishing us many happy returns either," said a black-whiskered man in a plaid ulster. "If we ever get away from here, you won't see us again soon!"

"What place is this?" inquired a gray-haired lady, who sat just in front of the Burnhams.

"Washin'ton's what they call it," said the jolly farmer. "Pop'lar name enough; but the place don't seem to be over pop'lar jest now with some on ye." And he laughed a big, jolly laugh.

"Is it, like our capital, a 'city of magnificent distances'?" inquired the man in the ulster.

"I reckon it is. It's consid'able of a distance from everywhere else on airth. But it's nigher to heaven 'n any other place hereabouts."

"What is raised on this hill?" inquired the traveling salesman.

"Wind, mostly. Is that article in your line?"

The laugh was on the salesman, but he enjoyed it as well as any of them. A bit of a girl about three years old, tugging a flaxen-haired doll under one arm, here came sidling down the aisle of the car.

"Ith oo Thanty Kauth?" she said, lifting her great, solemn black eyes to the farmer's face. The laugh was on him now; and he joined in it uproariously.

"Not jest exackly, my little gal," he said, as he lifted her up in his arms; "but you've come purty nigh it. Sandy Ross is what they call me."

"Has oo dot a thleigh and a waindeer?" persisted the little maiden.

"No; but I've got a first-rate wood sled,—pair o' bobs, with a wood rack on 't—'n' ez slick a span o' Canadian ponies ez ever you see!"

The farmer stroked the dark hair of the little girl with his great, hard hand, and she snuggled down on his shoulder as if he had been her grandfather.

The Burnhams had been joining in the merriment, though they had taken no part in the conversation. But when the little girl climbed down from the arms of Sandy Ross, Will arose and beckoned him to a vacant seat.

"How far from here do you live, Mr. Ross?"

"Right up the bank thar. That's my house, with a light in the winder."

It was a comfortable looking white farmhouse, with a sloping roof in the rear and a big chimney in the middle.

"Now, Mr. Ross, I live in Pittsfield, and I want mightily to get there before noon to-morrow. I don't believe this train will get there before to-morrow night. Could you take my sister and those two little chaps and me, and carry us all home early to-morrow morning on your wood sled, providing it isn't too cold to undertake the journey?"

"Let's see. Well, yes; I calc'late I could. I was a-thinkin' 'bout goin' over to Pittsfield t'morrer with a little jag o' wood, 'n' I reckon live critters like you won't be no more trouble, ho! ho! The snow ain't no gret depth; 't ain't nigh's deep on t' other side o' the mountain ez 't is on this side. There'll be drifts now 'n' then, but the fences is down, so that we kin turn inter the fields 'n' go round 'em."

"How long will it take you to drive over?"

"Let's see. 'T ain't over fifteen or sixteen mile. I reckon I can make it in three to four hours."

"Well, sir, if you'll get us over there safely before noon, I'll give you five dollars."

"All right; that's enough; tew much, I guess. But see here, my friends; jest bring the young lady 'n' the little chaps up to my house 'n' spend the night there, all on ye. Then we can hev an airy breakfast, 'n' start fair when we get good 'n' ready."

In less than five minutes the Burnhams, with bags and bundles, were following Sandy Ross to the door of the car.

This was the last that our travelers saw of their fellow passengers on the Western Express. Late the next afternoon the train rolled into Pittsfield station, but the Burnhams were busy elsewhere about that time.

It was but a few steps from the train to Sandy Ross's house. William carried his sister through the deepest snow, and the boys trudged along with the bundles, highly pleased with the prospect of an adventure in a farmhouse. Good Mrs. Ross was as blithe and hearty as her husband, and she soon made the young folks feel quite at home.

To Miss Grace "the spar' room," as Mrs. Ross called it, was assigned, while Will and the two boys found a sleeping place in the attic. The dim tallow candle that lighted them to bed disclosed all sorts of curious things. In one comer, facing each other, were two old, tall clocks that had long ceased ticking, and now stood with folded hands and silent pendulums, resting from their labors. An old chest of drawers, that would have been a prize for hunters of the antique, was near the clocks; braids of yellow seed-corn hung from the rafters, and at one end of the great room stood the handloom on which the mother of Mrs. Ross had been wont to weave cloth for the garments of her household. It was an heirloom, in the literal sense. The boys thought that this garret would have been a grand place to ransack; but they were too well bred to go prying about, and contented themselves with admiring what was before their eyes. It was not long before they were sound asleep in their snug nest of feathers; and when they waked the next morning breakfast was ready, and Farmer Ross and brother Will had made all the preparations for the journey. To the excellent farmer's breakfast of juicy ham and eggs, genuine country sausages, and delicious buckwheat cakes with maple sirup, they all did full justice.

"It does me good to see boys eat," said the kind farmer's wife; "they do enjoy it so"; and tears were in her eyes as she thought of the hungry boys that used to sit around this table. Farmer Ross and his wife were alone in the world. Two of their sons were sleeping in unmarked graves at Chancellorsville; the other had died when he was a baby. But they were not selfish people; they had learned to bear sorrow, and therefore their sorrow had not made them morose and miserable; it had only made them more kind and tender hearted.

Breakfast over, the wood sled came round to the door, and Mr. Ross looked in a moment to say a last word to his wife.

"You'd better make two or three pailfuls o' strong coffee, mother, 'n' bile three or four dozen aigs, 'n' heat up a big batch o' them air mince pies. The folks down here on the train 'll be mighty hungry this mornin', 'n' I've been down 'n' told 'em to come up here in 'bout half an hour, 'n' git what they want. Don't charge 'em

nothin'; let 'em pay what they've a min' ter. P'raps some on 'em hain't nothin' to pay with, 'n' they'll need it jest as much as the rest. We mustn't let folks starve that git storm-stayed right at our front door. And now, all aboard for Pittsfield!"

The hearty thanks and farewells to good Mrs. Ross were soon said, and the Burnhams bundled out of the kitchen into the wood sled. It was a long rack with upright stakes from a frame and held together by side rails, through which the ends of the stakes projected a few inches. A side board, about a foot in width, had been placed within the stakes on either side, and the space so inclosed had been filled with clean oat straw. Miss Grace wrapped Mrs. Ross's heavy blanket shawl round her sealskin sack, each of the two little boys did himself up in a blanket, William robed himself in his traveling rug, and they all sat down in the straw, two fronting forward and two backward, and placed their feet against four hot flatirons, wound in thick woolen cloth, and laid together in a nest between them. Over their laps a big buffalo robe was thrown, and Farmer Ross heaped the straw against their backs.

Away they went, shouting a merry good-by to the farmer's wife, secure against discomfort, and happy in the hope of reaching home in time for their Christmas dinner. Down in the railroad cut they saw the shovelers and the wreckers toiling at the disabled freight cars, but not much stir was visible about the express train that lay a little farther down the track. The snow did not appear to be very deep, and the ponies skipped briskly along with their light load. Here and there was a bare spot from which the snow had been blown, but not many drifts were found, and these were easily avoided, as Mr. Ross had said, by turning into the open fields.

Farmer Ross was as blithe as the morning. From his perch on a crossboard of the wood rack he kept up a brisk talk with the group in the straw behind him.

"Fire 'nough in the stove?" he asked. "'T ain't often that ye hev a stove like that to set 'round when ye go sleigh ridin'."

"All right, sir; it's warm as toast," said Win. "Genuine base-burner, isn't it?"

"I should think your feet would be cold, sitting up there," said Grace.

"Oh, no; not in this weather. 'Sides, if they do git cold I knock 'em together a little, or else git off 'n' run afoot a spell, 'n' they're soon warm again."

"Do you often go to Pittsfield?" asked William.

"Yes, every month or so. Gin'rally du my tradin' thar. Tek along a little suthin' to sell commonly,—a little jag o' wood, or a little butter, or a quarter o' beef, or suthin'. I meant to hev gone down last week, 'n' I had a big pile o' Christmas greens 't I meant to tek along to sell, but I was hendered, 'n' could n't go. There's the greens now—all piled up in the aidge o' the wood; I'd got 'em all ready. 'Fraid they won't be worth much next Christmas."

"Oh, Mr. Ross," cried Grace, "would it be very much trouble for you to put that nearest pile of them on the back part of the sled? I can find use for them at home, I know, and I should like to take them with me ever so much!"

"Sartainly; no trouble at all"; and in two or three great armfuls the pile of beautiful coral pine was heaped upon the sleigh.

The morning wore on toward nine o'clock, and as the sun rose higher the air grew warmer. The roads were steadily improving, and the ponies trotted along at a nimble pace. The boys began to be tired of sitting still.

"I'm not going to burrow up in this straw any longer," said Win; "I'm going to get up and stir about a little."

"So am I," said Phil.

It was easy enough to stand on the sled while it was in motion. In rough places the boys could take hold of the rail of the wood rack; and even if they fell it did not hurt them. Pretty soon Win, who had an artist's eye, began to pull out long vines of the evergreen and wind them round the stakes of the wood rack.

"I say, Phil," he cried, "if we only had some string, we could fix this old frame so that it would look nobby!"

"Well, here's your string," said Will, producing a ball of twine from his overcoat pocket and tossing it to his brother. "I put that in my pocket by mistake when I tied up my last package yesterday morning, and have been wishing it in Amherst ever since."

"Jolly!" shouted Win. "Now, Mr. Ross, you'll see what we'll make of your wood sled."

"Goin' t' make a kind o' Cindereller coach on 't, hey? Well, go ahead! I shan't be ashamed on 't, no matter how fine ye fix it."

The boys' fingers flew. This was fun! Before long all the stakes were trimmed, and a spiral wreath of the evergreen had been run all round the side rail of the rack. It really began to look quite fairy-like. William and Grace first laughed at the fancy of the boys, and then began to aid them with suggestions; and presently William was up himself, helping them in their work. Twine wound with the evergreen was run diagonally across from the top of each stake to the bottom of the nearest one; and the wood rack began to look very much like what the poets call a "wild-wood bower." All it needed was a roof, and this was soon supplied. William borrowed Mr. Ross's big jackknife, leaped from the sleigh, and cut eight willow rods, and they were speedily wound with the evergreen. Then the ends were made fast with twine to the railing of the rack on either side, and, arching overhead, they completed the transformation of the wood sled into a moving arbor of evergreens.

The boys danced with merriment.

"Isn't it just gay?" cried Phil. "I never dreamed that we could make it look so pretty!"

"We couldn't have done it, either," said Win, "if Bill and Grace hadn't helped us. But what will the fellows say when they see us ridin' down the street?"

"What I am most curious to see," said Will, "is the faces of Mr. and Mrs. Burnham and Baby Burnham when this gay chariot drives up to their door! They're worrying about us powerfully by this time, and I reckon

we've a jolly surprise in store for them."

"I hope they will not be as badly frightened," said Grace, "as Macbeth was when he saw 'Birnam wood' coming."

"Pretty good for sis," laughed William.

"What's the joke?" inquired Win.

"Too classic for small boys; you'll have to get up your Shakespeare before you can appreciate it," answered the big brother.

" 'Pears to me," now put in the charioteer from his perch, "that a rig ez fine ez this oughter have a leetle finer coachman. I ain't 'shamed o' the sled, ez I said; but I dew think I oughter be fixed up a leetle mite to match!"

"You shall be!" cried Grace. "Here, boys, help me wind a couple of wreaths."

Very soon, two light, twisted wreaths of evergreen were ready, and Mr. Ross, with great laughter, threw them over each shoulder and under the opposite arm, so that they crossed before and behind, like the straps that support a soldier's belt. Then his fur cap was quickly trimmed with sprays of the evergreen, that rose in a bell-crown all round his head.

Their journey was almost done. How quickly the time had passed! Every few rods they met sleigh loads of people, happy because Christmas and the sleighing had come together, and bent on making the most of both. These merry-makers all looked with wonder upon our travelers as they drew near, and answered their loud shouts of "Merry Christmas!" with laughter and cheers.

They had not gone far through the streets of the village before their kite had considerable tail. Just what it meant the small boys did not know; but if this driver was not Santa Claus, he was somebody equally good natured, for he bowed and laughed right and left, in the jolliest fashion, to the salutations of the boys, and as many of them as could get near hitched their hand sleds to his triumphal car.

Miss Grace was hidden from sight by the evergreens, and she enjoyed the sport of the boys almost as much as they did.

Meantime, the hours were passing slowly at Mr. Burnham's. The father and mother had been too anxious about their children to sleep much during the night. They could get no word from the train after it left Chester, and the delay and uncertainty greatly distressed them. Mr. Burnham had just returned from the station with the news that the wires were up, and that the train had been heard from in the cut just beyond the summit, where it was likely to be kept the greater part of the day.

"Oh, dear!" cried the mother. "I cannot have it so! Can't we get at them in some way? I'm afraid they will suffer with hunger. Then we had counted so much on this Christmas, and the children's fun is all spoiled. Think of them sitting all this blessed holiday, cooped up in those dreadful cars, waiting to be shoveled out of a snowdrift! It seems as if I should fly. I wish I could!"

"Well, my dear," said Mr. Burnham, soberly, "I am sorry that the holiday is spoiled, but I see nothing that we can do. We can trust William to take good care of them and bring them all home safely; and we've got to be patient, and wait."

Just then the heads of the ponies were turning in at the gate of the wide lawn in front of the house. The small boys who were following unhitched their hand sleds, and the escort remained outside the gate.

"Drive slowly!" said William. "Give them a good chance to see us coming!"

Baby Burnham was at the window. "Thanty Kauth!" she cried. "Look, papa! Look!"

"What does the child see?" said Mr. Burnham, going to the window. "Sure enough, baby. Do come here, my dear. What fantastical establishment is this coming up our driveway? It's a bower of evergreens on runners, and an old man with a white beard and a white coat all trimmed up with greens sits up there driving. He seems to be shaking with laughter, too. What can it mean?"

Just then the wood sled came alongside the porch, and, suddenly, out from between the garlanded sled stakes four heads were quickly thrust and four voices shouted:

"Merry Christmas!"

"The children! Bless their hearts!"

In a minute more, father and mother and baby and the jolly travelers were all very much mixed up on the porch, and there was a deal of hugging and kissing and laughing and crying, while Farmer Ross on his own hook, or rather on his own wood sled, was laughing softly, and crying a little, too. What made him cry I wonder? Presently Mr. Burnham said:

"But, Will, you haven't made us acquainted yet with your charioteer."

"It is Mr. Ross, father. He took us into his house on Washington Mountain last night and treated us like princes, and this morning he has brought us home, and helped us in the heartiest way to carry out our fun."

"Mr. Ross, we are greatly your debtors," said Mr. Burnham. "You have relieved us of a sore anxiety, and brought us a great pleasure."

"Wall, I dunno," said the farmer. "I didn't like to think o' these 'ere children bein' kep' away from hum on Christmas Day; 'n' ef I've helped 'em any way to hev a good time, why,—God bless 'em!—I don't think there's any better thing an old man like me could be doin' on sech a day as this!"

Just here Mr. Burnham's coachman came round the corner in great haste.

"Well, Patrick, what is it?" said his master.

"The shafts uv that sleigh—bad look to 'em!—is bruk, yer honor; 'n' I don't see how I'll iver get thim bashkits carried round at all!"

"Oh, those baskets!" cried Mr. Burnham in distress. "Our Christmas baskets haven't been delivered yet, and it's almost eleven o'clock. The storm and our worry about you kept us from delivering them last night, and we have hardly thought of them this morning. I'm afraid those poor people will have a late Christmas dinner."

"Baskets o' stuff for poor folks's dinners?" said Farmer Ross. "Let me take 'em round."

"Oh, yes, father!" shouted Win. "Let Phil and me go with him! The baskets are marked, aren't they? It'll be jolly fun to deliver them out of this sled."

In a minute the baskets—half a dozen of them—were loaded in, and within half an hour they were all set down at the homes to which they were addressed. Poor old Uncle Ned and Aunt Dinah hobbled to the door and took in their basket with eyes full of wonder at the strange vehicle that was just driving from their doors; the Widow Blanchard's children, playing outside, ran into the house when they saw the ponies coming, but speedily came out after their basket and carried it in, firm in the faith that they had had a sight of the veritable Santa Claus. To all the rest of the needy families the gifts, though late, were welcome; and the bright vision of the evergreen bower on runners brought gladness with it into all those lowly homes.

Farmer Ross went back with the boys to their home; his ponies were taken from the sled and given a good Christmas dinner in Mr. Burnham's stable; he himself was constrained to remain and partake of the feast that would not have been eaten but for him, and that lost none of its merriment because of him; and at length, about three o'clock in the afternoon, the Christmas car, stripped of its bravery, but carrying some goodly gifts to Mrs. Ross, started on its return to Washington Mountain.

My little friends who read this story will be glad to know that the Christmas festival at the church had been deferred on account of the storm from Christmas Eve to Christmas evening; so that the Burnhams had a chance to assist at the unloading of the Christmas tree.

They will also guess that Farmer Ross's house and his barn and his orchard and his pasture and his woods and his trout brook and his blackberry bushes and his dog and his ponies and his cows and his oxen and his hens and pretty nearly everything that was his had a chance to get very well acquainted with Win and Phil during the next summer vacation. It will be a long time, I am sure, before the Rosses and the Burnhams cease to be friends, and before any of them will forget *The Strange Adventures of a Wood Sled*.

KIDNAPPING SANTA CLAUS

L. FRANK BAUM

Santa Claus lives in the Laughing Valley, where stands the big, rambling castle in which his toys are manufactured. His workmen, selected from the Ryls, Knooks, Pixies, and Fairies, live with him, and every one is as busy as can be from one year's end to another.

It is called the Laughing Valley because everything there is happy and gay. The brook chuckles to itself as it leaps rollicking between its green banks; the wind whistles merrily in the trees; the sunbeams dance lightly over the soft grass, and the violets and wildflowers look smilingly up from their green nests. To laugh, one needs to be happy; to be happy, one needs to be content. And throughout the Laughing Valley of Santa Claus contentment reigns supreme.

On one side is the mighty forest of Burzee. At the other side stands the huge mountain that contains the caves of the Demons. And between them the valley lies smiling and peaceful.

One would think that our good old Santa Claus, who devotes his days to making children happy, would have no enemies on all the earth; and, as a matter of fact, for a long period of time he encountered nothing but love wherever he might go.

But the Demons who live in the mountain caves grew to hate Santa Claus very much, and all for the simple reason that he made children happy.

The caves of the Demons are five in number. A broad pathway leads up to the first cave, which is a finely arched cavern at the foot of the mountain, the entrance being beautifully carved and decorated. In it resides the Demon of Selfishness. Back of this is another cavern inhabited by the Demon of Envy. The cave of the Demon of Hatred is next in order, and through this one passes to the home of the Demon of Malice—situated in a dark and fearful cave in the very heart of the mountain. I do not know what lies beyond this. Some say there are terrible pitfalls leading to death and destruction, and this may very well be true. However, from each one of the four caves mentioned there is a small, narrow tunnel leading to the fifth cave—a cozy little room occupied by the Demon of Repentance. And as the rocky floors of these passages are well worn by the track of passing feet, I judge that many wanderers in the caves of the Demons have escaped through the tunnels to the abode of the Demon of Repentance, who is said to be a pleasant sort of fellow who gladly opens for one a little door admitting you into fresh air and sunshine again.

Well, these Demons of the caves, thinking they had great cause to dislike old Santa Claus, held a meeting one day to discuss the matter.

"I'm really getting lonesome," said the Demon of Selfishness. "For Santa Claus distributes so many pretty Christmas gifts to all the children that they become happy and generous, through his example, and keep away from my cave."

"I am having the same trouble," rejoined the Demon of Envy. "The little ones seem quite content with Santa Claus, and there are few, indeed, that I can coax to become envious."

"And that makes it bad for me!" declared the Demon of Hatred. "For if no children pass through the caves of Selfishness and Envy, none can get to my cavern."

"Or to mine," added the Demon of Malice.

"For my part," said the Demon of Repentance, "it is easily seen that if children do not visit your caves they have no need to visit mine; so I am quite as neglected as you are."

"And all because of this person they call Santa Claus!" exclaimed the Demon of Envy. "He is simply ruining our business, and something must be done at once."

To this they readily agreed; but what to do was another and more difficult matter to settle. They knew that Santa Claus worked all through the year at his castle in the Laughing Valley, preparing the gifts he was to distribute on Christmas Eve; and at first they resolved to try to tempt him into their caves, that they might

lead him on to the terrible pitfalls that ended in destruction.

So the very next day, while Santa Claus was busily at work, surrounded by his little band of assistants, the Demon of Selfishness came to him and said:

"These toys are wonderfully bright and pretty. Why do you not keep them for yourself? It's a pity to give them to those noisy boys and fretful girls, who break and destroy them so quickly."

"Nonsense!" cried the old graybeard, his bright eyes twinkling merrily as he turned toward the tempting Demon; "the boys and girls are never so noisy or fretful after receiving my presents, and if I can make them happy for one day in the year I am quite content."

So the Demon went back to the others, who awaited him in their caves, and said:

"I have failed, for Santa Claus is not at all selfish."

The following day the Demon of Envy visited Santa Claus. Said he: "The toy shops are full of playthings quite as pretty as these you are making. What a shame it is that they should interfere with your business! They make toys by machinery much quicker than you can make them by hand; and they sell them for money, while you get nothing at all for your work."

But Santa Claus refused to be envious of the toy shops.

"I can supply the little ones but once a year—on Christmas Eve," he answered; "for the children are many, and I am but one. And as my work is one of love and kindness I would be ashamed to receive money for my little gifts. But throughout all the year the children must be amused in some way, and so the toy shops are able to bring much happiness to my little friends. I like the toy shops, and am glad to see them prosper."

In spite of this second rebuff, the Demon of Hatred thought he would try to influence Santa Claus. So the next day he entered the busy workshop and said:

"Good morning, Santa! I have bad news for you."

"Then run away, like a good fellow," answered Santa Claus. "Bad news is something that should be kept secret and never told."

"You cannot escape this, however," declared the Demon, "for in the world are a good many who do not believe in Santa Claus, and these you are bound to hate bitterly, since they have so wronged you."

"Stuff and rubbish!" cried Santa.

"And there are others who resent your making children happy, and who sneer at you and call you a foolish old rattlepate! You are quite right to hate such base slanderers, and you ought to be revenged upon them for their evil words."

"But I don't hate 'em!" exclaimed Santa Claus, positively. "Such people do me no real harm, but merely render themselves and their children unhappy. Poor things! I'd much rather help them any day than injure them."

Indeed, the Demons could not tempt old Santa Claus in any way. On the contrary, he was shrewd enough to see that their object in visiting him was to make mischief and trouble, and his cheery laughter disconcerted the evil ones and showed to them the folly of such an undertaking. So they abandoned honeyed words and determined to use force.

It is well known that no harm can come to Santa Claus while he is in the Laughing Valley, for the fairies, and ryls, and knooks all protect him. But on Christmas Eve he drives his reindeer out into the big world, carrying a sleigh load of toys and pretty gifts to the children; and this was the time and the occasion when his enemies had the best chance to injure him. So the Demons laid their plans and awaited the arrival of Christmas Eve.

The moon shone big and white in the sky, and the snow lay crisp and sparkling on the ground as Santa Claus cracked his whip and sped away out of the valley into the great world beyond. The roomy sleigh was packed full with huge sacks of toys, and as the reindeer dashed onward our jolly old Santa laughed and whistled and sang for very joy. For in all his merry life this was the one day in the year when he was happiest—the day he lovingly bestowed the treasures of his workshop upon the little children.

It would be a busy night for him, he well knew. As he whistled and shouted and cracked his whip again, he reviewed in mind all the towns and cities and farmhouses where he was expected, and figured that he had just enough presents to go around and make every child happy. The reindeer knew exactly what was expected of them, and dashed along so swiftly that their feet scarcely seemed to touch the snow-covered ground.

Suddenly a strange thing happened: a rope shot through the moonlight, and a big noose that was in the end of it settled over the arms and body of Santa Claus and drew tight. Before he could resist or even cry out he was jerked from the seat of the sleigh and tumbled headforemost into a snowbank, while the reindeer rushed onward with the load of toys and carried it quickly out of sight and sound.

Such a surprising experience confused old Santa for a moment, and when he had collected his senses he found that the wicked Demons had pulled him from the snowdrift and bound him tightly with many coils of the stout rope. And then they carried the kidnapped Santa Claus away to their mountain, where they thrust the prisoner into a secret cave and chained him to the rocky wall so that he could not escape.

"Ha, ha!" laughed the Demons, rubbing their hands together with cruel glee. "What will the children do now? How they will cry and scold and storm when they find there are no toys in their stockings and no gifts on their Christmas trees! And what a lot of punishment they will receive from their parents, and how they will flock to our caves of Selfishness, and Envy, and Hatred, and Malice! We have done a mighty clever thing, we Demons of the Caves."

Now, it so chanced that on this Christmas Eve the good Santa Claus had taken with him in his sleigh Nuter the Ryl, Peter the Knook, Kilter the Pixie, and a small fairy named Wisk—his four favorite assistants. These little people he had often found very useful in helping to distribute his gifts to the children, and when their master was so suddenly dragged from the sleigh they were all snugly tucked underneath the seat, where the sharp wind could not reach them.

The tiny immortals knew nothing of the capture of Santa Claus until some time after he had disappeared,

but finally they missed his cheery voice, and as their master always sang or whistled on his journeys, the silence warned them that something was wrong.

Little Wisk stuck out his head from underneath the seat and found Santa Claus gone and no one to direct the flight of the reindeer.

"Whoa!" he called out, and the deer obediently slackened speed and came to a halt.

Peter and Nuter and Kilter all jumped upon the seat and looked back over the track made by the sleigh. But Santa Claus had been left miles and miles behind.

"What shall we do?" asked Wisk, anxiously, all the mirth and mischief banished from his wee face by this great calamity.

"We must go back at once and find our master," said Nuter the Ryl, who thought and spoke with much deliberation.

"No, no!" exclaimed Peter the Knook, who, cross and crabbed though he was, might always be depended upon in an emergency. "If we delay, or go back, there will not be time to get the toys to the children before morning; and that would grieve Santa Claus more than anything else."

"It is certain that some wicked creatures have captured him," added Kilter, thoughtfully; "and their object must be to make the children unhappy. So our first duty is to get the toys distributed as carefully as if Santa Claus were himself present. Afterward we can search for our master and easily secure his freedom."

This seemed such good and sensible advice that the others at once resolved to adopt it. So Peter the Knook called to the reindeer, and the faithful animals again sprang forward and dashed over hill and valley, through forest and plain, until they came to the houses wherein children lay sleeping and dreaming of the pretty gifts they would find on Christmas morning.

The little immortals had set themselves a difficult task; for although they had assisted Santa Claus on many of his journeys, their master had always directed and guided them and told them exactly what he wished them to do. But now they had to distribute the toys according to their own judgment, and they did not understand children as well as did old Santa. So it is no wonder they made some laughable errors.

Mamie Brown, who wanted a doll, got a drum instead; and a drum is of no use to a girl who loves dolls. And Charlie Smith, who delights to romp and play out of doors, and who wanted some new rubber boots to keep his feet dry, received a sewing box filled with colored worsted and threads and needles, which made him so provoked that he thoughtlessly called our dear Santa Claus a fraud.

Had there been many such mistakes the Demons would have accomplished their evil purpose and made the children unhappy. But the little friends of the absent Santa Claus labored faithfully and intelligently to carry out their master's ideas, and they made fewer errors than might be expected under such unusual circumstances.

And, although they worked as swiftly as possible, day had begun to break before the toys and other presents were all distributed; so for the first time in many years the reindeer trotted into the Laughing Valley, on their return, in broad daylight, with the brilliant sun peeping over the edge of the forest to prove they were far behind their accustomed hour.

Having put the deer in the stable, the little folk began to wonder how they might rescue their master; and they realized they must discover, first of all, what had happened to him, and where he was.

So Wisk, the fairy, transported himself to the bower of the Fairy Queen, which was located deep in the heart of the forest of Burzee; and once there, it did not take him long to find out all about the naughty Demons and how they had kidnapped the good Santa Claus to prevent his making children happy. The Fairy Queen also promised her assistance, and then, fortified by this powerful support, Wisk flew back to where Nuter and Peter and Kilter awaited him, and the four counseled together and laid plans to rescue their master from his enemies.

It is possible that Santa Claus was not as merry as usual during the night that succeeded his capture. For although he had faith in the judgment of his little friends, he could not avoid a certain amount of worry, and an anxious look would creep at times into his kind old eyes as he thought of the disappointment that might await his dear little children. And the Demons, who guarded him by turns, one after another, did not neglect to taunt him with contemptuous words in his helpless condition.

When Christmas Day dawned the Demon of Malice was guarding the prisoner, and his tongue was sharper than that of any of the others.

"The children are waking up, Santa!" he cried. "They are waking up to find their stockings empty! Ho, ho! How they will quarrel, and wail, and stamp their feet in anger! Our caves will be full to-day, old Santa! Our caves are sure to be full!"

But to this, as to other like taunts, Santa Claus answered nothing. He was much grieved by his capture, it is true; but his courage did not forsake him. And, finding that the prisoner would not reply to his jeers, the Demon of Malice presently went away, and sent the Demon of Repentance to take his place.

This last personage was not so disagreeable as the others. He had gentle and refined features, and his voice was soft and pleasant in tone.

"My brother Demons do not trust me over-much," said he, as he entered the cavern; "but it is morning, now, and the mischief is done. You cannot visit the children again for another year."

"That is true," answered Santa Claus, almost cheerfully; "Christmas Eve is past, and for the first time in centuries I have not visited my children."

"The little ones will be greatly disappointed," murmured the Demon of Repentance, almost regretfully; "but that cannot be helped now. Their grief is likely to make the children selfish and envious and hateful, and if they come to the caves of the Demons to-day I shall get a chance to lead some of them to my Cave of Repentance."

"Do you never repent yourself?" asked Santa Claus, curiously.

"Oh, yes, indeed," answered the Demon. "I am even now repenting that I assisted in your capture. Of course it is too late to remedy the evil that has been done; but repentance, you know, can come only after an

evil thought or deed, for in the beginning there is nothing to repent of."

"So I understand," said Santa Claus. "Those who avoid evil need never visit your cave."

"As a rule, that is true," replied the Demon; "yet you, who have done no evil, are about to visit my cave at once; for to prove that I sincerely regret my share in your capture, I am going to permit you to escape."

This speech greatly surprised the prisoner, until he reflected that it was just what might be expected of the Demon of Repentance. The fellow at once busied himself untying the knots that bound Santa Claus and unlocking the chains that fastened him to the wall. Then he led the way through a long tunnel until they both emerged in the Cave of Repentance.

"I hope you will forgive me," said the Demon, pleadingly. "I am not really a bad person, you know; and I believe I accomplish a great deal of good in the world."

With this he opened a back door that let in a flood of sunshine, and Santa Claus sniffed the fresh air gratefully.

"I bear no malice," said he to the Demon in a gentle voice; "and I am sure the world would be a dreary place without you. So, good morning, and a Merry Christmas to you!"

With these words he stepped out to greet the bright morning, and a moment later he was trudging along, whistling softly to himself, on his way to his home in the Laughing Valley.

Marching over the snow toward the mountain was a vast army, made up of the most curious creatures imaginable. There were numberless Knooks from the forest, as rough and crooked in appearance as the gnarled branches of the trees they ministered to. And there were dainty Ryls from the fields, each one bearing the emblem of the flower or plant it guarded. Behind these were many ranks of Pixies, Gnomes, and Nymphs, and in the rear a thousand beautiful fairies floated along in gorgeous array.

This wonderful army was led by Wisk, Peter, Nuter, and Kilter, who had assembled it to rescue Santa Claus from captivity and to punish the Demons who had dared to take him away from his beloved children.

And, although they looked so bright and peaceful, the little immortals were armed with powers that would be very terrible to those who had incurred their anger. Woe to the Demons of the Caves if this army of vengeance ever met them!

But lo! coming to meet his loyal friends appeared the imposing form of Santa Claus, his white beard floating in the breeze and his bright eyes sparkling with pleasure at this proof of the love and veneration he had inspired in the hearts of the most powerful creatures in existence.

And while they clustered around him and danced with glee at his safe return, he gave them earnest thanks for their support. But Wisk, and Nuter, and Peter, and Kilter he embraced affectionately.

"It is useless to pursue the Demons," said Santa Claus to the army. "They have their place in the world, and can never be destroyed. But that is a great pity, nevertheless," he continued, musingly.

So the Fairies, and Knooks, and Pixies, and Ryls all escorted the good man to his castle, and there left him to talk over the events of the night with his little assistants.

Wisk had already rendered himself invisible and flown through the big world to see how the children were getting along on this bright Christmas morning; and by the time he returned Peter had finished telling Santa Claus of how they had distributed the toys.

"We really did very well," cried the Fairy, in a pleased voice; "for I found little unhappiness among the children this morning. Still you must not get captured again, my dear master; for we might not be so fortunate another time in carrying out your ideas."

He then related the mistakes that had been made, and which he had not discovered until his tour of inspection. And Santa Claus at once sent him with rubber boots for Charlie Smith, and a doll for Mamie Brown; so that even those two disappointed ones became happy.

As for the wicked Demons of the Caves, they were filled with anger and chagrin when they found that their clever capture of Santa Claus had come to naught. Indeed, no one on that Christmas Day appeared to be at all selfish, or envious, or hateful. And, realizing that while the children's saint had so many powerful friends it was folly to oppose him, the Demons never again attempted to interfere with his journeys on Christmas Eve.

CHRISTMASLAND

HEINRICH SEIDEL

(Translated by Emma A. Schaub)

I. WERNER AND ANNA

In the last house of the village, just where the big forest begins, lived a poor widow with her two children, Werner and Anna. The little that grew in her garden and on her single acre of ground, the milk of the one goat she owned, and the small sum of money she was able to earn, were just enough to support the small family. Nor were the children allowed to be idle, but were obliged to help in every way possible. This they were glad to do, enjoying their work, which led them in all directions through the glorious forest. In early spring they gathered the yellow cowslips and the blue anemones to sell in the city, and later the fragrant lilies of the valley that grew in the beech wood. Then came the strawberries glistening red under the leaves, the blueberries and the coral-tinted bilberries growing in the moor, and beautiful mosses and lichens—all these the children cheerily gathered and sent to the city.

With the coming of the fall came new labor. Day after day the children went to the woods, picking up dry wood thrown down by the wind. This they carried home and stacked by the side of the hut. Nuts, too, were gathered, put in a bag, and hung in the chimney against Christmas time. Ah, Christmas! That was a magic word, and at its sound the eyes of the children sparkled. And yet the great day brought them very little. A wee

little tree with a few candles, some apples and nuts, and two gingerbread men; under the tree for each one a warm article of clothing for the winter, and if times were very good, a cheap toy or a new slate—that was all. And yet from those little candles and the golden star at the top of the tree there came a glorious light that shed its rays throughout the year, a light that shone in the eyes of the children whenever the word Christmas was spoken.

Winter had now come, and one evening as they sat cozily about the stove, their mother told them a beautiful Christmas story. When she had finished, Werner, who had been looking very thoughtful, suddenly asked: "Mother, where does the Christman live?"

The mother answered, letting the fine thread slip through her fingers while her spinning wheel hummed a merry tune: "The Christman? Behind the forest in the mountains. But no one can find him. Who seeks him wanders about in vain, and the little birds in the trees hop from branch to branch and laugh at him. In the mountains the Christman has his gardens, his shops, and his mines. There his busy workmen labor day and night, making lovely Christmas things. In the gardens grow the silver and gold apples and nuts, and the most delicious fruits of marzipan, and in the shops are heaped up thousands and thousands of the most wonderful toys in the world. There are halls filled with beautiful dolls, clad in calico, in wool, in silk, and in velvet"—"Ah!" said little Anna, and her eyes shone—"and others again are filled with drums and swords and guns, cannon and toy soldiers"—"Oh!" cried little Werner, and his eyes sparkled.

This story impressed him greatly; he could not forget it, and he thought how happy he would be could he but find the way to this wonderland. Once he got as far as the mountains, and wandered about there a long time, but could see nothing but valleys and hills and trees. The brooks that ran by him murmured and babbled as brooks always do, but did not betray their secret; the wood-peckers hammered and pecked just as they did elsewhere in the woods and then flew away, and the squirrels that climbed nimbly up the trees were just like other squirrels that he had seen.

He longed for a glimpse of the wonderful Christmasland—if some one would only tell him how to find it, he would surely go. The people of whom he inquired the way laughed at him, and when he told his mother she too laughed, and bade him think no more about it; the story she had told him had been only a fairy tale.

But little Werner could not forget the story, though he did not speak of it again. Only to his little sister Anna did he at times confide his thoughts, and together they dreamed dreams and saw visions of that wondrous country—Christmasland.

II. THE LITTLE BIRD

One morning shortly before Christmas, Werner, with his ax on his shoulder, went alone into the forest, for the forester, who liked the well-behaved boy, had this year again permitted him to cut down a little pine tree for their Christmas Eve. The pretty, graceful little tree which the children had already selected, stood in rather a lonely spot, far out in the woods, sheltered by a kindly old beech. It was a beautiful mild winter day, and when Werner at last reached the spot he sat down on a tree-stump to rest.

Round about him all was still as in a lonely church; only a brooklet murmured softly, and from afar came the shrill cry of a jay. Again he dreamed of the wonderful Christmasland, and the longing to see its glories grew so strong that he cried aloud: "Oh, if only some one could show me the way to Christmasland!"

Then from the waves of the brook came clear sounds like rippling laughter, a wood mouse peeped from her house and laughed a wee little laugh, and from the top of the old beech tree came a stirring and a waving, as though she were shaking her head at such folly. But from the little pine tree which stood directly before him he suddenly heard a sweet, clear chirping; it was a blue titmouse, hopping gayly from branch to branch, incessantly crying: "I know! I know!"

"What do you know?" asked Werner.

The little bird threw herself backward from a branch, turning over in the air in the drollest way, then alighting again, cried: "I know the way! I know the way!"

"Then show me the way!" said Werner quickly.

Again the little bird began to chirp softly, but the boy understood everything. "You were good to me!" said she. "You protected my little children, my ten little children! I know the way! I'll show you the way! Quick! Quick!"

And the little thing flew to the nearest bush, then farther, and Werner followed. At first he had comprehended but half of what the bird had said, but at last he remembered that it was a titmouse whose frightened cries had drawn him to the old beech tree last spring. There he saw a jay sitting before the hollow of the tree where the little bird had built her nest, about to seize the naked babies and devour them. The poor little mother was hovering about, trying to defend them, crying piteously. He picked up a stone and threw it so happily that the jay fell to the ground dead.

So now the little titmouse wished to show her gratitude. She kept flying before him from bush to bush toward the source of the brook, which came from the mountains. Soon the ground began to rise, and the brook at Werner's feet babbled louder; then he came to an ascending valley which grew narrower and narrower, while the walls on both sides grew steeper, and at last, when the brook suddenly disappeared behind a projecting rock, Werner saw before him a smooth wall of stone, towering high and crowned with mighty pine trees. The little bird suddenly vanished, but away up in the distance her voice could be faintly heard, crying: "Soon! Soon!"

Werner sat down on a rock and examined the stone wall. It was smooth, had no crevices, and was covered with mosses and gay lichens; he could see nothing more. So he sat and waited. At last he heard a gentle fluttering above him and a hazel nut fell at his feet. "Take! Take!" cried the little bird. "Crack! Crack!"

Werner took the nut and looked at it. He could discover nothing peculiar about it, but when he shook it, it rattled as though something hard were inside. He cracked it and found a dainty golden key. In the meantime the little bird had flown to the stone wall. Clinging to it with both delicate little feet, she began pecking away so busily among the lichens, that the pieces fairly flew. At last she cried: "Here! Here!"

Werner came near, and noticed a small, silver-bound keyhole. The golden key fitted exactly into it, and

when Werner turned it, a strange, fine, ringing sound came from the stone wall, and a heavy door, that fitted as exactly into its frame as though it had been cut into the rock, swung slowly open. A warm bluish air came from the opening, and an odor of burning pine needles and of wax candles just blown out, was wafted toward him.

"Oh, how this smells of Christmas!" said little Werner.

But the little bird cried: "Go in! Go in! Quick! Quick!"

Scarcely had Werner, who was just a little frightened, taken a few steps into the gloomy passage, when he felt a draft behind him, and suddenly it grew quite dark, for the door had again silently closed. Now indeed he began to lose courage, for to return was impossible, yet he saw that a faint heart would avail him little—so on he went, groping his way resolutely along the black passage.

III. CHRISTMASLAND

Soon his path grew brighter and he stepped out into the strangest country he had ever seen. The air was warm, but not with the warmth of summer, but as it is in heated rooms, and fragrant with many sweet odors. No sun shone in the sky, yet everywhere was an even, tempered brightness. Of the country itself he saw but little, for behind him was the huge wall of rock through which he had entered, and round about him tall bushes bearing the queerest fruits obstructed the view. As he walked along, lost in wonder, he came to a broad avenue that led to a distant building. Bordering this avenue on both sides were great apple trees, on which grew golden and silver apples. Old men who looked like gnomes, with their long gray beards, and pretty little children were busily engaged picking these apples and heaping them up in large baskets, many of which stood already filled to the brim with their glittering load. No one paid any attention to little Werner, who, with growing astonishment, directed his steps toward the building in the background, which proved to be a large castle, with towering steeples and gilded domes and roofs. On either side of the avenue lay large fields on which grew low plants. Here, too, every one was busy gathering and harvesting, and in the different fields, distinguished by different colors according to the plants they bore, he could see gay, dainty figures diligently loading little two-wheeled carts, drawn by gold-colored, shaggy ponies.

As Werner approached the castle he noticed a fragrant odor of honey cake, growing stronger and stronger, and on looking more closely, he perceived that the entire castle was made of this delectable stuff. The foundation consisted of large blocks, the walls of smooth cakes ornamented in the most enticing way with citron and almonds. Everywhere were exquisite reliefs of marzipan, the balustrades and galleries and balconies of sugar, the beautiful statues of chocolate standing in gilded niches, and the glittering, gay windows made of transparent bon-bons—indeed, here was a castle good enough to eat! At the artistic entrance the handle of the doorbell was of transparent sugar. Werner took heart, and pulled with all his might. No bell rang, however, but a voice from within cried, "Kikeriki!" so loud and shrill that the frightened boy stepped hastily back. The cry was repeated again and again, like an echo growing fainter and fainter, losing itself in the interior of the building. Then there was silence. The door now opened softly and before him stood so strange a creature that had it not lived and moved, Werner would undoubtedly have taken it for a large jumping-jack.

"By leaf gold and honey cake!" said this merry person. "A visitor? Why, that is a most remarkable event!" And then, whether from pleasure or astonishment, he threw his limbs repeatedly up over his head, so that it was almost dreadful to see. Swinging his arms and legs back and forth, he asked: "Well, my boy, and what do you want?"

"Does the Christmasman live here?" asked little Werner.

"Certainly," said the jumping-jack, "and his Honor is at home, but very busy, very busy."

Then he asked the little fellow to follow him, moving along in a queer, sidelong manner, swinging his arms and legs incessantly. He led the way through an entrance hall whose walls were made of marzipan and whose ceiling was supported by pillars of polished chocolate, to a door, before which two gigantic nutcrackers in full uniform stood guard; told him to wait here, and disappeared. In the meantime the nutcrackers stared at Werner with their big eyes, then grinned at each other with an indescribable wooden grin, at which there was a funny sound as though they were laughing with their stomachs. Presently the jumping-jack returned, made a most beautiful sidelong bow, and said: "My gracious master begs you to enter." Then the nutcrackers, drawing close together, suddenly presented their swords and with their teeth beat a roll that was most extraordinary.

When little Werner stepped into the room he was greatly astonished, for the Christmasman did not look at all as he had imagined him, nor did he resemble the pictures he had seen of him. True, he had a beautiful long white beard, as was proper, but on his head was a blue, gold-embroidered skullcap, and he wore a dressing gown of yellow silk, and sat before a large book and wrote. But this dressing gown was covered with such wonderful embroidery that it was like a picture book. On it you could see soldiers and dolls and clowns, and all the animals of Noah's ark, drums and fifes, violins, trumpets, swords and guns, flowers and cakes, and sun and moon and stars.

The Christmasman laid down his pen and said: "How did you get here, my boy?"

Werner answered: "The little bird showed me the way."

" 'T is a hundred years since any one has been here," replied the Christmasman, "and now this little fellow succeeds in coming. Well, your reward shall be that you may see everything. I myself am too busy just now, but my daughter shall be your guide. Come, little Goldflame," he cried, "we have a guest!"

Then in the next room there was a fluttering and a rustling, and in ran a beautiful little girl. She wore a dress of leaf-gold and she glittered and sparkled all over. On her head was a little crown of gold, and on its topmost tip was a gleaming flamelet.

"Why, how nice!" she said, and took little Werner by the hand, crying, "Come along, strange boy!" and ran with him from the room.

IV. THE CHRISTMAS WAREHOUSE

They came to a large corridor where long rows of wooden horses stood tied—there were gray horses and brown horses, chestnut horses and black horses.

"You may choose one," said little Goldflame.

Werner selected a beautiful, shiny, dapple-gray and Goldflame mounted a coal-black steed. "Hoy!" she cried, and with a whir away rolled the little horses so fast that Werner's hair flew, and the flame on the girl's crown was wafted like a streamer in the air. When they came to the door at the end of the corridor, she cried, "Holla!" It opened and they rushed through into a big hall in the middle of which they halted. They dismounted and little Goldflame said: "This is the hall of lead." Lining the walls to the ceiling were open cupboards filled with shelves on which stood, packed in boxes, countless armies of soldiers, hunters, shepherds, sleighing parties, menageries, and everything possible that could be made of lead. Little black-bearded dwarfs climbed busily up and down ladders, placing the boxes into carts which they rolled outside, where larger wagons waited to be loaded with the toys. As soon as the dwarfs saw Werner and Goldflame they brought them two gold-brocaded easy-chairs, and Goldflame said: "The big parade is coming very soon."

They sat down, and had barely waited half a minute when from under one of the cupboards came a strange ringing music and the Prussian guard marched out, and filed by with martial strains. Here indeed were toy soldiers that delighted one's heart! How the little fellows strutted and the dapper lieutenants saluted with their swords! Then came the white cuirassiers with their glittering armor, the red hussars of Potsdam, the lancers with their gleaming flags, the blue dragoons, and last of all the cannon. When these had passed, "Trari, trara!" sounded from under the cupboard, and deer, rabbits, and foxes burst forth, the yelping pack behind, and the hunters on horseback with huzza, crack of whip, and sounding of horns.

Then all at once something glistened in the air and fine snow began to fall. When the ground was white a sleighing party with merry bells ringing came out and rushed by. The fronts of the sleighs were in the form of swans, lions, tigers, and dragons, and in the sleighs sat ladies and gentlemen in beautiful furs. In passing, they threw snowballs at Werner and at little Goldflame. But if you looked closely at one of these snowballs, you found a tiny bonbon wrapped in tissue paper.

The snow disappeared, and now with sweet bells ringing came shepherds and shepherdesses with their flocks, then pretty peasants with fruits and flowers, then gypsies, musicians, tinkers, rope walkers, horseback riders, and such vagrant folk. Last came Mr. Hagenbeck of Hamburg with his African menagerie of giraffes, elephants, rhinoceroses, hippopotamuses, zebras, and antelopes. The lions and panthers followed in cages on little wagons, and roared mightily, as though insulted at the indignities put upon them.

At the close of this jolly parade both children again mounted their horses and rode on. What marvels were unfolded before little Werner's eyes! The large hall filled with dolls, for which he did not particularly care and which he only wished Anna might see, the theater magazine where at Goldflame's request a thousand theaters opened at the same time with a thousand different plays, making a terrible din, the tool-chest warehouse, the storeroom for the musical instruments, the wooden-animal magazine, the picture department, the paint-box warehouse, the hall of the wax candles, and so on, until he was quite tired out when at last they reached the great candy department.

"Now let us eat," said little Goldflame. Immediately six little confectioner's apprentices brought a table, set it, and served them with the most delicious dishes. Werner had never tasted such good things! There were Leipzig larks of marzipan filled with nut cream, sausages of quinces, ham made of rosy creamy sugar, pastry filled with strawberry jam, and all sorts of candied fruits. They had pineapple lemonade with vanilla cream to drink, and behind them stood the six little waiters, eager to serve, running to fill every order. For dessert they were to have, as Goldflame remarked, something quite superlatively fine—dry black bread and cheese. Such ordinary dishes were so rare in this country, and so difficult to obtain, that they were considered the greatest delicacies. When they had finished eating, the wooden horses were again brought out, and Goldflame said, "Now we will visit the mines." So mounting their excellent steeds, away they rode.

V. THE MINES

They rode over fields on which grew the most exquisite fruits and vegetables, all of sugar or chocolate filled with cream; they galloped along stately avenues bordered with fruit trees, toward the mountains which lay before them. Some of these gleamed white as chalk; others looked dull and dark, almost black. But the tops of even the black mountains were as white as though snow-capped.

"Perhaps you think you see snow," said little Goldflame. "But when it snows here, it only snows powdered sugar."

Werner now saw before him a high, shining white rock on which hundreds of men were working. They rode quite close and dismounted. "This is the great sugar quarry," said Goldflame. "This entire rock consists of the finest white colonial sugar."

Quite near them they observed an entrance to a cave, and as they approached it several miners hurried toward them with torches and led the way. They penetrated deep into the mountain, whose walls shimmered and shone in the reflected torchlight. Presently they stepped into a magnificent chamber whose walls, covered with huge crystals of transparent rock candy, glittered and sparkled in the light of the torches.

"This is the large rock-candy cavern," said little Goldflame. They went on and came to a place where the miners were knocking and hammering, and working new passages into the mountains.

"These men are looking for melted sugar, and when they find it, they scoop it out with huge spoons," she said.

Suddenly, as they proceeded, they beheld mountains, no longer white and shining, but dull, dark brown, and smelling of vanilla. "We are now approaching the chocolate mines," explained little Goldflame.

Here many people were at work tunneling into the mountains, for it was only in the interior that the best vanilla chocolate was found. They passed through great chambers supported here and there by single pillars left standing. When at last they again stepped into the open air, Werner noticed a roaring brook that came from a ravine in the mountains and rushed toward the valley, where it turned the mills that sawed the chocolate blocks into cakes.

"Would you like to have a drink?" said little Goldflame. "It tastes good; it is pure liqueur." Little Werner was so very thirsty after all the sweets he had eaten and seen, and from the brook came so fresh and enticing an odor, that he seized the cup eagerly which an obliging miner handed him, and emptied it at a single draft. But scarcely had he finished when the world began to turn about him in the queerest way—he saw two Goldflames, four Goldflames, a hundred Goldflames, glittering and gleaming before him, then flowing together into a shining sea of light, carrying away his senses—and he knew nothing more.

VI. CONCLUSION

The first sound that Werner heard on awakening was the chirping of a titmouse. He was astonished to find himself sitting on a stump under the old beech tree with the little pine tree in front of him. The titmouse hopped from branch to branch and chirped, but Werner no longer understood what she said. It suddenly occurred to him that it must be very late, that his mother had surely been anxiously waiting for him. But looking up at the sun he was astonished to find that scarcely a quarter of an hour had passed since he had left this spot. He could not account for this mystery, but eager to relate his wonderful experiences to his mother and little Anna, he cut down the pine tree and hurried home with his burden as fast as he could. When with shining eyes and breathless haste he had told them his story, his mother grew quite angry and told him not to dare fall asleep again in the woods in winter—had the weather been colder it might have been his death. But afterwards she shook her head, saying to herself, "Where does the boy get all his strange fancies?"

Little Werner wept because his mother did not believe him, and went away, but Anna followed, eager to hear more. She never tired of hearing about Goldflame and the hall of dolls, and in the days that followed he had to tell her about them over and over again, until he was quite comforted. One day they went to the woods together to look for the entrance to that wonderful country. But though they followed the brooklet they never found a place resembling in the least the description Werner had given, and he was so ashamed and embarrassed, he knew not what to say.

And so Christmas drew near. A heavy snow had been falling for two whole days, and the world was beautiful, wrapped in its glistening, white Christmas robe. Night was falling, and the children sat in their dark chamber, eagerly waiting, whispering together and listening to their mother who was walking back and forth in the brightly lighted Christmas room, arranging their poor little gifts. Suddenly from afar they heard the jingling of sleighbells coming nearer and nearer, and a whip cracked merrily. Now the sleigh was quite close, now it stopped before the house; they could hear the horses stamping and the bells jingling softly when the animals turned their heads.

"The Christmasman! The Christmasman!" cried Werner. They heard doors opening and a man's voice speaking—then their mother called to them, "Come in, children; your uncle is here."

Werner and Anna ran into the room and there stood a man in a great fur coat who held out his hands to them, saying, "Come to me, my dear children." He kissed each one and said, "You shall come with me to the city and live with me in my large house. I will be a father to you and I will care for you." In the meantime a gigantic coachman with a fur cap, a long white beard, and a cloak with seven collars was bringing many large packages into the room. When these were afterwards opened they contained so many beautiful gifts that the people in that little house had a Christmas such as they had never had before! Later, when Werner and Anna went to bed, he whispered to her very mysteriously, "Do you know who the coachman was with the fur cap, the long white beard, and the big cloak? That was the Christmasman. Indeed, I recognized him, and he looked at me and winked."

But what had happened to the rich old uncle who lived alone, an unsociable miser, and who had never given his poor sister and her children a thought—what had happened to him to change him so? In the night following the day on which Werner had visited the Christmasman, the uncle had had a strange dream. A man with a blue velvet cap and a long white beard, wrapped in a golden robe, suddenly stood before him, looked at him with great, blue, penetrating eyes, then spoke slowly and impressively: "Konrad Borodin, have you a sister?" Thereupon fear overcame him so that he could not answer. Then the apparition gradually vanished, the eyes only gazing threateningly upon him. Three successive nights he had the same dream. In the meantime a restlessness beyond description drove him from room to room of his dreary, empty house, and ever in his ear there sounded that deep, reproachful voice of his dream, saying, "Have you a sister?" On the morning after the third night he could endure it no longer, but hurried to the city, where to the astonishment of all the people who had known him as a miser, he bought the loveliest things, ordered a sleigh, filled it with his purchases, and drove directly to his poor sister.

Little Werner received a good education, and grew to be a famous and highly respected man. He himself told me this story.

A CHRISTMAS LEGEND

(A Florentine Legend of the Nativity)

VERNON LEE

Beyond Bethlehem, which is a big village, walled and moated, lies a hilly country, exceeding wild and covered with dense woods of firs, pines, larches, beeches, and similar trees. At times the people of Bethlehem, going in bands, cut down these trees and burn them to charcoal which they pack on mules and sell in the valley. Sometimes they tie together whole tree trunks such as would serve for beams, rafters, and masts, and float them down the rivers, which are many and very rapid.

On these mountains in the thickest part of the forests a certain woodcutter bethought him to build a house wherein to live with his family, store the timber, and care for his beasts. For this purpose he employed certain pillars and pieces of masonry that stood in the forest, being remains of a temple of the heathen, which had long ceased to exist. He cleared the wood round about, leaving only tree stumps and bushes. Close by in a ravine between high fir trees ran a river of greenish waters, exceedingly cold and rapid. It was always full to the brim even in mid-summer, owing to the melting snows; and around up hill and down dale stretched the

woods of firs, larches, pines, and other noble and useful trees, emitting a very pleasant and virtuous fragrance.

The man thought to enjoy his house and came with his family and servants. Also he brought his horses and mules and oxen which he had employed to carry down the timber and charcoal. But scarcely were they settled when an earthquake rent the place, tearing wall from wall, and pillar from pillar; and a voice was heard in the air crying, "Ecce domus domini dei,"^[16] whereupon they fled, astonished and in terror, and returned to the town.

And no one of that man's family ventured henceforth to return to that house or to that wood save one called Hilarion, a poor lad and a servant, but of upright heart and faith. He offered to go back and take up his abode there and cut down the trees and burn the charcoal for his master. So he went. He was but a poor lad clothed in leathern tunic and coarse serge hood.

And Hilarion took with him an ox and an ass to load with charcoal and drive down to Bethlehem to his master.

The first night on which Hilarion slept in that house, which had fallen to ruin, he heard voices, as of children—both boys and maidens—singing in the air. But he closed his eyes, repeated a Paternoster, turned over, and slept. Another night he heard voices which made him tremble, but being clean of heart he said two Aves and went to sleep. And once more did he hear the voices, and they were passing sweet. And with them came a fragrance as of crushed herbs and many kinds of flowers, frankincense, and orris root. Hilarion feared the voices were those of heathen gods, but he said his prayers and slept.

But at length one night as Hilarion heard these songs he opened his eyes, and behold, the place was light, and a great staircase of light like golden cobwebs stretched up to heaven and hosts of angels appeared, coming and going, with locks like honeycomb and robes of rose and green, azure and white, thickly embroidered with purest pearls. They had wings as of butterflies and peacock's tails and a golden glory shone about their heads. They went to and fro carrying garlands and strewing flowers, so that, although midwinter, it was like a garden in June, sweet with roses and lilies and gilliflowers. And the angels sang and, when they had finished their work they said, "It is well," and they departed, holding hands as they flew into the sky above the fir trees. And Hilarion was astonished and prayed fervently.

And the next day when he was cutting a fir tree in the wood he met among the rocks a man old and venerable with a long gray beard and a solemn air. He was clad in crimson, and under his arm he carried written books and a scourge. And Hilarion said, "Who art thou? The forest is haunted by spirits, and I would know whether thou be of them or of men."

And the old man made answer, "I am a wise man and a king. I have spent all my days learning the secrets of things. I know how the trees grow, how the waters run, and where treasures be. I can teach thee what the stars sing, and in what manner the ruby and emerald gather their light in the heart of the earth. I can chain the wind and stop the sun, for I am wise above all men. But I seek one wiser than myself, and I go through the woods in search of him, my master."

And Hilarion said, "Tarry thou here, and thou shalt see, if I mistake not, him whom thou seekest."

So the old man tarried in the forest and built himself a hut of stones.

And the day after that as Hilarion went forth to catch fish in the river he met on the bank a lady, beautiful beyond compare. And Hilarion asked, "Who art thou? The forest is haunted by spirits; art thou one of them?"

And she answered, "I am a princess, the fairest of women. Kings and princes have brought gifts to me. They have hung wreaths on my palace and strewn flowers in my garden. I am beautiful beyond compare, but I seek one more beautiful than myself. Day by day I go searching my master by the lakes and rivers."

And Hilarion made answer thus, "Tarry thou here and thou shalt see, if I mistake not, him whom thou seekest."

And the lady tarried by the river and built herself a cabin of reeds and leaves.

That night was the coldest and longest winter night. Hilarion made for himself a bed of fern and hay in the stable of the ox and the ass and he lay close to them for warmth. And lo! in the middle of the night the ass brayed and the ox bellowed and Hilarion started up. He saw the heavens open with a great brightness as of beaten and fretted gold. Angels wreathed in roses were coming and going, and as they held each other's hands they sang, "Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good will toward men." And Hilarion wondered again and prayed fervently.

And that day toward noon there came through the wood one bearing a staff and leading a mule on which was seated a woman. They were poor folk, travel stained. And the man said to Hilarion, "My name is Joseph. I am a carpenter of the city of Nazareth. My wife is called Mary. Suffer thou us to rest and my wife to lie on this straw of the stables."

And Hilarion said, "You are welcome."

Hilarion laid down more fern and hay and gave provender to the mule.

And Mary brought forth her first-born son and Hilarion took it and laid it in the manger. And he went forth into the woods, where he found the wise man and the beautiful woman.

"Come with me to my stable," he said, "where the fir trees were cleared above the river."

And they went with him to the ruined house, and they saw the babe lying in the manger.

Then the wise man and the beautiful woman knelt down before the child.

"He is exceeding fair," said the princess.

"He is wiser than I am," said the king. "Surely this is He that is our Master."

And the skies opened and there came forth angels such as Hilarion had seen before with the glory of radiant gold about their heads and garlands of roses around their necks. And they sang again, "Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good will toward men."

THE STAR IN THE EAST

Three Shepherds
Three Kings: GASPAR, MELCHIOR, BALTHAZAR
JOSEPH MARY

SCENE I. *Hills outside Jerusalem*

Carol by Children:

In the fields with their flocks abiding,
They lay on the dewy ground,
And glimmering under the starlight
The sheep lay white around.
When the light of the Lord streamed o'er them,
And lo! from the heavens above
An angel leaned from the glory,
And sang his song of love;
He sang that first sweet Christmas
The song that shall never cease—
Glory to God in the highest,
On earth good will and peace.

FIRST SHEPHERD:

Now must I rest awhile!
For mile on mile, and mile on mile
I've trudged on foot since break of day began.
And I'm but an old and ancient man.
I am stiff and my bones are old,
And the night is bitter—bitter cold.

SECOND SHEPHERD:

Aye, 'tis bitter cold, and naught to be seen
But snow and the starry sky.

FIRST SHEPHERD:

I've come a mighty step to-day,
But—is that the town so far away?

SECOND SHEPHERD:

Aye, dost see that great star
That hangs above the town?

FIRST SHEPHERD:

'Tis a wondrous star even as ever I saw.
But I am wearied sore;
So wearied I have never been before.

Enter Third Shepherd

THIRD SHEPHERD:

Look ye, here is a lamb, new born.

SECOND SHEPHERD:

Poor little beastie! Lay it down and warm it.

THIRD SHEPHERD:

An ill night to be born in! Frost and snow,
Cold heaven above, cold earth below.
I marvel any little creature should be born
On such a night. I found it all forlorn,
Crying beside its mother.

SECOND SHEPHERD:

Warm it in thy cloak. 'Tis but a little lamb.

FIRST SHEPHERD:

Hark! is that the sky that sings?

SECOND SHEPHERD:

Nay, I hear no sound at all.
You are wearied. Mile and mile you've trudged to-day.

THIRD SHEPHERD:

Well, as for sleep, I'm ready. What say ye?

SECOND SHEPHERD:

Aye, do. Sleep ye, and I'll keep watch.
The wolf, maybe, will visit us ere dawn.
Or, if not he, perchance another lamb.
*(They sleep. The Third Shepherd walks, with
the lamb in his cloak. Soft music is heard.)*

THIRD SHEPHERD:

Hark! There's music in the wind!
And what strange light is in the east?
Surely it is not dawn?
(Angels appear. The Shepherd arouses the others.)

ANGEL:

Gloria in Excelsis!
Fear not, for behold I bring you glad tidings of great joy.
For unto you is born this day in the city of David,
a Saviour, which is Christ the Lord.
And this shall be the sign unto you:
Ye shall find the heavenly
babe wrapped in swaddling clothes, lying in a manger.
Gloria in Excelsis!

FIRST SHEPHERD:

'Twas a fine voice—even as ever I heard.

SECOND SHEPHERD:

All the hills with a lighting, methought, at his word shone fair.

THIRD SHEPHERD:

He spoke of a Babe at Bethlehem, mark you well.
That betokens yon star. Let us seek Him there.

FIRST SHEPHERD:

To Bethlehem he bade that we should go. I fear we tarry too long.

SECOND SHEPHERD:

Full glad would I be,
Might I kneel on my knee
Some word to say to that child.

THIRD SHEPHERD:

But the angel said in a manger was he laid and poorly clad.

FIRST SHEPHERD:

We shall see him I know before it be morn.

SECOND SHEPHERD:

The place is near. Let us go even now unto
Bethlehem and see this thing
which has come to pass, which the Lord hath made known unto us.

FIRST and THIRD SHEPHERDS:

Aye, let us go and find Him!
(Tableau held while music dies away.)

SCENE II. *Manger Scene*

Carol by children:

O little town of Bethlehem,
How still we see thee lie,
Above thy deep and dreamless sleep
The silent stars go by.
Yet in thy dark streets shineth
The everlasting light.
The hopes and fears of all the years
Are met in thee to-night.

Angel chorus:

Away in the manger,
No crib for his bed,
The little Lord Jesus
Lay down his sweet head.
The stars in the bright sky
Looked down where He lay,
The little Lord Jesus
Asleep in the hay.

The cattle were lowing,
The baby awakes
But little Lord Jesus,
No crying He makes.
I love thee, Lord Jesus!
Look down from the sky,
And stay by my cradle
Till morning is nigh.

*(Shepherds arrive at the manger.
They stand at a little distance, gazing in awe.)*

FIRST SHEPHERD:

Lo, here is the house, and here is He!

SECOND SHEPHERD:

Forsooth, it is the same.

THIRD SHEPHERD:

Look ye, where the Lord is laid,
Between two beasts, and in a manger,
As the angel said.

(They advance, and kneel before the manger.)

FIRST SHEPHERD:

Hail, hail, young child
Of a maiden, meek and mild.
Lo, he merries,
Lo, he laughs, my sweeting.
I give Thee my greeting!
Have a bob of cherries!

SECOND SHEPHERD:

Hail, goodly Babe!
A bird have I brought
To my Bairn.
Hail, little tiny mop,
I would drink in Thy cup,
Little day star!

THIRD SHEPHERD:

Hail, darling dear:
Sweet is Thy cheer;
A ball I bring Thee.
Put forth Thy dall,^[17]
Keep and play Thee withal,
Little heavenly light.

Angel chorus:

Holy night, peaceful night,
All is calm, all is bright,
Only one yet wakes and prays,
Looking on with tender gaze
On her heavenly child,
On her heavenly child.

Holy night, peaceful night,
Son of God, Light of Light,
Pure and gentle in thine eyes
All thy wealth of mercy lies
For a world redeemed,
For a world redeemed.

*(The Three Kings arrive at the door of the stable.
Joseph advances to meet them.)*

GASPAR:
We have journeyed from afar
Led by the shining of your splendid star.
We are Gaspar, Melchior, and Balthazar.

JOSEPH:
Sirs, whom seek ye?

GASPAR:
We seek a newborn King,
Gold, frankincense to Him to bring,
And many a kingly precious thing.

JOSEPH:
Good sirs, here lies a newborn child,
Seek ye him and his mother mild?

(The Three Kings go toward the manger.)

BALTHAZAR:
Behold, the child is clothed in light!

MELCHIOR:
Our journey ends; past is the night.

GASPAR:
Let us make no more delay
To worship him most worthily.

GASPAR }
MELCHIOR } Hail, King of Kings!
BALTHAZAR } *(They kneel.)*

GASPAR:
I bring Thee a crown,
O King of Kings!
And here a scepter full of gems,
For Thou shalt rule the hearts of men.
(He gives crown and scepter.)

MELCHIOR:
For Thee I bring sweet frankincense.
(Swings censor.)

BALTHAZAR:
And I bring myrrh to offer Thee!

GASPAR:
The greatest gift is yet ungiven—
Oh, heavenly King, heart's love we bring.

MELCHIOR:
Not gifts of gold nor priceless gems
Is worth the love we offer Thee.

BALTHAZAR:
And lowly folk who have no gold
Nor rare and precious thing to give,
May bring the dearest gift of all—
A loving heart.

Golden carol (sung by the Three Kings):
We saw a light shine out afar,
On Christmas in the morning,
And straight we knew Christ's Star it was,
Bright beaming in the morning.

Then did we fall on bended knee,
On Christmas in the morning,
And praised the Lord who'd let us see
His glory at its dawning.
(Tableau, Kings and Shepherds.)

Angel carol:
Then let us all with one accord
Sing praises to our heavenly Lord,
That hath made Heaven and Earth of naught,
And with His blood mankind hath bought;
Noël, Noël, Noël, Noël,
Born is the King of Israel!

Recessional carol by children:

God rest ye merrv. gentlemen.

Let nothing you dismay;
For Jesus Christ our Saviour
Was born on Christmas Day,
To save us all from Satan's power
When we had gone astray.

Oh! tidings of comfort and joy,
Comfort and joy,
Oh! tidings of comfort and joy!

A BLESSING

ABBIE FARWELL BROWN

Now may the Holy Christ Child
Who came on Christmas Day,
The gentle Friend and Brother
Who smiles upon your play,
Bless all the little children
However far away.

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- [15] A franc is equal to twenty cents.
- [16] "Behold the house of the Lord God!"
- [17] *Hand* (old English).

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