SANTA CLAUS ON A LARK

WASHINGTON GLADDEN

SANTA CLAUS ON A LARK

AND

OTHER CHRISTMAS STORIES

BY

WASHINGTON GLADDEN

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SANTA CLAUS ON A LARK

ON a certain twenty-fourth day of December, about four o'clock in the afternoon, if you had been looking in at the front windows of the Merchants' and Manufacturers' Bank, in the city of Smokopolis, you would have seen a big book, lying open on a desk, shut itself up with a sounding smack, spring into the air, and go flying to its place on the shelf of the vault in the rear of the counting-room.

While you were wondering what might be the matter with the big book, you would suddenly discover that its remarkable antics were due to the agency of a little man whom you had hardly noticed before, whose chubby hands had closed the book, lifted it above his head, and borne it swiftly to its resting-place. Now that the big book is out of sight, you get a better look at the little man, as he skips back from the vault, plucks a pen from one ear and a pencil from the other, lays them down upon the rack of his inkstand, and then steps briskly across the floor again to the anteroom, whence he brings

forth a gray overcoat with fur collar; into this he quickly plunges, and sets a visorless sealskin cap daintily on his head. All these movements are swift and sure, but noiseless; you would scarcely hear his step if you were in the counting-room; he opens the door of the anteroom, and shuts it without any clatter; he is as spry and as sly and as silent as a humming-bird.

Little? Well, I should say so! About five feet three in his high-heeled boots; plump figure; ruddy face with no suspicion of beard; bright gray eyes; curling chestnut hair; nose like a Seckel pear; and pursy little bud of a mouth, ready on the shortest notice to blossom into a smile. How old? I give it up. If I should say that he is twenty you would believe it; and if I should put him down at forty you would not dispute it. He is one of those plump, fresh, cheery people who never grow old.

He has donned his overcoat, and stands pulling on his fur gloves and looking out of the window at the softly-falling snow before any of the clerks have discovered his movements. Then Finch, the paying-teller, looks up quickly and says with a smile: "Hello, Ben! Off for the night?"

"Yes, and for the morrow, too," answers the little man in a chirping tone.

"Of course. A good holiday to you, old chap! You 've earned it, if anybody has."

"Thank you, sir. Your saying so will help to make it merry."

"Good-night, Ben!"

"Merry Christmas, Ben!"

Such are the hearty words that follow him as he hurries away. It is evident that he is a favorite among his fellows.

As he walks up the busy street, dodging the porters rushing out of the stores with boxes and bundles, and the shoppers hurrying home with their hands full of parcels, and their eyes still turning to the bright show-windows, he gets ever and anon a bow and a friendly word from the persons whom he meets—greetings which he returns with a sprightly courtesy. Two clerical-looking gentlemen pause and shake hands with him, the one introducing him to the other. It is Doctor Adams of the Third Presbyterian Church who knows the little man, and who tells his companion, after they have parted with him, something of his history. Let us listen:

"Benoni Benaiah Benjamin, that is his name," says the Doctor, laughing.

"My, what a name!" answers the other. "Is he a Hebrew, pray?"

"Oh, no; he is the son of a Puritan Yankee who settled in Western Pennsylvania years ago. He was an only child, and his father and mother were killed in a railway accident when he was about twelve years old; the company gave him a position as train newsboy and kept a kindly watch over him; he was steady and frugal, saved his money and took a term or two at a commercial college; then he took a place as bookkeeper

in a bank down street, and has now been there ten years. He is a first-class bookkeeper and one of the best known and best loved men in the city. I don't know why he is so popular. He is very quiet, one of the properest little men you ever saw; never says or does an undignified thing; never takes a prominent part in public affairs; never blows his trumpet on the streets when he bestows his alms, so nobody knows what charitable deeds he may do, though there is a general impression that he is a very generous giver. Whatever good he does he manages to keep well hidden. I don't think I have another man in my church whose influence is, on the whole, more salutary and helpful than that of little Ben Benjamin."

Meantime the little man, whose ears might have burned if they had not been tingling with the keen Christmas frost, has turned into a broad avenue, and is hurrying homeward. The snow falls faster and faster; the sleighing, which was somewhat worn, will be thoroughly repaired.

Through the gate that opens before a pretty cottage the little man passes, and lets himself in with a latch-key at the front door. A kindly faced old lady comes forward to meet him, takes from his hands his scarf and his cap, and leads him into the little drawing-room, where a bright fire is glowing in the grate. Good Mrs. Snowden has had Ben Benjamin as her sole boarder for ten years, and the business interest of the landlady and the stately courtesy of the hostess are by this time wholly swallowed up in the motherly affection with

which she has learned to regard him. He has taken in her heart the place that belonged to her own son, who died just before Ben came to live with her. The rocking-chair that he likes is drawn up by the fire, and the evening paper lies within reach on a stand at his elbow. But the little man shows no interest in the news of the day; his mind is evidently preoccupied. He sits with his feet upon the fender, looking into the blazing coals, and musing while the fire burns.

"It is snowing fast, Mr. Benjamin," the landlady ventures.

"Very fast; fast enough to make a lovely Christmas counterpane in an hour. An inch or two must have fallen already."

"Will you drive to-night, as usual?"

"Certainly; the ponies need exercise, and I don't mind the snow."

"When Thomas came in, after feeding the ponies," Mrs. Snowden continues, "he said that an expressman had just brought a barrel addressed to you to be left at the stable. Christmas gifts for the ponies, I dare say."

"Likely enough!" laughed Ben. "Of course Santa Claus would n't forget *them.*"

The maid now announces supper. After it is finished Ben dons his overcoat and his warm Arctic overshoes, and is ready for his customary evening drive.

"Don't sit up for me," he says carelessly to Mrs. Snowden. "I shall take a long drive to-night, and it may be late before I return."

The landlady lifts her eyebrows slightly; this is

unwonted behavior; but her confidence in her *protégé* allows no questioning. So Ben sallies forth, bidding her good-night, and leaving her to speculate on his mysterious performance.

It must, by this time, be as evident to my readers as it was to Mrs. Snowden that there is something unusual on the mind of our hero; and it is impossible any longer to hide the secret which he had so carefully concealed. The truth is that this quiet, kindly, proper little man has determined that to-night, for once in his life, he will go off on a regular lark. He has been cherishing this purpose for three or four weeks. Perhaps the first suggestion of it came into his mind on the afternoon when the snow first fell. He was driving along Elm Avenue in his cute little cutter, drawn by the prancing brown ponies that are now so well known in Smokopolis, when he heard, through the resonant air that often accompanies a snowstorm, a little girl standing on a corner say to her companion: "My! would n't he make a lovely Santa Claus!"

"*Would n't* he though!" exclaimed the other. "He 's just the right size."

"And what a jolly little face, too! Only Santa Claus has whiskers, I think."

Ben laughed softly when he heard it, and then kept thinking it over.

Would n't it be fun to *be* a veritable Santa Claus, and go about giving gifts?—not to take anybody into the secret, of course; to surprise everybody with presents that nobody could account for; or, perhaps, to let

them have a glimpse of the messenger, hurriedly depositing his favors and swiftly departing, unheralded and unexplained. The more he thought of it, the more he was fascinated by the notion. But it would not do to attempt it here in Smokopolis; he would almost certainly be discovered. It could only be done in some secluded country place where there were no throngs and no gas-lamps on the streets. Springdale—that was the very place! It was a village thirteen miles north of the city; one long street running east and west, crossed at its western extremity by the Gridiron Railway, and lying sheltered and secure from the noises of the world in a lovely valley, the abode of peace. The houses on either side the long street were well separated; and there was not enough movement on the street to interfere with such a shadowy visitation as Ben was contemplating. So the plan had gradually shaped itself in his mind.

He would collect, one by one, a large number of gifts of all sorts, suitable for old and young; on Christmas eve, after dark, he would steal away to Springdale, watch his chances, and make his distribution in ways that might then be opened to him. The barrel which had been delivered that afternoon at the stable contained the store which was thus to be dispensed. He had purchased these gifts in many places; and had kept them in a private closet of his own in the basement of the bank building; the expressman had brought the barrel to the stable by his order. This is the secret that is hidden in the breast of Benoni Benaiah Benjamin, as

he bids Mrs. Snowden good-night, and trots briskly down the garden walk in the direction of the stable, where the brown ponies, Dunder and Blixen, who know their master's step, are whinnying to give him greeting. These ponies are almost the only luxury little Ben allows himself; they have been in his possession now for four years; and every day, after banking hours, Ben is whirling along some country road behind them, filling his lungs with the sweet air of the hills and his heart with the pure delight of motion.

Ben opens the stable-door, and is greeted by an audible horse-giggle from the ponies, as they take from his fingers the accustomed lump of sugar with great gusto, and rub their brown cheeks against his red cheeks in a very loving fashion.

Ben now lights his lantern, casts off his overcoat, seizes a hatchet, and quickly unheads the mysterious barrel; then he transfers its contents to his sleigh, carefully placing them so that he may easily lay his hands on them—dolls in one pile, games in another, books by themselves, toys for the little folk in a separate heap, two or three warm little shawls for the shoulders of old ladies (shawls such as Ben had given to his landlady last winter and found her often rejoicing in), and a variety of miscellaneous articles of which he hopes to make some fitting disposal. From the bottom of the barrel he pulls out a white cap, made of the fur of the Arctic fox, and a flowing white wig and beard. Arrayed in these disguises, he glances at his face as revealed in the bit of looking-glass that Thomas

keeps for his stable toilet, and breaks into a gleeful laugh. Suddenly he checks himself, covers his mouth with his hands, and goes dancing across the stable floor. Such a jolly little Santa Claus as he is, with his keen eyes, his little dumpling of a nose, and his red cheeks blooming out of this shock of white hair! His fur coat will complete the costume.

"Hey, Dunder! Ho, Blixen!" he softly cries, as he confronts the ponies. "Did you ever see Santa Claus?"

The ponies answer with a snort, starting back in their stalls, but Ben's voice re-assures them. Quickly now he flings on the harness, from which he removes the bells; and tucking his gray fur lap-robe carefully around his treasures, he puts his lighted lantern between his feet, underneath the robe, and drives away. Out through the alley, across the street, and down another unfrequented lane he slips swiftly along, and soon is beyond the street-lamps, out in the open country. Dunder and Blixen are in their gayest mood; they fill their nostrils with the winter wind, and spin away right merrily.

It is now about seven o'clock, and there are thirteen miles to cover; but Ben does not wish to reach Springdale too early; the ponies will easily make it by half-past eight. Dearborn Woods, a stretch of forest three miles long, lies just ahead of him; and Dunder and Blixen plunge into its somber arches at a brisk pace. It is a familiar road to them, and they are wont to quicken their gait when they enter its shadows. Now the long-

pent-up mirth of the little man can safely effervesce, and his cheery laugh rings through the woods in clear, melodious laughter.

"Oho! ho! ho!" he cries; "is n't this a jolly lark, indeed? Who would ever have suspected you, Benoni Benjamin, of cutting this kind of a caper? What would Doctor Adams and the church folk say if they caught you in this ridiculous rig? But they won't catch you, eh? No; they won't. Ho! ho! ho! The Doctor said one day in the Bible class that Ben in Hebrew words means son of something or other: Benoni Benaiah Benjamin, what are you the son of to-night? I have it. The college boys sing it:

> "'I 'm the son of a son of a
> Son of a son of a
> Son of a gambolier.'

That 's what I am? Hey! Oho! ho!"

The little man trolls this merry stave—it happens to be all he knows of the song—over and over again, and laughs and shouts till Dunder and Blixen catch the infection, and, shaking their heads and snorting vociferously, they break into a gallop. If there had been any elves or goblins in Dearborn Woods that night they would surely have come forth from their hiding-places at the sound of Ben Benjamin's laughter, but neither they nor any of humankind responded to his merriment; and when he emerged from the woods and the lights of the farm-houses began to re-appear by the roadside, his jubilation was subdued to a merry little

laugh, and the ponies sped over the snow with scarcely a sound.

The soft-falling snow slowly increases in depth as they go northward, and the driver compels his eager coursers to take a more leisurely pace. At this rate, six or eight inches of snow will be added during the night to the well-worn sleighing—more than enough for Christmas uses. Thus far Ben has neither met nor overtaken a single wayfarer; but, as he reaches the top of a long hill, he sees a light approaching from the direction of Springdale. It is Doctor Horton, the physician of that village, going out on some professional errand and carrying his lantern in his buggy.

"Here's a go!" says Ben to himself. "How shall we dodge that lantern? It 's some old covey that will want to talk, I 'll venture. Look alive there, Blixen; you and Dunder must get me out of this."

The light draws near, and as the horses meet, the Doctor turns the light of the lantern full upon Ben's face. His own eyes are as big as dollars.

"Je-ru-sha!" he exclaims (it is the only expression of the sort he allows himself). "What 's this, anyhow?"

The passage is somewhat narrow, and Ben is giving strict attention to his ponies. His only answer is a little gurgling laugh.

"Who are you? What 's your name? Where on earth did you come from?" cries Doctor Horton hurriedly, his voice quivering a little.

"Oho! ho! ho!" laughed Ben, with a tone as musical and as gay as the horns of Elfland.

"Good-natured laugh!" says the Doctor; "nothing impish in that, I 'll guarantee."

In a moment, the travelers are well past each other, and Ben's ponies are trotting down the hill.

"I say!" cries the Doctor, turning on his seat and holding up his lantern.

"Say on!" cries Ben hilariously.

"I 've a mind to follow," says the Doctor aloud, turning his horse's head. But Ben's little ponies spring into their best gait, showing the Doctor at once how vain it would be for him with his aged steed to undertake the pursuit. Down the hill they go at a tearing pace, while the voice of Ben is borne back on the wings of the wind:

"I 'm the son of a son of a
Son of a son of a
Son of a gambolier."

"Well," ejaculated the Doctor, drawing a long breath, "you are about the spryest little spook I have met in my travels. None of the Smokopolis boys are likely to be off on this lonely road at this time of night, and you don't belong in Springdale, *that* I know. You 're a conundrum, and I give you up. But I don't believe that you are bent on mischief. Too gay a laugh, and too merry an eye for that." And turning his horse's head southward, the Doctor jogs on.

After this Ben meets no travelers until he turns the corner, near the blacksmith shop, at the eastern extremity of Springdale street. Here a belated farmer, upon an empty wood-rack, scans the small establishment inquisi-

tively, but it is dark, and Ben has flung the corner of his lap-robe over his head, so that the gaze of the curious rustic is scantily rewarded. Now he is driving down the village street, and the shafts of light are shot athwart the way, through the falling snow, from the windows of the houses on either side. In default of street lamps, all the villagers open their shutters and draw their curtains, in the winter evenings, that the light of the fireside may guide and cheer the traveler.

It is now nine o'clock, for the deepening snow has somewhat retarded our amateur Santa Claus. But it is a very good time for him to make a *reconnoissance* of the village. Through these open windows he can gain many hints as to the best disposition of his bounty. He will drive carefully and slowly down on one side of the wide street and back on the other, keeping his eyes open and noting the houses; then he will go round again, a little later, and make his distribution.

"Steady, Dunder! Slowly, Blixen!" he says softly: "let 's look a minute!" They are stopping before a low, broad cottage, with sloping roof; a white-haired woman is sitting by the evening lamp. "That gray shoulder-shawl will fit you beautifully!" says Ben. A little girl about eight years old is sitting by the side of the old lady—grandmother and granddaughter beyond a doubt: the maiden is working away for dear life on some bit of worsted, and glancing stealthily over her shoulder, now and then, at her father who sits reading on the other side of the table. "Good!" chuckles Ben, who takes in the situation at a glance; "you shall have

one of the work-boxes, little Busy-fingers!" So while the ponies stand, he writes by the light of his lantern, under the lap-robe, on two cards, "For the old Lady," and, "For the fair-haired Girl,"—pins the one on the shawl, and shuts the other into the work-box; makes a bundle of them, and lays them together in a corner of the sleigh. So he goes from house to house, picking out the presents, slipping them into big paper bags that he has provided; one bag for each house, and piling the bags in regular order in his sleigh. Some of the houses refuse to give him any clew to the age and quality of their occupants; but before he has made the circuit of the street he has found places for all his small wares, and he feels well assured that the greater number of them will be fittingly bestowed. A good half-hour has been taken in this *reconnoissance;* when it is finished he scuds back toward the eastern end of the street to begin the distribution. Very few pedestrians have appeared on the sidewalks, and these he has managed to dodge by skillfully tarrying in the dark places between the houses until they were past. But now, a boy of ten, carrying a bundle, and whistling blithely, plunges out from the walk and cries:

"Let me ride?"

Ben is too good-natured to refuse, and the boy fastens himself to the side of the sleigh, clinging to his bundle.

"Slick little team you have there," he says.

"Well, I reckon!" answers Ben in his tuneful falsetto.

"Can they go?" asks the boy.

"Yes, pretty well for little fellows."

Ben wishes to answer no more questions, so he quickly reverses the order of the colloquy and becomes inquisitor himself.

"What's your name, boy?"

"Jack Kilbourne."

"Any relation to Jack the Giant-Killer?"

"Oh, yes; I 'm his great-grandfather's second cousin," answers Jack, promptly.

"Oho! ho!" laughs Ben. "You 're an old one, you are! Any younger ones at your house."

"Yes, *sir!* We 've a new boy baby there not four weeks old. And then there 's Sis; she 's been up to Grandma's now for a month, and she 's comin' down to-night on the 'commodation. There 's the whistle now!"

"Is she coming alone?"

"Yes; Uncle Tom 's put her on the train, and Papa will meet her at the depot."

"What 's her name?"

"Lil."

"How old is she?"

"'Bout five or six, I guess."

"Where do you live?"

"Right up there; big white house; left hand side."

All the while, Jack's eyes have been on the ponies; he has not once raised them to the driver's face, and he could have seen but little if he had, for they have been passing a space vacant of houses, where all was dark. But now, just as they are drawing near to Jack's home,

the ruling passion of the boy seizes its last chance to utter itself:

"Let 's see 'em go!"

Nothing loth, Ben whistles to the ponies, and they spring at once into a rattling pace. Jack is delighted,

"'OHO! HO! HO!' LAUGHS THE LITTLE MAN, AS THE BOY TUMBLES BACKWARD INTO THE SNOW."

but his delight is only momentary; they are opposite his house in ten seconds, and the ponies are reined in to let him dismount. He lifts his eye to the face of the charioteer just as the light from the window strikes it, and the look of amazement that overspreads his countenance tickles Ben to the very end of his toes.

"Oho! ho! ho!" laughs the little man, while the

boy suddenly relaxes his hold upon the sleigh and tumbles backward into the snow. Quick as a flash he picks himself up and peers through the storm at the flying apparition.

"Je-mi-ma Cripps!" gasps Jack; "if that is n't the old fellow himself, then I hope I may never see him!"

The boy rushes into the house, while the little man speeds away to the upper end of the street to set forth on his benignant errand.

"W-w-what d' ye think I saw just now?" cries Jack, bursting into his mother's room, his teeth fairly chattering.

"Sh-h! my son, you 'll wake the baby. But what was it?" asks the pale lady hurriedly, perceiving the boy's excitement.

"S-s-a-anta Claus!"

"Santa Claus? Where was he? How do you know?" asks the mother, her anxious look relaxing into an expression of curiosity and amusement.

"Right out here in the street. I rode up with him from down there by Billy Townsend's house."

"Rode with him?"

"Y-y-es 'm! I caught on his sleigh an' rode with him. He had the cutest little ponies!"

"What did he say to you?" queries Mrs. Kilbourne, beginning to laugh.

"D-don't know what he did say," stammers Jack; "it scared everything out o' my head when I saw him. Never looked up at all to see who it was till we were right opposite our house, 'n' then the light shone right

into his face. My! what a cunning little chap. I don't believe he 's more 'n that high,"—and Jack measures with his hand a stature less than his own,—"and his face and his eyes look as if he were about five years old, and his hair and whiskers look as if he were about five hundred; and he had a little fur cap and a fur coat, I think; and he laughed,—you ought to have heard him laugh!"

"What made him laugh?"

"To see how s'prised I was, I guess. He asked me 'f I was any relation to Jack the Giant-Killer, 'n I told him I was his great-grandfather, or something. I thought he was poking fun at me, 'n' I thought I 'd give him as good as he sent. Cracky! If I 'd known who it was that I was talkin' to, I 'd have been a little more pertickler 'bout what I said. He was a jolly little chap, anyhow."

"O Jack!" cries his mother, "your imagination must have made most of this. I can hardly believe that you have really seen anything quite so strange as you describe."

"Now, Mother Kilbourne!" replies Jack, deeply grieved and somewhat indignant; "I guess I have eyes and ears; and I guess I know what I see with my eyes and hear with my ears; and *I* tell you, it is just exactly as I 've told you. I never b'lieved in Santa Claus before; but when a fellow hangs on to his sleigh and rides with him a quarter of a mile or so, then he *knows;* and there 's no use talking."

"Well, my son, it is very curious, I admit. But I wish your father would come. He must have had time

to walk here since the train arrived. Is it still snowing hard?" asks the lady as she rises and walks slowly to the window, and, shutting her face between her hands, gazes out into the storm.

"'Deed it is!" answers Jack. "Snow's most up to my knees now. Sis will have a gay time wading through it."

"Your father will be obliged to carry her, I fear," replies Mrs. Kilbourne. "I think," she adds, after a moment, "that he must have stopped by the way at Judge Gray's; I know that there was some matter of important business between them. Our little Lil will be very tired, I fear."

Jack sits looking into the glowing grate, and asking his mother all sorts of questions about the legend of St. Nicholas; who he was, anyhow; if he was really a man; and when he lived; and how long ago; and what he did; and what about the Bible stories that tell of spirits and angels that appeared to men—a sharp fire of puzzling questions, which his mother answers, dubiously and absently, for her heart is a little troubled about the child for whose coming she waits impatiently.

Meanwhile Ben is speeding upon his errand of good-will with many a merry experience. Halting his ponies in front of each favored house he seizes the parcel prepared for its inmates, runs to a lighted window, taps on the pane, holds aloft his treasure in full sight, makes a low bow, skips to the door and lays it down upon the sill, and then jumps into his cutter and is off in a twinkling. The children run to the window half in terror, half in transport; they gaze after the

vanishing sprite with their hearts in their mouths; then they go timidly to the door and take with undissembled glee the goods so mysteriously provided for them. As for the older folks, they are as much puzzled as the children; no one can find any clew to the identity of this unearthly visitant. If Ben could have looked into all these homes, and could have heard the admiring outcries, and could have known how much of surprise and curiosity and innocent mirth and thankfulness his pranks were producing, he would have been fully satisfied with the success of his experiment. Finally he arrives in front of Mr. Kilbourne's gate, for he has reserved a part of his bounty for the children whose descriptive list Jack has given him. There is a light tap on the window which opens upon the veranda, and Mrs. Kilbourne starts. There he is, in full view, bowing low, waving his parcel in the air, then bounding away with the spring of an antelope.

"There, Mother Kilbourne!" cries Jack, his teeth chattering again; "n—now what have you to say?"

"Blessings on us!" exclaims the pale lady; "what does it mean?"

They reach the window, like all the rest, just in time to see the ponies trot away, and to verify Jack's description in every detail.

"Well, I never!" cries Mrs. Kilbourne. "Run to the door, Jack, and see what he has left!"

A rubber rattle for the baby, a volume of "Baby World" for Lil, and "Historic Boys" for Jack,—these were the gifts drawn forth from the paper bag with great delight and wonderment.

"Now you 'll own up, won't you, Mother?" demands Jack triumphantly. "I did n't imagine it all, did I?"

"No, Jack; you are a good reporter; your account was very accurate."

"Well, how do you explain him?"

"I can't explain him," answers the mother. "I have n't the least idea who he is—some good being, I am sure."

"Right you are!" says Jack, in a tone the solemnity of which strangely contrasts with his school-boy phraseology. "But here come Father and Lil!"

The boy runs to admit the tardy comers, but his father is alone. "Where 's Lil?" cries Jack, as he opens the door.

"Is n't she here?" demands Mr. Kilbourne anxiously.

"No, sir; we thought you went to the station after her."

Mr. Kilbourne pushes into the room, where the pale mother stands, trembling and anxious.

"We shall find her soon," he says. "Did n't that Johnson boy bring you my note?"

"What note? No! Nobody brought any note," cries Mrs. Kilbourne.

"The young rascal! I sent him with a line to tell you that I could not leave my office at that hour, and that Jack must go to the train for Lillie."

"And so the poor child found no one waiting for her there. Where can she have gone?"

"Wait!" cries the father. "I 'll telephone to Wil-

kinson at the depot. That 's where she is beyond a doubt. He has taken her into his office to keep her till we arrive."

Mr. Kilbourne rushes to the telephone.

"Hello, Central! Give me the Gridiron depot. That you, Wilkinson? Kilbourne 's talking. Did my little girl come down on the accommodation train from Smokopolis?—What?—Did n't what?"

Mr. Kilbourne turns away from the telephone rather pale, with an anxious look about his eyes; but, for his wife's sake, he says cheerfully:

"Well; Wilkinson says that he saw a little girl step off the rear end of the train; the conductor helped her off and told her to run into the waiting-room; Wilkinson had some baggage to look after, and when he was through with that the child was out of sight. He supposed that some one had come for her."

"O my poor little lamb!" cries the mother, piteously. "Where is she? Out in this merciless storm! What shall I do?"

"Don't cry, Mother!" says Jack, cheerily. "She 's down the street somewhere; she 's gone into somebody's house."

"They would have sent us word," says Mrs. Kilbourne, hopelessly.

"Well, we 'll find her, anyhow," says Jack.

Mr. Kilbourne has been thinking hard with knitted brows and compressed lips. Now he speaks: "Jack, you stay here, and take care of your mother. I 'll go down street. As soon as I get word of her, I 'll call to you from the nearest telephone."

He gently leads the trembling lady to the sofa, and turns to go.

"THERE HE IS—THE SAME LITTLE MAN, AND HE TOSSES LIL ABOVE HIS HEAD!"

Hark! the gate is opening! There is a quick footstep on the porch—on the veranda! Mr. Kilbourne

pauses; Mrs. Kilbourne springs to her feet. There he is—the same little man, and Lil is in his arms! He tosses her above his head; he lets her gently down upon the veranda; he makes the same low bow; he springs from the porch and runs away.

Mr. Kilbourne rushes to the door.

"Hello!" he cries. "Who are you, my friend? Say!—won't you let me——?"

But the little man is in the sleigh and the ponies are in motion. All they hear is Ben s laugh as he drives away. "Oho! ho! ho!"

Mr. Kilbourne picks up the little girl, who stands half dazed upon the porch, and hurries into the house. Her mother clasps the child in her arms and covers her face with kisses. Poor little bairn! Her garments are wet and her curls are matted with snow, but her eyes are bright.

"Was n't it beautiful for Santa Claus to bring me home?" she cries.

"Yes, my darling; where did he find you?"

"Oh, up here in the road. Papa was n't there when the train stopped, an' I was in *such* a hurry to go home I started right off; an' I went along down that way, an' then I turned into the street."

"The little midget!" exclaims Mr. Kilbourne, "she went off up Long Lane!"

"There was n't any houses," continues the little wanderer, "so I kept going on, an' on; an' it snowed so I could n't see; an' by and by I came to another road,——"

"Yes, she must have turned out on the Smokopolis road," shouts Jack.

"An' I kept going on, an' then I was tired, an' I sat down on a log to rest, an' I heard a team coming,—and it was Santa Claus,—and he turned an' brought me home."

"How did he know where your home was?" asked the father.

"Oh, he asked me what was my name, and I told him it was Lillie Kilbourne, and he said:

"'Oh, yes, I know where you live! I've been to your house once to-night.'"

"How did you know it was Santa Claus?" asked her mother.

"Why, I saw him, did n't I? When he lifted up the robe to tuck me in, there was a lantern between his legs,—he said it was his stove,—an' the light shined right up into his face, an' I saw him as plain as anything. 'Sides, I asked him if he was n't Santa Claus, an' he laughed and said, 'That 's what some folks call me!'"

"I don't know whether he is a saint or an angel," says Mrs. Kilbourne, solemnly; "but this I know, my darling, he has been a messenger of good to us."

"But what did he mean when he said he had been here before to-night?" asks Mr. Kilbourne.

Now it is Jack's turn to talk. While his mother strips off the wet garments and puts the little girl into her warm bed Jack rehearses to his father,

open-eyed with wonder, the tale of the evening, with which we are familiar. His father listens, questions, shakes his head, and gives it up.

Many of the gossips of Springdale wondered that night, and the next day, and are wondering still, over this mystery, but they are not likely soon to unravel it, for the ponies went leisurely back that night to Smokopolis. It was about one o'clock when they began munching their oats in their comfortable stalls; the wig and the beard that had formed so perfect a disguise were hidden in the granary; the little man let himself softly in at Mrs. Snowden's front door, and went noiselessly to his room. It was a happy heart that beat, on that early Christmas morning, in the breast of Benoni Benaiah Benjamin; but the secret of its happiness will never be discovered, for his laughing lips will not open to reveal it, even in his dreams.

II

A CHRISTMAS DINNER WITH THE MAN IN THE MOON

"H'M!" growled Uncle Jack. "What will you do to me if I won't tell you a story?"

"Hang you on the Christmas-tree!" shouted Joe.

"Kiss you a thousand times!" cried Sue.

"Hold! Enough!" exclaimed the besieged uncle. "I 'll come right down. Look here! You have n't heard about that wonderful machine, lately invented by somebody, which shows you things that are going on hundreds of miles away?"

"Tell us about it," chants the full battalion.

"Well, I don't know much about *that;* but I have an instrument of my own that will do wonderful things. By looking into it, you can not only see people that are far off, you can hear what they are saying and tell what they are thinking; and what is more, you can look back and see what has happened to them, and look ahead and see what is going to happen to them for hours and days to come."

"Oh, uncle! Give us a look into it, won't you?"

"No; I can't do that. But, if you like, I 'll take a look into it myself, and report what I see."

Presently, Uncle Jack returned from his room, where all sorts of curious machines were stored,—microscopes, electrical batteries, and what not,—bringing with him a curious-looking instrument. It was composed of two shining cylinders of brass, mounted like small telescopes, and placed at an angle, so that one end of one of them was quite near to one end of the other, and the other ends were wide apart. Between the adjacent ends was a prism of beautifully polished glass.

Uncle Jack placed this instrument on a stand in the bay window, and sat down before it.

"Now you must all retire and be seated," he said. "I do not believe that the machinery will work unless you keep perfectly still. You must n't interrupt me with any questions. When I am through, I will try to explain anything that you do not understand."

"All right; go ahead!" The battalion was soon at parade rest, and Uncle Jack proceeded.

The first thing that comes into the field of vision is a railway-station, about one hundred and fifty miles from this city. A boy is just entering the rear door of the last car of the afternoon express, and quietly depositing himself and his little Russia bag on the short seat at the end of the car. He has just taken from his pocket a letter addressed to "Mark Howland." That is his

name. His Uncle Cyrus has invited Mark to spend Christmas with his cousins in New Liverpool, and he is now on his way to that metropolis.

There is nothing to fear on account of the strangeness of the place to which he is going, for his cousins Arthur and Clarence will meet him at the station; and there is no reason to doubt the heartiness of his welcome, for his uncle's family are not at all "stuck up," if they do live in a fine house; and his father and mother are not only willing, but glad to have him go; so the happy light of expectancy shines out of his eyes.

It has been a busy day with Mark. He was up at four in the morning to go over the paper-route with Horace Mills, who is to carry the morning papers for him during his three days' absence; then there were many little preparations to make about the house, for Mark did not wish to take his pleasuring at the expense of extra work for his father and mother, whose daily burdens are heavy enough; and therefore, as far as he can, he has anticipated the work of the three coming days. This filled the forenoon. After dinner, there were a few last errands for his mother, and then there was only time to pack his bag and don his Sunday suit, and hurry to the station for the four o'clock express.

The evening is cloudy and it is soon dark, and there is little to see from the windows of the car. Mark amuses himself for a while in watching the passengers; but they happen to be an unusually decorous company, and there is not much entertainment in that occupation. At length, he makes himself comfortable in his corner

of the car, rests his head against the window-frame, and gives himself up to imagining the delights of the coming day. Presently the speed of the train slackens, and the brakeman cries: "Lunenburg; ten minutes for refreshments; change cars for the Aërial Line!"

While Mark is observing the departure of the passengers who get down at this station, and wondering what the "Aërial Line" may be, he is surprised to see his Uncle Cyrus entering the front door of the car.

"Oh, here you are, Mark!" he exclaims, as he espies him. "Glad to see you, my boy. How you grow! But come, bring your bag. We have changed our plans since morning. I have had an invitation to spend Christmas with Sir Marmaduke Monahan, and I am to bring my boys along. You are one of my boys for the time being, so here you go. Arthur and Clarence are waiting outside. I have telegraphed your father, he knows all about it. Come on."

Mark picks up his bag and follows his uncle, half-dazed by the suddenness of this change of plans.

Arthur and Clarence greet him in high glee.

"Is n't this a gay old adventure?" cries Arthur. "You did n't expect anything like this; did you?"

"N-no," answers Mark, rather demurely. He is not yet sure that he is glad to be cheated out of his visit to New Liverpool. And then he asks:

"But who is Sir Marmaduke Monahan?"

"Don't you know?" cry both the boys. "Why, he 's the one they call The Man in the Moon. When he was down here the last time, he stopped over Sunday

with us. Papa's one of the aldermen, you know, and Sir Marmaduke was the guest of the city; so Papa saw him and asked him to our house. He 's just the jolliest little old chap. He told us ever so much about his home, and made us promise that we would visit him sometime. This morning we got a telegram from him, and started this afternoon on short notice."

Now it begins to come to Mark that he has read in the papers of the establishment of an aërial line to the moon, the result of one of Edison's wonderful inventions.

The night is dark and chilly; but at the farther end of the station a great electric light is blazing, and thither the four travelers make their way. A long flight of steps leads up to an elevated platform, alongside of which, resting upon trestle-work, stands the great aërial car. It looks a little like one of the Winans cigar steamers; its length is perhaps one hundred and fifty feet, and its shape is that of a cylinder, pointed at both ends. Just forward of the middle of the car are two enormous paddle-wheels, one on each side, not covered in like the paddles of a North River steamboat, but in full view.

"How soon does it start?" Mark asks his uncle.

"In five minutes; there is the captain now."

A man in a bright red uniform is coming out of the station with a lantern in his hand. Following him is a company of thirty or forty little people, whose singular appearance strikes Mark almost dumb with astonishment.

"What queer creatures are those?" he whispers.

"Those are the moon-folk," answers his uncle. "You have never seen any of them, have you? They are getting to be so common in the streets of New Liverpool that we hardly notice them."

"But what are those things around their heads?"

"Those are the air-protectors. You know the atmosphere of the moon is very thin; some of the astronomers used to say that there was n't any, but there is; only it is so extremely rare that we were not able to discover it. The lungs of the moon-folk are, of course, adapted to that thin atmosphere, and could not breathe in ours any more than we could breathe water. So when they come down to earth they wear these globes, which are hermetically sealed around their necks and are very strong, to protect them from our air."

"Are these globes made of glass?" asks Mark.

"Yes, they are: the new kind of glass, that is annealed so that it is flexible and tough as iron."

As the curious little folk go trotting by on their way to the car, one of them recognizes Mr. Howland, and gives a queer little jerk of the head.

"That," says Clarence, "is Sir Marmaduke's steward. He was at our house with his master."

Now the little man halts and holds out to Mr. Howland a tiny telephone and transmitter. Mark notes that they communicate with a mouth-piece inside the globe which protects the moon-man's head.

"That 's the way they have to talk," said Arthur.

"There is n't any air to speak of inside that glass, and so there can't be any sound. But he manages it with this little telephone. He hears with his teeth,—that 's the new way of hearing,—then he speaks into his transmitter, and we can hear him.

"What was he saying?" asks Arthur, as the little man hurries on.

"Only that Sir Marmaduke is expecting us, and that he will see us at the other end of the line," replies his father.

"All aboard!" shouts the captain. "Earth-folk forward; moon-folk abaft the wheel!"

Mark observes that two gang-planks run out to "The Meteor,"—for that is the name of the aërial car,—and that the little people are passing in over one of them, and the earth-born passengers over the other. They all are soon inside the handsome little saloon, elliptical in shape, furnished with stuffed lounges and easy-chairs, and a center-table with a few books and papers, lighted by small windows of thick plate-glass, and warmed by electric radiators. The sliding door is shut by the guard and firmly fastened, a few strokes of a musical bell are heard, a tremulous flutter passes through the frame of "The Meteor," and the great paddle-wheels begin to revolve. Mark observes that the separate paddles of each wheel are constructed so that, as each one begins the downward and backward stroke, it spreads out like a fan, and then shuts up as it begins to rise from its lowest position, so as to offer but little resistance to the air.

The huge ship rises slowly from its timber moorings; the paddle-wheels begin to revolve with great rapidity; the lights of the village below drop down and down like falling stars; for a moment, a thick mist outside hides everything from view—"The Meteor" is passing through the clouds; in another moment the stars above blaze out with wonderful brilliancy, the clouds are all lying beneath,—a silvery sea, lit by the rising moon,—and the lights of the under world have all disappeared.

"How high up are we now?" Clarence asks.

His father turns to a barometer on the wall, with a table of altitudes hanging beside it, and answers: "About six miles, I judge from this table. We are not yet fully under headway. But my ears begin to ring, and I guess we had better be getting on our respirators."

Following Mr. Howland, the boys all go over to the forward part of the saloon, where a gentlemanly steward is assisting the passengers to adjust these curious contrivances.

An elderly gentleman, who has just secured his outfit, is returning to his seat.

Mark notices that he wears over his nose a neatly fitting rubber cap, from the bottom of which a tube extends to the inside pocket of his coat.

"You see," explains his uncle, "we are getting up now where the atmosphere is very thin, and presently there will be next to none at all. These respirators are made for the supply of air to the

earth-folk on their journey through space and during their stay at the moon. Edison's wonderful air-condenser is the invention that makes this possible. By this invention, twenty-five thousand cubic feet of air are condensed into a solid block, about three times as large as a good-sized pocket-book, that will keep without aërifying in any climate. There! He is slipping one of the bricks of condensed air into that pouch just now, and handing it to that gentleman. You see that it looks a good deal like a piece of Parian marble. The tube connects the pouch containing the condensed air with the respirator on the end of the nose, and the moisture of the breath produces a gentle and gradual aërification as they call it, or change of the brick into good air."

"How long will one of those chunks of condensed air last?" Mark asks.

"About twenty-four hours. They can last longer, but they are generally renewed every day."

"I should think, then," Mark answers, "that earth-folk, while they are in the moon, would feel like saying in their prayers, 'Give us this day our daily breath,' as well as 'our daily bread.'"

"Perhaps," rejoined his uncle, reverently, "they might fitly offer that prayer while they are on the earth, too, as well as anywhere else."

"How fast are we going now?" Arthur inquires.

"Possibly sixty miles an hour," says his father.

"Sixty miles an hour!" answers Mark. "Why,

that 's—let me see: six fours are twenty-four, six twos are twelve, and two are fourteen. That 's only fourteen hundred and forty miles a day, and we have two hundred and thirty thousand miles to travel."

"Whew!" cries Arthur. "It will take us more than a hundred days—almost two hundred—to get there at this rate."

"You don't understand," Mr. Howland explains. "We can only go by means of these paddles through our atmosphere."

"And that," breaks in Arthur, "is only forty-five miles."

"It is more than that. The later conjectures of the best astronomers, that the atmosphere extends about two hundred miles from the surface of the earth, have been verified. But just as soon as we reach the outermost limits of this atmospheric envelope of the earth, we strike the great electric currents that flow between the earth and the moon. These currents, at this time of the day, flow toward the moon. They go with immense velocity,—probably twenty thousand miles an hour. This car is covered, as you saw, with soft iron, and, by the electric engines which drive the machinery, it is converted into an immense electro-magnet, on which these currents lay hold, sweeping the car right along with them. There is no air to resist the motion, you know, and you are not conscious of motion any more than you are when drifting with the Gulf Stream in the Atlantic."

"ALL ABOARD FOR THE MOON."

"We shall get there, then," Mark figures, "in about twelve hours from the time we started."

"Yes; if nothing happens we shall land about eight o'clock to-morrow morning. And now, as there is very little that you can see, and as we shall have a fatiguing day to-morrow, and ought to start fresh, I propose that we all lie down upon these comfortable couches and try to get a night's rest."

The boys do not quite relish the suggestion, but they adopt it, nevertheless, and are soon sleeping soundly. An hour or two later, Mark awakens, and, lifting himself on his elbow, looks out of the forward windows. The moon is shining in, and such a moon! Talk about dinner-plates or cart-wheels! The great bright shield of this moon fills a vast circle of the heavens. It is twenty times bigger than any moon he ever saw. He takes a quarter-dollar from his pocket and holds it before his eye at a distance of about two inches, and the coin does not hide the planet; a bright silver rim is visible all around it. The dark spots on the moon's surface are now clearly seen to be deep valleys and gorges; the mountain ranges come out in clear relief. Mark is at first inclined to wake his cousins; but he concludes to wait an hour or two till the view shall be a little finer; and before he knows it, he is sound asleep again.

He is wakened by a general stir in the saloon. The captain is crying, "All ashore!" The passengers are gathering their hand-luggage, and preparing to disembark. How in the world, or rather in the moon, this

landing was ever effected, Mark does not understand. But there is no time now to ask questions, and he picks up his bag and follows his uncle and his cousins. The gang-plank leads out to an elevated platform, crowned with a neat little building, from the cupola of which a purple-and-white flag, shaped and colored somewhat

EVERY MAN MUST WEAR A RESPIRATOR.

like a pansy, is floating in the faint breeze. In a neat little park surrounding the station an orderly crowd of the moon-folk are waiting.

It is the brightest-colored company that Mark has ever seen. The park fairly glitters and dances with brilliant hues. The little carriages in which the gentry are sitting, instead of being painted dead black, are gay with crimson and purple and gold. The little ponies themselves have coats as bright as the plumage of the

birds on the earth, and the costumes of the people are all as gay as color can make them.

"See!" exclaims Clarence; "what do they mean? They are all waving flags, and they seem to be shouting, but they do not make any noise."

"No noise that you can hear," replied Mr. Howland. "The atmosphere is so rare that it does not convey the sound to our ears. Perhaps when we draw nearer we shall hear a little of it."

"But what are they shouting for?" asks Arthur.

"They are greeting us," replies his father. "These are Sir Marmaduke's people—his constituents perhaps I ought to call them; and they have come at his summons to give us a welcome."

A handsome young officer now appears on the platform, and touching his cap to the travelers, beckons them to follow him. They all descend the platform and go to the small square in front of the park, where the carriages are waiting. Here Sir Marmaduke comes forward to greet them, lifting his chapeau, and extending his hand in a very cordial fashion.

He is a pleasant-faced little man, with gray hair; he is dressed in a purple uniform with white facings, and he carries at his side an elegant little sword. He puts his fingers to his ears and points with a smiling face toward the multitude in the park (who are waving their flags and their caps, and seem to be shouting still more uproariously), as if to say:

"They are making so much noise that it is of no use for me to try to talk."

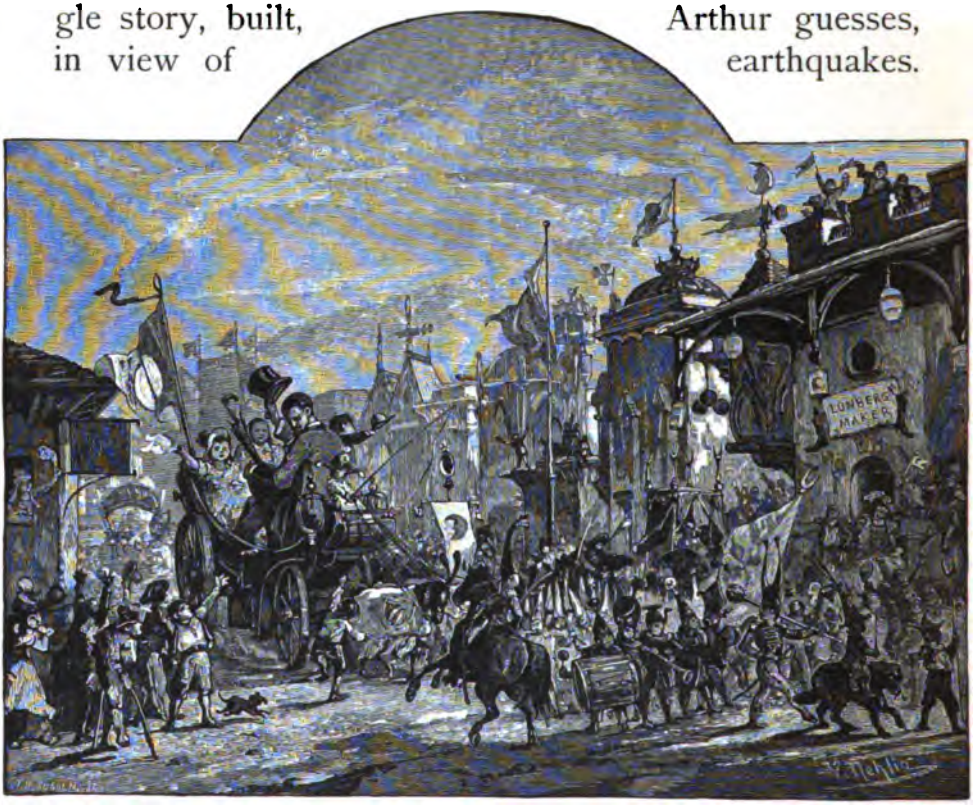
The boys can hardly refrain from laughing at this dumb show; but a faint murmur comes to their ears, like the shouting of a multitude miles away, and they realize that it is not really pantomime, though it looks so very like it.

They are led by Sir Marmaduke to the chariot in waiting. The body of this conveyance is scarlet, the wheels are gilt, and the cushions are sky-blue; it is drawn by sixteen ponies, four abreast, each team of which is driven by a postilion. The chariot is about as large as an ordinary barouche, with seats for four; but it towers high above all the carriages of the moon-folk.

A faint popping comes to their ears, which seems to be a salute from a battery of electrical cannon in the upper corner of the park; in the midst of the salute the procession moves off. A band, dressed in scarlet and gold, and playing on silver instruments, leads the way; the tones resemble the notes of a small music-box, smothered in a trunk. Sir Marmaduke's body-guard of two hundred cavalry comes next; then Sir Marmaduke himself in his carriage of state, drawn by eight ponies; then the travelers in their chariot; then the grandees of the moon in carriages, and then the rest of the military and citizens on foot.

It is about a mile from the station to the palace of Sir Marmaduke, and the travelers have a chance to observe the scenery. The surface is quite uneven; the hills are high and steep, and the valleys narrow; the trees are small and somewhat different in form from

those on the earth; the grass is fine and soft, and multitudes of the brightest pink and yellow flowers bloom in the meadows. The houses, from all of which the pansy flag is flying, are stone, and are nearly all of a single story, built, Arthur guesses, in view of earthquakes.



THE GRAND CAVALCADE IN THE METROPOLIS OF THE MOON.

"Moonquakes, you mean," suggests Mark.

The very moderate laugh with which the other boys greet this small witticism seems to produce consternation among the moon-folk. Sir Marmaduke claps his hands to his ears, the cavalry ponies in front fall to

jumping and prancing, and the whole procession is struck with a sudden tremor.

"Careful, boys!" whispers Mr. Howland. "You must remember that one of our ordinary tones sounds like thunder to these people, and the rush of air from our lungs, when we suddenly laugh or cry out, affects this thin atmosphere somewhat as an explosion of nitro-glycerine affects the atmosphere of the earth. A sudden outcry in a loud tone might do great damage."

And now the head of the column halts upon a wide avenue leading up to a fine palace; the cavalry is drawn up in ranks on either side of the avenue; the carriages pass between, halting at the steps only long enough to allow Sir Marmaduke, and the travelers, and the grandees to dismount and ascend the pavilion; the troops march past with flying banners and music faintly heard, and the guests are escorted to their rooms in the palace, and are told to amuse themselves in any way that pleases them until dinner shall be ready.

"I have read," says Arthur, "that there is no moisture on the surface of the moon; but this vegetation proves that there is. Besides, right there is a beautiful fountain playing on the lawn before the palace, and yonder is a river."

"It is true," his father answers, "that there are but few signs of moisture on the side of the moon that is nearest the earth; but we sailed around last night to the other side,—the side that we never see from the earth; and here the surface is much lower, and there is moisture enough to promote vegetation. It is only this side of the moon that is inhabited."

It is not long before a herald comes to summon our travelers to dinner. They pass through a long corridor into the spacious hall of the palace, where the feast is spread. Sir Marmaduke meets them at the door of the hall, and escorts them to a dais at the side of the room,

SIR MARMADUKE MAKES A SPEECH.

upon which stands the table prepared for them. From this elevated position the whole of the banqueting hall is visible, and the gay costumes of the guests, with the splendor of the table-service and the abundance of the flowers, make it a brilliant spectacle.

Sir Marmaduke places Mr. Howland on his right,

and his prime minister on his left; the three boys occupy the seats next to Mr. Howland.

The master of the feast holds in his hand a speaking-trumpet, with which he can converse with his guest upon the right; for it is only by the aid of this that he can make himself heard. The waiters who come to serve the earth-folks also have speaking-trumpets slung around their necks; but they find little use for them, for the feast proceeds with great formality and in excellent order.

One course after another is served. Mark has never seen in his dreams anything so tempting as this bountiful feast.

Presently the cloth is removed, and the Man in the Moon rises to propose the health of the earth-folk. To each of the guests a monstrous ear-trumpet is handed, with a megaphone attached, and the boys, at a sign from Mr. Howland, draw back from the table, bring their chairs a little nearer to Sir Marmaduke, and listen to what he is saying. His thin voice comes to them as from afar, a little like the sound of the telephone when the wires are not working very well; but, with strict attention, they catch the words of his speech:

"My lords and gentlemen: We are honored in having with us to-day one of the most distinguished inhabitants of the earth. Allow me to present him, and the young gentlemen who are with him, and to bid him and them, in the name of you all, a hearty welcome to the moon."

Here the whole company rise and give three tremendous cheers, which sound to the boys about

as loud as the buzz of half a dozen house-flies on a window-pane.

"There could be no better day than this," Sir Marmaduke goes on, "for the promotion of peace and good-will between the inhabitants of this planet and those of Mother Earth." ("Hear! Hear!" from the multitude below.) "It has been one of my dearest ambitions to secure more perfect communication and more friendly relations between the moon and the earth." ("Hear! Hear!" and cheers. "I need not refer to the erroneous opinions which so long were held by our people, concerning the earth and her inhabitants. You know that, until a recent period, it was believed by most of our scientific men that the people living on the earth were quadrupeds,—that each was provided with four legs, two horns, and a tail." (Sensation.) "The origin of this opinion is known to you all. Many centuries ago, a creature from the earth passed swiftly through our sky one day about noon, and was seen to return in the direction of the earth. It was supposed to be one of the earth's inhabitants. It is now known that it was one of their domestic animals. The event is recorded in the annals of the earth, and is one of the facts taught to the children of that planet at a very tender age. It is referred to in one of their treatises of useful science in the following manner:

"'Hey diddle diddle,
The cat and the fiddle,
The cow jumped over the moon.'

"It was a cow, then, my lords and gentlemen, and not one of the earth-folk, that appeared that day so suddenly in our sky. Our scientists were too hasty in their inferences. They should not have based a theory so broad upon a single fact. And inasmuch as there have been those among us who were slow to relinquish the old theory, and loath to believe that the people of the earth are bipeds like ourselves, I am greatly pleased to give you to-day an ocular demonstration of the new theory."

Sir Marmaduke sits down amid great cheering.

Mr. Howland has risen, and is watching for the applause to subside before beginning his response. The boys have kept as sober faces as possible, but the speech of the Man in the Moon has pretty nearly upset their gravity. Mark is biting his lips to keep back the merriment, when he suddenly turns around and perceives the fat old prime minister, who has eaten too much Christmas dinner, asleep in his chair through all this enthusiasm, and nodding desperately in the direction of a hot pudding that has been left by the waiters before him on the table. Every nod brings his face a little nearer to the smoking heap, and finally down goes his nose plump into the pudding.

It is a little more than the boy can endure. How much of it is laugh, and how much cough, and how much scream, nobody can tell; but there is a tremendous explosion from the mouth and nose of Mark—an explosion that smashes crockery and upsets vases, and sends Sir Marmaduke spinning out of his chair, and scatters the guests as if a thunder-bolt had struck

the palace. In a few moments the hall is deserted by all but the master of the feast and a few of his attendants, with the guests from the earth, who are looking on in dismay at the havoc which has been made by Mark's unlucky outburst.

The good Sir Marmaduke quickly comes forward to reässure them.

"Really," he says, "you must not be distressed about this. No serious harm has been done. The boy was not to blame. I, too, caught a glimpse of the old gentleman, making the last desperate nod, and I could n't help bursting with laughter."

"But the people," says Mr. Howland. "I am very sorry that we should have had the misfortune to frighten them so badly."

"You need have no anxiety on that score," replies Sir Marmaduke. "They did not connect the noise they heard with you in any way. They all thought it was a moonquake, and they have hurried home to see whether their houses have sustained any injury."

While they have been talking, they have been passing through the hall toward the pavilion. The chariot of the guests has just appeared in front of the palace.

"Can it be possible?" exclaims Mr. Howland. "Our time of departure has come. Good-bye, Sir Marmaduke. You have done us much honor, and given us great pleasure."

"Good-bye," returns the gentle host. "I shall see you here again, I am sure. And I want the boys to come without fail. The next time, we will take a little trip to the mountains, and see some of the craters of

the extinct volcanoes, and camp out a few days where the game and the fish are plenty. Good-bye. *Bon voyage!*"

The parting guests, thus heartily speeded, mount their carriage, are whirled to the station, enter again the saloon of "The Meteor," are lifted upon the great electric tide then just ebbing, and will soon, no doubt, be safely landed at the Lunenburg terminus of the Great Aërial Line.

When Uncle Jack's narration closes there is silence in the library for half a minute.

"Uncle Jack!" finally ejaculates Sue, with a good deal of emphasis on "Jack," and with a falling inflection.

"Let us look into that machine," pleads Joe.

"Oh, *that* machine," says Uncle Jack, in a very cool way, "is my spectroscope. I did not see in *that* the things I have been telling you."

"What did you see them in?" urges Joe.

"Humbug!" shouts the knowing Fred. "He made it all up out of his own head. There! He 's got the blank-book in his hand, now, that he writes his stories in. I 'll bet he 's read every word of it out of that book while he has been sitting there with his back to us, pretending to look into that old spectroscope."

"Alas! my gentle babes," complains the solemn uncle, slipping the blank-book into his desk. "I grieve that you should have so little confidence in me. But you must remember that in these days of Edison and Jules Verne, nothing is incredible."

III

TOM NOBLE'S CHRISTMAS

WHAT do you suppose Tom Noble had in his stocking on Christmas morning?

"A new jack-knife?"

No.

"Skates?"

No.

"Pocket-book? Pencil case? Game of authors? Dominoes? Jack-straws? Smashed-up locomotive? Bag of candy?"

No.

"Some kind of a book then?"

No; no book of any kind.

"Cold potato?"

No.

"Pair of clappers then? O, drum?"

O dear, no: I should hope not. Besides, I don't see how you could get a drum into a stocking. I have sometimes thought that I might, and could, and would put my stocking and my boot, too, into a drum, but I

never heard of anybody's putting a drum into a stocking.

"Well — then — perhaps it was a–a–a–jumping-jack!"

N-n-o, it was n't exactly that, but you 've come pretty near it this time; it was something that could jump.

"O, acrobats; dancing darkey!"

No. But I don't believe you 'll ever guess. I 'll give you a hint or two, and then perhaps you will think.

The thing that was in Tom's stocking that morning was put in by Tom himself. It is n't very common, I know, for boys to fill their own stockings, and Tom had not always done it in exactly this way; but there was a good reason why nobody but him should do it this time, and I presume if you had been in his place you would have done just as he did.

The thing that was in Tom's stocking was worth a great deal.

"Worth a dollar?"

More than that.

"Ten dollars?"

More than that.

"Hundred dollars!"

O yes, much more than that: if you had been in Tom's place you would not have sold it, I 'm sure, for many hundreds of dollars.

"Was n't he a lucky boy, though?"

Yes, he was: not however in just the way you think.

But you have n't guessed yet what it was that Tom had in his stocking. Give it up? Well then I'll tell you.

It was his foot. He put it in when he jumped out of bed. Now you know why it was like a jumping-jack, and why Tom put it into his stocking himself, and why he would n't have sold it for a good deal of money.

But you thought it was a present. Yes, but Tom did n't expect any present in his stocking that morning. I suppose he would have been as glad of one as you or I, but there was no one to make him a present on this Christmas day. He thought it all over before he went to sleep on Christmas eve. The year before there were presents enough. They were living then in the old home in the city—Father and Mother and little Sue and baby Dick; and they had a Christmas tree in the parlor, and on it was a new dressing-gown for father, and a new chain and locket with father's picture in it for mother, and a doll's house for little Sue, and a jack-in-the-box for Dick, and many other things too numerous to mention; not the least among which was a splendid new sled, latest tooth-pick pattern, painted blue, with its name, "Streak," in gilt letters on the top; a genuine blue streak it proved, too, Tom said, "Give it a good day and a good track."

Tom remembered that day very well. He thought it all over—how bright his father's eyes were, and what an eager look there was on his face, as he watched the children at their play, and how hard he seemed to be trying to make the day a merry one for all, and still how it sometimes seemed as though he would cry, even

while he was laughing. Tom did not know, then, what this all meant, nor why his mother was so sad; but when, two months after, his father died, he understood that they were full of sorrow because they knew that it would be the last Christmas they ever would spend on earth together.

Tom loved his father dearly; and when one day they called him in, and he sat down by the bedside, and took the thin cold hand in his, and heard the slowly whispered words: "I 'm going away, my boy. Be good to your mother. Take care of little Sue and Dick. I leave them with you! Always tell the truth. Don't do a mean thing. Father trusts you. Jesus will help you"—when Tom heard these words, slowly and painfully spoken, and went out of the room knowing that he never again should see his father alive, it seemed to him that his heart would break. He thought he should never be happy again like other boys. But young hearts are not often crushed by sorrow, and Tom soon saw that there was need that he should be braver and more cheerful than he had ever been before.

In the spring their house in the city was sold, and Tom's mother, with the children, moved into the farmhouse where his father had lived when he was a boy. It was an old-fashioned house with a sloping roof in the rear that reached almost to the ground, and there were five large elms in the yard with a swing hanging from the branches of one of them, and there was a nice garden with currant bushes and asparagus beds and pie-plant in great abundance, and there was an orchard with

twenty or thirty old apple trees, and a pasture with woods in the rear and a brook running through it with a good many dace and minnows in it, and now and then a trout. There could not have been a better home for a twelve-year-old boy, and Tom had enjoyed it, though he had been obliged to work pretty hard, for his mother was not rich. The care of the garden and of old Betsey the cow, and of the pigs and the hens fell pretty much on Tom, and in looking after these things his mornings and evenings and holidays and vacations had been fully occupied. I suppose he had sometimes been idle when he ought to have been at work, and sometimes careless and roguish; but I am bound to say that Tom had tried hard to act like a man. All the neighbors said, at any rate, that that widow Noble's boy Tom was just the manliest little chap that ever was.

"Handles a hoe," said Farmer Brown, "as if he had been born with a hoe in his hand."

"Ye oughter see his inyun beds," said Farmer Green. "There ain't a weed in 'em anywhere big enough for a grasshopper to roost on. Pusley don't stand no show at all in his garden."

"And that ain't the best on't," said Farmer White. "Blamed if he ain't the most fatherliest little fellow to them younger children that I ever see. And he 's jest as tender and good to his mother as a boy could be. 'T ain't often you see a woman treated by anything of mankind as he treats her. Seems jest like as if he was a courtin' on her; he 's so kind and thoughtful like."

It did the neighbors good to praise Tom, I am sure.

And if they did not say these things to his face, he knew that they thought well of him, and their good opinion helped him mightily to be a better boy.

I have told you all these things about Tom, that you may understand a little how he felt that Christmas eve, as he lay there thinking about the last Christmas day, and of all that had happened since. He felt sure there would be no presents; for his mother was going to Brookville, the week before, but she had been taken suddenly ill and had neither been able to purchase nor prepare anything for Christmas. Now she was better; grandmother had come to take care of her, and all was going on well. But though Tom was very thankful for this, he could n't help thinking how different things were the year before; and because he was a real boy and not one of Mr. Hiram Hydraulic's boys, I guess (though I don't know, because I was not there to see), that he cried about it a little before he went to sleep.

The next morning all this sorrow was bravely put away. Tom was up betimes, and it was plain to begin with that if the day failed to be a merry one, it would not be for the want of Tom's wishing it to be merry early and often.

"Merry Christmas, Sue! Merry Christmas, Dick!" he shouted, and the little folks sat up and rubbed their eyes.

"Where 's Mawy Quismas?" said Baby Dick, "I want to see her."

Dick's ideas of the children's holiday were vague. He had heard something about it and his notion was

that Christmas was a young lady, perhaps a daughter of Santa Claus, of whom he had also heard; that her pockets were full of good things for children, and that her first name was Mary. "Where 's Mawy Quismas?" he demanded.

"O, you 're a knowing youngster," laughed Tom, as he rolled up the cherub in the blanket and tossed him over his shoulder; "Christmas is n't a woman, Dick, it 's a day. 'T is n't *Mary* Christmas, it 's *Merry* Christmas." Dick still looked dubious.

"Well," said Susie, "there was a Mary that had something to do with it; perhaps he 's thinking about the story in the Testament. But say, Tom, is this Christmas day, truly?"

"You 're right, it is," said Tom, "the rale ginooine Christmas day. But look here, ducky, we 're not going to have any presents to-day; because, you know, mamma has been sick, and she has n't been able to get anything ready for Christmas, or even to think about it. Now don't you say a single word about presents: that would make her feel badly, you know. Let 's see if we can't have a jolly old Christmas all on our own hook. That 'll do her lots of good. Come on, let 's go down and wish her Merry Christmas! Softly! we won't wake her if she is asleep."

They knocked gently at mother's door.

"Come in," said mother.

"Merry Christmas," chanted the trio in unison.

Mother was sitting up in bed with her breakfast shawl round her shoulders. She was much better, but

her face wore a troubled look, that quickly passed away when the happy little group stood by the side of her bed.

"Where's Mawy Quismas?" persisted Dick. The irrepressible youngster was determined to spoil Tom's plans.

"O mother!" he laughed, "this baby thinks Christmas is a girl, and her name is Mary."

"Well, children, dear," Mrs. Noble began, "I 'm sorry—"

"Now, mother, dear," said Tom, gently putting his arm round her neck and stopping her mouth with a kiss, "don't you say another word. I 'm not sorry a bit. I was, a little, but I 've got all over it. Are you, Sue!"

"No," said Sue, bravely.

"Are you, Dick?"

"No, I is n't sawy," crowed the little cherub, flapping the wings of his nightgown, "but I 's hungwy vough. I wants my bextuf."

"Bless his heart," said grandma, "his breakfast he shall have right away."

"Now just let me fix this thing," cried Tom. "After breakfast I 'm going up to the woods to cut a nice little Christmas tree and get it ready for evening. Christmas evening is just as good a time for a Christmas tree as Christmas eve. Then we 'll all go out and have some jolly fun sliding down the little hill behind the house. After dinner I 'll pop a good lot of corn, and Sue and Dick can string that while I go up to Holmes's Hill, if mother says I may, and have an hour or two of royal

coasting. All the fellows are to be there this afternoon. Then after supper, I 'll build a roaring fire in the big sitting-room fire-place, and we 'll bring in our Christmas tree, and festoon it with pop-corn, and hang some of those bright balls on it that we had last year, you know, mother, with some apples and things, and I know we can make it look as pretty as a picture. Then we 'll crack a lot of walnuts and butternuts, and make some molasses taffy; and we 'll play some games, and sing 'We Three Kings of Orient,' and I should n't wonder if we would all feel as happy as kings."

"Very good, Tom," said Mrs. Noble; "your programme is a capital one. My children have been so good, all summer, and especially my dear boy, that I felt very sorry because I was not able to prepare for their Christmas; but I know that if each one tries to make the rest happy, we shall all have a merry Christmas. I 'll ask the doctor when he comes, and perhaps he 'll let you and grandma help me into the big rocking-chair, and draw me out into the sitting-room for a little while this evening."

"Do it, mother!" shouted Tom. "Good for you! Won't that be staving to have you round again."

With his heart full of his plan to make the most of his Christmas, Tom put on his cap and mittens and sallied forth into the frosty air to do his chores before breakfast. The sun was just looking over the top of Holmes's Hill, and the meadows beneath, white with snow that rain and frost had enameled with a glittering crust, shone like a crystal sea. Tom thought there was

glory on the earth, this Christmas morning, almost as bright as the angels saw in the sky. No doubt it was partly because his heart was so full of good will that the world looked so glorious.

"Merry Christmas, old Betsey!" he shouted, as he mixed an extra allowance of meal for her breakfast.

"M-m-m-m!" replied the cow.

I don't know exactly what she meant by that; but I know that the dumb creatures would be very thankful on Christmas day if they knew enough; for it is the Lord Christ who had a manger for his cradle, and on whom the large-eyed cattle looked wonderingly before ever the shepherds worshiped Him, who has taught his disciples to be merciful and kind to "man, and bird, and beast."

"Merry Christmas, Grunter and Greaser!" shouted Tom again, as he looked over the side of the pig-pen, with a basket of corn in his hand. Greaser and Grunter were of Dick's mind; they wanted their breakfast, and no nonsense; and they put their forefeet up on the side of the pen, and said so in the plainest Hog Latin. Tom gave it to them, and by this time the Prince or Pasha, or Highcockolorum, or whatever you call him, of the hen-house, was on hand with his numerous family.

"Merry Christmas to you, old Rooster!" said Tom; whereupon that worthy stood a moment on one leg, cocked his head first on one side and then on the other, and then flew up to the top of the pig-pen, flapped his wings, and answered—

But you know what *he* said much better than I can

tell you. It sounded to Tom a little like: "Ditto to you!" At any rate the funny way the old rooster said it made Tom laugh heartily, and he went into breakfast in the best of humor.

After breakfast, the day's programme was carried out just as Tom had arranged it. Taking his hatchet and a rope, he loaded the little children on his sled and went to the woods for the Christmas tree. The one he picked out was a trim little spruce about six feet in height; and after he had chopped it down, he fastened it to his sled with the rope he had brought, and started for the house. From the woods to the garden gate was one long hill, and Tom had no need to draw the sled home; with Dick before and Sue behind, his sled skimmed swiftly over the crust, and little Dick screamed with delight to see the Christmas tree come sweeping after. Tom said it all looked like a green comet with three heads.

After the tree was brought into the wood-shed Tom sawed off the trunk, nailed on a block for a standard, and, after whipping off the snow, set it aside for the evening. All this work the little folks watched with eager eye. Then the corn was popped, and then came the fun that Sue and Dick had been waiting for all the morning—the coasting on the crust of the little hill behind the house. Jolly day it was for coasting, too. The crust was as solid as a floor and as smooth as ice; anything would go, whether it had runners or not. Tom and Sue put the sled through all its paces. They rode front-face, side-saddle, filibuster (or some such word);

they rode backwards, they got barrel staves and put a board across them, and went down on them famously; they tied streamers to sticks and waved them as they went, and shouted and screamed till they were tired. Little Dick was not neglected. He rode till he was weary, and then went afoot. He fell down any number of times, but it did n't hurt him any; once he rolled half way down the hill, but he picked himself up at the bottom and only wanted to know what made the "fensh go wound." After all this fun the children were ready for their good Christmas dinner that grandmother had prepared for them, and the little ones were content to stay in the house while Tom went over to Holmes's Hill for his afternoon's sport with the boys.

Just above Mr. Holmes's house the road to Brookville turned to the left, going round the corner of his yard, while the direct road was the road to Millbury. The boys with single sleds started on the Millbury road, only a little above the house, and went to the bottom of the hill, about a quarter of a mile below; but Bill Harrison and his crew of eight large boys, with their double-ripper, went round the corner and up the Brookville road more than half a mile above the house. The road was smooth and icy, and the ripper came down like the wind. Bill said that they had made the three-quarters of a mile in a little less than a minute and a half. The small boys all watched out for this dangerous craft, and never started when it was due at the corner.

Tom had made the short trip two or three times on his good "Blue Streak," that would n't take the dust of

any small sled, and was waiting with half a dozen other boys at the top of the hill on the straight road, for the ripper to come down the other road. The warning cry of the crew had been heard, and they would be at the corner within a minute. Nearer and nearer came the cry: "Clear the track! Clear the track! Clear the track!" The ripper was within a quarter of a mile when suddenly little Harry Holmes, a curly-headed four year old, who was playing in his father's yard, slid through the front gate down upon the road, and rolled from his sled, which went on and left him sitting there composedly, right in the track of the terrible ripper, brushing the snow from his sleeve. The crew could not see him, and could not avoid him; he was just around the corner from them. Every boy in Tom's group saw him, though; and there was a sudden outcry of alarm, but nobody stirred save Tom. Quick as lightning he flung the good "Blue Streak" down upon the road, and himself upon it, steering straight for the unconscious child.

"Clear the track!" yelled the ripper's crew. It was frightfully near. Now Tom was at the corner. He glanced up the road; there they were, right upon him, already bending in to keep the craft upright as they went round the turn! But he was ahead! One moment more, and deftly steering to the left of the child, he passed his right arm round him, and giving his left foot a powerful dig into the snow, swept the little fellow out of the track and over a little bank by the roadside. Tom's sled tipped over and he and the child rolled down

the bank together, but neither was hurt. The crew of the ripper turned pale with fright, as they saw the sudden danger of the child, and his marvelous escape; the stern of the "Blue Streak" was grazed by the prow of their craft as it went round the turn. "Good boy! Tom!" "Bully for you!" they shouted as they swept on down the hill.

But if the crew of the ripper were thankful, what do you suppose were the feelings of little Harry's father, who was just coming out of the door as Tom plucked his child out of the jaws of death. He had heard the cry of the ripper crew, and looking out, had seen little Harry sitting there; then rushing out of the door had also seen the rescue. "You brave boy!" he said with swelling heart, as Tom put the child into his arms. "You saved his life! God bless you! Come in!" But Mrs. Holmes had fallen fainting in the doorway, overcome by the sudden peril of her child, and Tom simply said, "Thank you, sir! not unless I can be of some use. I must go home after this trip." And he climbed back to the starting place, where the other boys were still standing breathless.

"Three cheers for Tom Noble!" cried Charley Green,— and the boys gave him three, and a tiger.

"There, fellows, that will do," laughed Tom. "I 'm not running for office, and it is not worth while to make yourselves hoarse about so small a matter."

"But it is n't a small matter," said George Lincoln. "Look here, old fellow! You know I called you a coward two weeks ago, because you

would n't go skating on Brown's pond when the ice was thin"—

"And you know," broke in Will Stebbins, "that I said that you was mamma's boy, and that I would n't be tied up to any woman's apron strings as you were to hers."

"Well," said Tom, "what of it? I did n't lay up anything against you on that account."

"No matter if you did n't," said George, "I take it all back. That 's the best I can do. And if anybody calls Tom Noble a coward after this—why,—it won't be true, that 's all."

"And if anybody calls him mamma's boy in my hearing," said Will, "I shall only say that I wish my mamma had as plucky a boy, that 's all!"

"All right, fellows," said Tom. "You 're all very generous. I 'm glad of your good will, and hope to merit the continuance of the same, as the papers say. But now I must go home."

And mounting again his good sled, Tom was soon at the foot of the hill, and speedily reached his home.

I must not take long to tell you of what happened that evening. After supper, according to programme, mother came out into the sitting-room; the Christmas tree was brought in and dressed, and it was just as pretty a tree as merry children ever danced around; the nuts were cracked, the games were played, and just as the first verse of "We Three Kings" was finished, there was a sound of sleigh bells outside, and somebody stopped at the gate.

"Mr. Holmes and Mrs. Holmes, and Harry," said Tom, as he looked out into the moonlight.

"What can have sent them over here this evening?" queried Mrs. Noble.

Tom blushed, but said nothing. When he let them into the sitting-room his mother noticed that the lady caught hold of him, and kissed him, looking very much as if she were going to cry. All this was a riddle to Mrs. Noble, but she remembered in a moment that Mrs. Holmes's boy Phil had died only two years before, and she thought that Tom had probably brought him freshly to her mind.

After a few words Mr. Holmes said to Mrs. Noble: "I suppose you know, madam, how much we owe to your son?"

"No," said Tom's mother, with a puzzled look. "What do you mean?"

"So he has n't told you," said Mr. Holmes. "No, on the whole, I did n't suppose that he would. It would n't be like him." And then Mr. Holmes went over by the side of Mrs. Noble and told her all about it, while Tom and the other children took little Harry aside and regaled him with walnut meats and pop-corn. When he happened to glance over toward his mother he noticed that her cheeks were flushed and her eyes moistened at hearing Mr. Holmes's story. Pretty soon the gentleman came over to him, and taking from his pocket a good-sized package said: "Tom, I have brought with me something that I hope you will accept as a slight token of my gratitude to you. They belonged to my dead boy, and I have n't cared to part with them; but

if it had n't been for you, our only other boy might not have been ours to-night!"

So saying he put the package into Tom's hands, and wishing all a merry Christmas, the visitors took their leave.

"What is it, Tom?" cried Sue, before they were out of the gate.

Tom opened the package and both of his eyes very wide at the same moment. It was a splendid pair of silver-mounted club skates, beautiful as a picture and just Tom's size.

"And here," said his mother, "is a box of building blocks for Dick, and a box of kindergarten gifts —weaving—for Sue, that Mrs. Holmes has brought; so that all my children will have something after all to remember this Christmas by.

The presents were hung on the tree, just to see how they would look, you know, and then they all danced round it once more, and then they sang the other verses of "We Three Kings," and then the little folks went to bed.

"I 'm glad, Tom," said his mother when grandma had gone out with the little children. It was all she could say.

"I 'm glad that *you 're* glad, mother, dear," said Tom, tenderly, as he crept up to her side and laid his head in her lap.

"Tom," after a little silence.

"Well, mother."

"Has this been a happy Christmas?"

"Yes, mother."

"It would have been, would n't it, if these gifts had n't come to-night?"

"O, yes, indeed."

"It would have been, would n't it, even if you had n't had the chance to do that—what you did this afternoon? I m glad that you were able to do it; but then, that was not the reason of all your happiness to-day, was it?"

"No, mother."

"What was it then?"

"Well," said Tom slowly, "I suppose it was because I tried a little to help other folks to have a good time."

"That was it, my boy. You forgot yourself in trying to make others happy. And he who does that finds that Christmas lasts all the year round; for good will and peace are always in his heart, and in blessing others he himself is richly blest. Good-night, my darling."

"Good-night, mother."

And wiping away the thankful and happy tears that fell from his mother's eyes upon his face, Tom Noble went to bed.

IV

THE STRANGE ADVENTURES OF A WOOD-SLED

"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 farm-house, 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

"FOUR VOICES SHOUTED, 'MERRY CHRISTMAS!'"

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 further, 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.

"Are n't you afraid there may be trouble on the mountain, Will?" asked Grace.

"Should n'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 could n't go on afoot very well."

"Going to be snowed up! That 's tip-top!" 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 was n'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. Would n'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 ploughing 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 snow-bank 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.

"O, 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 is n'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 should n't wonder at all if we stayed here twenty-four hours."

"Can't you telegraph to father?"

"I 'm sorry to say I can not. 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——Some-

body 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 seal-skin cap; "and the sooner you bid us good riddance the better we shall like it."

"And you need n'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 farm-house, 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 is n't too cold to undertake the journey?"

"Le' '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?"

"Le' '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 friend; 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 airly 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 farm-house. 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 corner, 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 hand-loom on which the mother of Mrs. Ross had been wont to weave cloth for the garments of her household. It was an heir-loom, 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 syrup, 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 must n't let folks starve that git storm-staid 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 rising 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 enclosed had been filled with clean oat-straw. Miss Grace wrapped Mrs. Ross's heavy blanket shawl round her seal-skin sacque, 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 flat-irons, 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-bye 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 further 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 cross-board 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, is n't it?"

"I should think your feet would be cold sitting up there," said Grace.

"O, 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 agin."

"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."

"O, 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!"

"Sartinly; 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 sha'n'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 jack-knife, 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.

"Is n't it just gay?" cried Phil. "I never dreamed that we could make it look so pretty!"

"We could n't have done it, either," said Win, if Bill and Grace had n'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 Shakespear 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.

"'MERRY CHRISTMAS TO YE ALL!'"

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 snow-drift. 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 drive-way? 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 have n'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 did n'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 till 'em!—is bruk, yer honor; 'n' I don't see how I 'll iver get thim bashkits carried round at all!"

"O, those baskets!" cried Mr. Burnham in distress. "Our Christmas baskets have n'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."

"O yes, father!" shouted Win; "let Phil and me go with him! The baskets are marked, are n'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 every thing 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.

V

AN ANGEL IN AN ULSTER

"WELL, sir, I am sorry; but I 've done the best I could for you."

It is the conductor on the night express on the Eastern Railroad who is speaking; and the passenger, to whom his remark is addressed, stands with watch in hand, near the door of the car, as the train draws into the Boston station. "I do not doubt it," is the answer. "You can not be blamed for the delay. The other train must have left the Western station already."

"Undoubtedly; the time is past, and they always start on time."

"And there is no train that connects through to Cincinnati before to-morrow morning?"

"No!"

"Well, that settles it. Thank you."

Mr. Haliburton Todd steps down from the platform of the car, and walks slowly past the row of beckoning and shouting hackmen. He is too good a philosopher to be angry with the freshet that delayed the train, but there is a shade of disappointment on his face, and a trace of moisture in his eye. He is a wholesome-looking man of forty-five, with grayish hair and beard, blue eyes, and a ruddy countenance. Probably he is never much given to grinning, but just now his face is unusually grave; nevertheless it is a kind face; under its sober mask there is a world of good nature. In short, he is just the sort of man that a shrewd girl of twelve would pick out for an uncle. If any one thinks that is not high praise, I should like to have him try his hand at commendation.

There are, indeed, quite a number of boys and girls to whom Uncle Hal is both a saint and a hero. At that Christmas party, in the home of his sister in the Western city to which he has been hurrying, these boys and girls are to be assembled. All the married brothers and sisters, with their families, will be there. But it is of no use now for him to try to join them. The feast will be ended and the circle will be broken, before he can reach Cincinnati. So he strolls out of the station and up the street. No, he will not take a hack nor a horse-car; happy people may consent to be carried; those whose minds are troubled would better go afoot. He will walk off his disappointment.

He trudges along the narrow streets; the drays and the express wagons, laden with all sorts of boxes and parcels, are clattering to and fro; porters, large and small, are running with bundles, big and little; the shops are crowded with eager customers. Mr. Haliburton Todd is too good a man to be dismal long in the midst of a scene like this. "What hosts of people," he says to himself, "are thinking and working with all their might to-day to make other people happy to-morrow! And how happy they all are themselves, to-day! We always say that Christmas is the happiest day in the year; but is it? Is n't it the day before Christmas?"

So thinking, he pauses at the window of a small print-shop, when his attention is caught by the voices of two children, standing in the hall at the foot of the stairs leading to the stories above. On the sign beside the door-way he reads, "Jackman & Company, Manufacturers of Ladies' Underwear."

The children are a girl of twelve and a boy of ten, neatly but plainly dressed; a troubled look is on their bright faces.

"How much, Ruby?" asks the boy.

"Only seven dollars," answers the girl, choking back a sob. "There were four dozen of the night-dresses, and the price was two dollars a dozen; but the man said that some of them were not well made, so he kept back a dollar."

"The man lied," says Ben, "and I 'll go up and tell him so."

"Oh, no," answers Ruby; "that would n't do any good. He would n't mind you, and he might not give us any more work. But the work *was* well done, if we *did* help; for you run the machine beautifully, and mamma says that my button-holes are every bit as good as hers. Just think of it! Only seven dollars for two weeks' hard work of all three of us!"

"We can't have the turkey," says Ben, sadly.

"Oh, no. I found a nice young one down at the corner store that we could get for a dollar and a half, but we must lay by two dollars for the rent, you know; and there 'll be coal to buy next week. I 'm sure Mamma will think we can't afford it."

"Come on, then," says Ben, bestowing a farewell kick upon the iron sign of Jackman & Company.

Mr. Haliburton Todd has forgotten all about his own disappointment in listening to the more serious trouble of these two children. As they walk up the street, he follows them closely, trying to imagine the story of their lives. They stop now and then for a moment to look into the windows of the toy-stores, and to admire the sweet wonders of the confectioners, but they do not tarry long. Presently, the eyes of Mr. Todd are caught by a large theater-bill, announcing the Oratorio of the Messiah, at Music Hall, Tuesday evening, December 24, by the Handel and Haydn Society. Mr. Lang is to play the great organ. Theodore Thomas's orchestra is to assist, and the soloists are Miss Thursby and Miss Cary, and Mr. Whitney and Mr. Sims Reeves.

"Correct!" says Mr. Haliburton Todd, aloud. He knows now what he will do with the coming evening. It is long since his passion for music has been promised such a gratification.

While he pauses, he notes that Ruby and Ben are scanning with eager eyes the same bill-board. "Rather remarkable children," he says to himself, "to care for oratorio. If it were a minstrel show, I should n't wonder."

"Would n't I like to go?" says Ruby.

"Would n't I?" echoes Ben, with a low whistle.

"Don't you remember," says the girl, "the night Papa and Mamma took us to hear Nilsson? Miss Cary was there, you know, and she sang this:

> "'Birds of the night that softly call,
> Winds in the night that strangely sigh.'"

It is a sweet and sympathetic voice that croons the first strain of Sullivan's lullaby.

"I remember it," says Ben. "Mamma used to sing it afterward, pretty near as well as she did. And don't you remember that French chap that played the violin? Blue Tom, they called him, or some such name."

"*Vieuxtemps*," laughs Ruby, who knows a little French.

"Yes, that 's it. But could n't he make the old fiddle dance, though!" And the boy tilts his basket against his shoulder, and executes upon it an imaginary roulade with an imaginary bow. "We used to have good times at home, did n't we—when Papa played the violin and Mamma the piano?" Ben goes on.

"Don't!" pleads Ruby, turning, with a great sob, from the bright promise of the bill-board.

The two children walk on in silence for a few moments,—Mr. Haliburton Todd still close behind them. Ruby has resolutely dried her tears, but her thoughts are still with the great singers, and the voice of the wonderful Swede is ringing through her memory, for presently Mr. Todd hears her singing low:

> "'Angels ever bright and fair
> Take, oh, take me to your care!'"

"Well, my child," he says, in a low tone, "I don't think that angels are apt to have gray hairs in their whiskers, nor to wear ulsters; but there 's an old fellow about my size that would like to be an angel just now for your sake."

While he is talking thus to himself, the children turn into the hall of a tenement house. Mr. Haliburton Todd glances after them, and sees them entering a room on the first landing. He walks on a few steps slowly, hesitates, then quickly turns back. In a moment he is knocking at the door which had been opened for the children. The knock is answered by the boy.

"I beg your pardon, my little man," says Mr. Todd. "I am a stranger to you; but I should like to see your mother if she is not engaged."

"Come in, sir," says a voice within. It is the voice of a lady. Her face is pale and anxious, but her manner is quiet and self-possessed.

"It is a curious errand that brings me, madam," says Mr. Haliburton Todd; "but I trust you will par-

don my boldness and grant my request. These children of yours chanced to be standing with me in front of the same placard, announcing the oratorio to-night; and I heard enough of what they said to know that they have a rare appreciation of good music. I have come in to see if you will let me take them to the Music Hall, this evening."

"Oh, Mamma!" cries Ben.

Ruby's eyes plead, but the mother's face is grave. "Your offer is extremely kind, sir," she says at length, slowly; "and the thing you propose would give my children great pleasure; but—"

"You do not know me," Mr. Todd replies. "That is true; and of course a wise mother would not commit her children to the care of an entire stranger. Here 's my card,—'Todd and Templeton, Mattawamkeag, Maine,' but that proves nothing. However, I 'm not going to give it up so. Let me see; I wonder if I know anybody that you know in this big city. Who is your minister?"

"We attend at present, St. Matthew's Church, of which Mr. Brown is rector."

"What is his first name?"

"John, I think."

"John Robinson Brown?"

"Yes; that is the name."

"Cor-rect!" ejaculates Mr. Todd, triumphantly, with a distinct hyphen between the two syllables of his favorite interjection; "that fixes it. What luck this is! I know your minister perfectly. He has been up in

our woods fishing every summer for five years, and we are the best of friends. Can you tell me his residence?"

"I know," cries Ben. "He lives next door to the church, on Chaucer street."

"All right. Let the boy run up to his house after dinner, and see whether Mr. Brown indorses me. I 'll drop in on him this morning. If he says so, you 'll let the children go with me to-night?"

"I know no reason," answers the mother, "why they may not go. You are very kind."

"Kind to myself, that 's all. But I shall be obliged to ask your name, madam."

"Johnson."

"Thank you, Mrs. Johnson. I will call for the children at half-past seven. Good-morning!"

Mr. Haliburton Todd bows himself out with a beaming face, and leaves sunshine behind him. He pauses a moment on the landing. The door of the room adjoining the Johnsons' stands open, and he observes that the room is vacant. He steps in and finds a glazier setting a pane of glass. It is a pleasant room, with an open fire-place; the rear parlor-chamber of an old-fashioned house, and it has been newly papered and painted. It communicates with the sitting-room where the children and their mother live.

"Is this room rented?" he asks the glazier.

"Guess not."

"Where is the agent?"

"Number seven, Court street."

"Thank you!" Mr. Haliburton Todd glances

around the room again, nods decisively, and hurries down the stairs.

What becomes of him for the next hour we will not inquire. A man is entitled to have a little time to himself, and it is not polite, even in stories, to be prying into all the doings of our neighbors.

The next glimpse we get of him, he is sitting in the study of the rector of St. Matthew's, explaining to that gentleman what he wishes to do for these two little parishioners of his.

"Just like you," cries the minister. "But who are the children?"

"Their name is Johnson, and they live in a tenement house on Denison street, number forty-five."

"Ah, yes. Their father was the master of a bark in the African trade, and he was lost on the west coast a year and a half ago. Nothing was ever known of his fate, excepting that a portion of the vessel bearing its name, 'Ruby,' was washed ashore, somewhere in Angola, I think. They had a home of their own, bought in flush times, and mortgaged for half its value, but in the shrinkage everything was swept away. They have lived in this tenement now for nearly a year, supporting themselves by sewing. I suspect they are poor enough, but they are thoroughly independent; it is hard to get a chance to do anything for them. You seem to have outflanked them."

"Oh, no; I 'm not much of a strategist; I moved on their works and captured them. It 's my selfishness; I want to hear Thursby and Cary with those children's

ears to-night, that 's all. And if you will kindly write a little note, assuring the mother that I will not eat her children, the boy will call for it. And now, good-morning. I shall see you next summer in the woods."

The rector presses his friend to tarry, but he pleads business, and hurries away.

Now he mysteriously disappears again. After a few hours we find him seated before the grate, in his cozy room at the Parker House; the telegram has gone to Cincinnati with the bad news that he is not coming; the oratorio tickets have been purchased; dinner has been eaten; there is time for rest, and he is writing a few letters to those nephews and nieces who know, by this time, to their great grief, that they will not see Uncle Hal to-morrow.

Meantime, the hours have passed cheerily at the little room of the Johnsons, on Denison street; for, though the kindness of their unknown friend could not heal the hurt caused by the hardness of their greedy employer, it has helped them to bear it. Ben has brought from the rector an enthusiastic note about Mr. Todd, and the children have waited in delighted anticipation of the evening. Promptly at half-past seven, the step of their friend is on the stair, and his knock at the door.

"Come in, sir!" says Ben. It is a very different voice from that of the boy who was talking at Jackson & Company's entrance a few hours ago.

"This has been a day of great expectations here," says Ben's mother. "I do not know what could have been promised the children that would have pleased

them more. Of music they have had a passionate love from infancy, and they have n't heard much lately."

"Well, they shall have to-night the best that Boston affords," says Mr. Todd. "Now, you must tell me your name, my boy. We want a good understanding before we start."

"Ben, sir, is what my mother calls me."

"Ben Johnson, eh? A first-class name, and a famous one. Correct!" laughs Mr. Todd. "And now, will the little lady tell me her name?"

"Ruby, sir, is all there is of it," answers the maiden.

"Well, Ruby," says Mr. Todd, "your name is like the boarder's coffee; it is good enough what there is of it, and there 's enough of it, such as it is. Now, you want to know what to call me. My name 's Uncle Hal. That 's what a lot of boys and girls out West would have been calling me to-morrow if I had n't missed the train; and if you 'll just let me play, to-night, that I 'm your uncle, I shall have a great deal better time."

So they go off merrily.

Music Hall is packed from floor to topmost gallery. On either side of the great organ rise the ranks of the chorus, eight hundred singers; the orchestra is massed in front; the soloists are just entering, to take their places at the left of the conductor.

"There 's Miss Cary!" cries Ruby, eagerly.

Mr. Todd points out to the children the other singers whom they do not know, and, while he is speaking, the click of Mr. Zerrahn's baton is heard, the musicians of the orchestra lift their instruments, and the glorious

strains of the overture burst upon the ears of the wondering children.

But no wise historian will try to tell about this evening's music, nor how Ruby and Ben enjoy it. More than once, in the rush of the great choruses, Ben finds himself catching his breath, and there is a rosy spot all the while on Ruby's cheek and a dazzling brightness in her eye. Mr. Todd watches them, momently; he listens, as he said, with their ears as well as his own, and finds his own pleasure trebled by their keen enjoyment.

"Oh, Mamma," says Ben, as she tucks him into bed, "it seemed, some of the time, as if I was so full that I could n't hold another bit. When Miss Thursby sang that song—you remember, Ruby. What was it?"

"'I know that my Redeemer liveth,'" answers Ruby.

"Yes; that 's the one;—when she sang that, I thought my heart would stop beating."

"But what I liked best," says Ruby, true to her old love, "was one Miss Cary sang about the Saviour, 'He was despised.'"

"It was all very beautiful, I know, my darlings," answers the mother; "but you must forget it now, as soon as you can, for it is late."

The next morning Ruby is wakened by the stirring of her mother. "Oh, Mamma," she says, softly, putting her arms about her mother's neck, "I had a beautiful dream last night, and I must tell it to you before you get up. I dreamed that Miss Thursby was standing on a high rock on the seashore, singing that song, 'I know

that my Redeemer liveth'; and when she came to that part 'In the latter day he shall stand upon the earth,' I thought that dear Papa rose right up out of the sea, and walked on the water to the shore; and that Mr. Todd took him by the hand and led him up to us; and just as he flew toward us, and caught you in his arms, I woke up."

The desolate mother kisses the daughter with tears, but cannot answer. Beside that dream the dark and stern reality is hard to look upon. Yet somehow, the child's heart clings to the comfort of the dream.

Presently her eyes are caught by an unwonted display of colors on a chair beside the bed. "Oh, what are these?" she cries, leaping to her feet.

"They are yours, my daughter."

"Look here, Ben! Where did they come from, Mamma? M-m-y! Oh, look! look! And here are yours, Ben."

By this time the drowsy boy is wide awake, and he pounces with a shout upon the treasures heaped on his own chair, and gathers them into his bed. A book and a nice silk handkerchief for each of the children; an elegant morocco work-box stocked with all sorts of useful things for Ruby, and a complete little tool-chest for Ben; the Christmas "St. Nicholas" for both, with a receipt for a year's subscription, and a nice box of sweetmeats to divide between them,—these are the beautiful and mysterious gifts.

"Who brought them, Mamma?" they cry, with one voice.

"Your friend, Mr. Todd. He had two packages concealed under his coat, when he came for you last night; and when he rose to go I found them on the floor beside his chair, one marked, 'For the Girl,' and the other, 'For the Boy.'"

"What makes him do such things?" asks Ben, solemnly.

"'Good-will,' I think," answers his mother. "He seems to be one of those men of good-will of whom the angels sang."

"Anyhow, I 'd like to hug him," says the impetuous Ben. "Did he say he would come and see us again?"

"Perhaps he will, in the course of the day. He said that he should not return to Maine until the evening train."

Suddenly Ruby drops her treasures and flings her arms again about her mother's neck. "You blessed Mamma!" she cries, tenderly, "you 've got nothing at all. Why did n't some of the good-willers think of you?"

"Perhaps they will, before night," answers the mother, speaking cheerfully, and smiling faintly. "But whether they do or not, it makes the day a great deal happier to me that my children have found so good a friend."

It is a merry morning with Ruby and Ben. The inspection of their boxes, and the examination of their books, make the time pass quickly.

"Somebody 's moving into the next room," says Ben, coming in from an errand. "I saw a man carry-

ing in a table and some chairs. Queer time to move, I should think."

"They are going to keep Christmas, at any rate," said Ruby; "for I saw them, a little while ago, bringing up a great pile of greens."

"P'r'aps they 've hired the reindeer-team to move their goods," says Ben.

"Then," answers his mother, "they ought to have come down the chimney instead of up the stairs."

So they have their little jokes about their new neighbors; but the children have moved once themselves, and they are too polite to make use of the opportunity afforded by moving-day to take an inventory of a neighbor's goods.

They are to have a late dinner. The turkey, hankered after by Ben, is not for them to-day; but a nice chicken is roasting in the oven, and a few oranges and nuts will give them an unwonted dessert. While they wait for dinner, the children beseech their mother to read to them the Christmas story in "St. Nicholas." "It means so much more when you read," says Ben, "than it does when I read."

So they gather by the window; the mother in the arm-chair, on one arm of which Ben roosts, with his cheek against his mother's—Ruby sitting opposite. It is a pretty group, and the face of many a passer-by lights up with pleasure as his eye chances to fall upon it.

It is now a little past one o'clock, and Mr. Haliburton Todd, sauntering forth from his comfortable quar-

ters at Parker's, makes his way along Tremont street, in the direction of Court. He is going nowhere in particular, but he thinks that a little walk will sharpen his appetite for dinner. When he approaches Scollay's

THE ANGEL SHOWS THE SAILOR A PRETTY PICTURE.

Square, his eye lights on a man standing uncertainly upon a corner, and looking wistfully up and down the streets. The face has a familiar look, and as he draws a little nearer, Mr. Todd makes a sudden rush for the puzzled wayfarer.

"Hello, Brad!" he shouts, grasping the man by the shoulders.

"Hello!" the other answers coolly, drawing back a little; then, rushing forward: "Bless my eyes! Is this Hal Todd?"

"Nobody else, old fellow! But how on earth did I ever know you? Come to look you over, you 're not yourself at all. Fifteen years, is n't it, since we met?"

"All of that," says the stranger.

"Let 's see: you 've been in the sea-faring line, have n't you?" says Mr. Todd.

"Yes, I have, bad luck to me!" answers his friend, with a sigh.

"Oh, well," says the hearty lumberman, "the folks on shore have n't all been fortunate. Where 's your home, now?"

"Just what I 'm trying to find out."

"What do you mean?"

"My dear fellow," says the stranger, with quavering voice, "my ship was wrecked a year and a half ago on the west coast of Africa; I reached the shore, only to fall sick of a fever, through which my cabin-boy nursed me; for a long time I was too weak to move; finally, by slow stages, we made our way to Benguela; there we waited months for a vessel, and, to make a long story short, I reached Boston this morning. I went to the house that was mine two years ago, and found it occupied by another family,—sold under mortgage, they said. They could not tell me where I should find my wife and children. I went to the neighbors who knew them; some of them had moved away, others were out of town on their Christmas vacation. Of course, I shall find

them after a little; but just where to look at this moment I don't know."

Mr. Todd has listened to this story with a changing expression of countenance. When his friend first mentioned the shipwreck, a sudden light of intelligence sprang into his eye, and his lips opened, but he quickly shut them again. He is greatly interested in what he hears, but he is not greatly pained by it. His friend wonders whether Hal Todd has lost some of the old manly tenderness of the academy days.

"Well, Brad Johnson," he cries, drawing a long breath, after the short recital is ended, "this is a strange story. But, as you say, this family of yours can be found, and shall be. Come with me. There is a police-station down this way."

The two men walk on, arm-in-arm, in the direction of Denison street.

"How much is there of this missing family?" asks Mr. Todd.

"There 's a wife and two children,—I hope," answers the other. "The best woman in the world, Hal, and two of the brightest children. Sing like larks, both of 'em. Bless their hearts!" says the sailor, brushing away a tear; "I thought I should have 'em in my lap this Christmas day, and it 's tough to be hunting for 'em in this blind fashion."

"It *is* tough," says the lumberman, choking a little. He has stopped on the sidewalk, on Denison street, just opposite Number 45. He lays his hand on his friend's shoulder. "Look here, Brad Johnson," he says, "we

are going to find that wife and those children pretty soon, I suspect. And you 've got to keep cool. D' ye hear?"

"What do you mean?" gasps the sailor.

The eye of Mr. Haliburton Todd is quietly lifted to the window of the second story opposite. His friend's eye follows, and falls on the picture we saw there a little while ago,—the mother intent upon the book, the children intent upon the mother's face.

There is no outcry, but the father lifts his hands, as if to heaven, staggers a little, and then plunges across the street. Mr. Todd is after him, and seizes him by the collar just as he reaches the foot of the stairs.

"Hold on, man!" he says, decisively. "You must n't rush in on that woman in this way. You 'd kill her. She 's none too strong. Wait here a few moments, and I 'll break it to her."

"You 're right," answers the father, pressing his hands against his temples, and steadying himself by the wall. "But you won't keep me waiting long, will you?"

Mr. Haliburton Todd knocks at the door, and is let in by Ben.

"Oh, Mr. Todd, how good you are! Thank you a hundred thousand times!" cry both the children at once.

"Well, I 'm glad if you 've enjoyed my little gifts," he answers. "But I 've been thinking that your good mother ought to have a little of the cheer of this Christmas as well as you."

"Just what we said," answers Ben.

Mrs. Johnson colors a little, but before she can

speak, Mr. Todd goes on. "Pardon me, madam, but what your minister told me yesterday of your affairs

"'RATHER REMARKABLE CHILDREN,' MR. HALIBURTON TODD SAYS TO HIMSELF, 'TO CARE FOR ORATORIO.'"

has led me to take a deep interest in them. How long is it since your husband left home?"

"More than two years," answers the lady.

"You have had no direct intelligence from him since he went away?"

"None at all, save the painful news of the loss of his vessel with all on board."

"Have you ever learned the full particulars of the shipwreck?"

"No: how could I?" Mrs. Johnson turns suddenly pale.

"Be calm, I beseech you, my dear lady. I did not suppose that you could have heard. But I met just now, in the street, an old friend of mine—and of yours—who knows a good deal about it. And I want to assure you, before he comes in, that—that the story as it reached you—was—was considerably exaggerated, that is all. Excuse me, and I will send in my friend."

Mr. Todd quickly withdraws. The color comes and goes upon the mother's face. "Merciful Father!" she cries, "what does it all mean?"

She rises from the chair; the door that Mr. Todd has left ajar gently opens, and quickly closes. We will not open it again just now. That place is too sacred for prying eyes. It is a great cry of joy that fills the ears and the eyes of Mr. Haliburton Todd, as he goes softly down the stairs, and walks away to his hotel.

An hour later, when the shock of the joy is over a little, and the explanations have been made, and father and mother and children are sitting for a few moments silent in a great peace, the nature of the human boy begins to assert itself.

"Is n't it," ventures Ben, timidly, as if the words were a profanation, "is n't it about time for dinner?"

"Indeed it is, my boy," answers his mother; "and I 'm afraid our dinner is spoiled. Open the oven door, Ruby."

Ruby obeys, and finds the poor, forgotten chicken done to a cinder. "Never mind," says the mother. "Our dinner will be a little late, but we 'll find something with which to keep the feast."

Just then, there is a knock at the door opening into the new neighbor's apartment.

"What can they want?" says Mrs. Johnson. "Perhaps, my dear, you had better answer the knock. They are new-comers to-day."

Mr. Johnson pushes back the bolt and opens the door. The room is hung with a profusion of Christmas greens. A bright fire blazes on the hearth. A table in the middle of the room is loaded with smoking viands. A smiling colored waiter, with napkin on arm, bows politely when the door is opened.

"Ef you please, sah, dinnah is ready, sah!"

"Whose dinner?" demands Mr. Johnson.

"Your dinnah, sah. De folks's dinnah 'n dis yer front room. It was ordered fo' dem."

"Where was it ordered?"

"Copeland's, sah."

"Who ordered it?"

"Gen'l'm'n with gray ulcerated coat on, sah; I seen him kim up t' yer room 'bout 'n hour ago. I was to git it all ready 'n' call you jes' half-past two."

"Another of Todd's surprises," exclaims Mr. Johnson. "Well, my dears, the dinner is here; and we should be very ungrateful not to partake of it with thanksgiving."

"'EF YOU PLEASE, SAH, DINNAH IS READY, SAH!'"

What a happy feast it is. How the laughter and the tears chase each other round the table! How swiftly the grief and misery and dread of the two desolate years that are gone, fly away into a far-off land!

By and by, when the cloth is removed, and they are

seated around the open fire, Ruby says, musingly: "Papa, did you really and truly know Mr. Todd when you were a boy?"

"Certainly, my darling; why do you ask?"

"I can't quite think," says the girl, "that he is a real man. It seems to me as if he must be an angel."

While she speaks, the angel is knocking at the door. They all fly to him; the father hugs him; the mother kisses his hand; the children clasp his knees.

"Help! help!" shouts the hearty lumberman. "I did n't come here to be garroted."

Then, with much laughing and crying, they tell him Ruby's doubts concerning him.

"Well," he says, merrily, "I may be an angel, but, if so, I 'm not aware of it. Angels are not generally addicted to the lumber business. And you need n't make any speeches to me, for I have n't time to hear 'em. Fact is, this has been the very reddest of all my red-letter days; the merriest of my Christmases; and you people have been the innocent occasion of it all. And, I 'm not done with you yet. I 'll have you all up to my lumber-camp next summer; there 's a nice cabin there, for you. Pine woods 'll do you lots of good, madam. Great fishing there, Ben! You 'll all come, won't you? It 's almost train-time. Good-bye!"

And before they have time to protest or to promise, Mr. Haliburton Todd is down the stairs, rushing away to the station of the Eastern Railroad.

VI

MR. HALIBURTON TODD'S SURPRISE PARTY

"O MOTHER! Father! Ruby! look! listen!" It is Ben Johnson from whose white lips this outcry breaks. Some of you have seen him before. You remember that day before Christmas, when Ben and his sister Ruby, going home with heavy hearts, paused before the placard announcing the great oratorio, when Mr. Haliburton Todd, overhearing their conversation, followed them to their home; and you remember all that came of it, on that night and the next day, happiest of all Christmas days in their memory. It was only a year ago that all those strange things happened, and the year has passed so quickly that it seems but yesterday. From the narrow chambers where their father found them when he came back to them on that Christmas day, as one alive from the dead, they have removed to a pleasant home in Dorchester; the mother's pale face is bright and rosy again, the wan and anxious look of the children has disappeared, and the bronzed cheeks of their sailor father fairly shine with contentment. His

home has never seemed to him half so happy as during the last year.

You may be sure that they have not forgotten Mr. Haliburton Todd, their good angel in the ulster, who brought them so much happiness a year ago. His parting invitation was renewed, during the summer, and was accepted; and the whole family went up to the Maine woods and spent two weeks with their jolly friend. What a merry party it was; for some of those Cincinnati nephews and nieces of Mr. Todd, with their father and mother, were there also, and the larks they had, fishing, rowing, tramping, picking berries, climbing the mountains, camping in the woods, these children have not yet ceased talking about. It is no wonder, therefore, that they always scan the New England column of the "Boston Journal" for news from Maine; and it is this newspaper that Ben is holding in his hand, as the exclamation which we have heard breaks from his lips. It is evident that the boy is greatly shocked and troubled.

"What is it, my son?" asks the mother.

"It 's about Mr. Todd."

"What!" cries Ruby, blanching; "has anything happened to him?"

"Ye-es," answers the boy, shivering with excitement; "something awful, I 'm afraid."

"Read! read!" is the father's quick injunction.

Ben reads, as steadily as he can: "'Mattawamkeag, Dec. 16. A serious accident occurred here to-day, at Todd's lumber camp. In trying to loosen a gorge of

logs in the river, the lives of two workmen were imperiled; Mr. Todd, the proprietor, ventured out to render them assistance, when suddenly the gorge gave way, and one of the men was drowned. Mr. Todd escaped with the fracture of one leg and some severe bruises.'"

"Oh!" cries Ruby with a great sob.

"Thank God it is no worse!" exclaims the mother.

"It is n't very alarming, after all, is it, papa?" demands the more hopeful Ben.

"No; I trust not; but you can't tell. Bless me! what perils these landsmen have to face!" ejaculates the seaman. "I 'd never risk my life in those wild woods!"

"Who will take care of him?" asks Ruby.

"He will have good care, never fear!" answers the mother. "The old lady who keeps house for him, Aunty Carew, will watch over him as if he were her own son; and his French man-of-all-work, François, is as trusty as a watch-dog and as gentle as a girl. There will be plenty of others, too, you may depend, who will look after him. Mr. Todd will never lack for friends."

"I hope not!" And the tender-hearted girl brushes from her eyes the tears of solicitude and of grateful memory. "But, oh mamma, I can't bear to think of him lying there, helpless, with only *such* people to be near him, and nobody that he really loves. And then it spoils his Christmas, too! He was going to Cincinnati next week. Last year, you know, he was on his way thither, and was delayed by a railway accident; that was what kept him here; but he meant to go

surely this year, and it will be such a disappointment to him and to them, too."

"I know it," says Ben, soberly. The boy drops his newspaper on the floor and goes to the window. The snow is falling, gently, much as it was that morning when Mr. Todd first looked over their shoulder at the handbill; the bitter pain and sorrow of that time and the joy in which it ended, are linked with tender recollections of their great-hearted friend. Doubtless Mr. Todd is Ben's hero; and doubtless, since every boy must have a hero, Ben is fortunate in his choice.

The newsboy hurries past, shouting his incoherent cry; the street-car, with both platforms crowded, jingles along toward Boston; a group of boys are snowballing on the opposite corner, but Ben sees only that picture in his mind's eye of his friend lying lame and sore in his lonely house in the Maine woods.

"He was trying to save the men's lives, too, when he came so near losing his own," says Ben. "That 's like him!"

"He did save one of them, I suppose," answers Ruby.

"So it seems," responds the mother.

There are a few moments of silence. The fire crackles in the grate; the clock ticks on the mantelpiece; they are all thinking. Breakfast is announced, and they go out silently. Ben toys with an orange; but good digestion waits in vain on appetite. Nobody cares for breakfast.

"I 'll tell you what, shipmates!" It is Captain Johnson who speaks, his brows knitted, his eyes danc-

ing, and his big hand coming down on the table with a blow that makes the breakfast dishes jingle. "We 'll go down there!"

"Down where?" cries Ben.

"Down to Maine—to Mattawamkeag! We 'll go and spend Christmas with Todd!"

"Oh, papa!" exclaims Ruby, with beaming eyes.

"Hooray!" shouts Ben, jumping up from his chair, cantering twice around the table, and ending up by giving his father a tremendous hug.

"But would that be wise?" interposes the thoughtful mother. "*You* might go and see him, my dear; but he may not be in condition to welcome so many visitors."

"That 's so," concedes the captain. The children's faces lengthen.

"I wish we could know just how he is," says the mother.

Just then the postman's ring is heard and Ben runs to the door, returning with a letter.

"It 's from Uncle Hal!" he shouts. "Mattawamkeag, Maine!"

"No," answers the father, glancing anxiously at the envelope. "It 's not his handwriting—merciful heavens! can it be—"

Their hearts stop beating while the letter is torn open.

"O,—I—guess—it 's—all—right—" says Mr. Johnson brokenly, as his eye glances down the page. "Yes," he cries reassuringly; "it 's all right! It 's the

doctor who writes the letter at Todd's dictation; let me read:

"MATTAWAMKEAG, December 17.

"*My dear friends:* Don't be scared by the newspapers. There is no cause for alarm. It is nothing but a broken leg, and not a serious fracture at that; it will only keep me on my back a few weeks. I 'm not a pig and I don't like to lie in a trough, but I 'll be as patient as I can. The doctor has rigged me up on a light narrow bedstead with casters, and I 'm going to be wheeled about the house by and by. I 've got a private car, you see, and shall travel when I please. François will be conductor. I was afraid that you would see the news in the papers, and be alarmed, so I got the doctor to write this; in a day or two I 'll do my own writing. What I don't like a bit is being chiseled out of my Christmas. I was going West, you know, and meant to take you in for a night on my way, but that jig 's up. Well, we 'll wait a year.

"Love to Ruby and Ben! Bless their laughing eyes! I thought I 'd give 'em a shaking up next week, but they must take the will for the deed. Good-bye all! Merry Christmas!

"Your cheerful old cripple,

"HALIBURTON TODD."

"Well," says Mr. Johnson, fetching a deep breath, "he seems to be in a very comfortable state of mind and body. I don't believe that a little surprise party would do him any harm."

"N—no," replies the considerate mother; "but I 'm not just clear how he could take care of us!"

"I 'll tell you!" answers the captain. "We 'll take care of ourselves. Todd 's in his house near the mill, evidently; there 's a house next door that belongs to

him, where his partner lives, that is vacant. We 'll go and take possession of that. Aunty Carew has the care of both of them, and she will make ready for us and keep our secret. We 'll take the best part of our Christmas dinner along with us, and make them very little trouble."

"That begins to look practicable," answers the prudent housewife; "only it will be quite a costly journey. With all our other Christmas expenses, are we sure that we can afford it?"

"We 'll have no other Christmas expenses. We 'll give up all our presents, all our treats, every one!" cries Ruby.

"Yes! yes! every one," echoes Ben. "There 's more fun in this than in forty million presents."

"All right," answers the father, laughing; "we 'll manage the finances, I think."

"I 'm thinking about the Nortons," Ruby muses. "I suppose that Uncle Hal has written to them, too. These children will be heart-broken."

"Let 's ask them to go with us?" explodes the impetuous Ben.

"Sure enough; why not?" replies the captain. "I 'll write to-day, there 's plenty of time, and let them into our scheme, and ask them to meet us here at the Boston and Maine Depot, on the morning of the twenty-fourth; then we will go on together and take old Todd by storm."

"Hooray!" shouts Ben, capering about the table once more, and emphasizing his delight with another filial hug.

So it is all happily arranged. The letter goes to the Nortons in Cincinnati, and brings a telegram accepting the proposition; and the intervening days are full of the bustle of preparation. A huge hamper is packed with all sorts of Christmas goodies that can be carried and kept—plum puddings, cake, mince-pies, jellies, dainty meringues, and such like; and on the morning of the twenty-fourth of December, the quartette of Bostonians meet the quintette of Cincinnatians at the railway station, and are soon spinning away to the northeast.

I must not forget that you are not yet acquainted with these travelers from the West. Let me present them to you. Mrs. Norton, you know, is Mr. Todd's sister. Ben says that she is n't a bit like him, and Ruby says that she is just like him. The fact is that she is a slender lady, with a sweet face and a gentle voice, not at all like her bluff brother in her manners, but just as considerate and generous as he is. Her husband is a railway superintendent of the Queen City,—a stout, short, strong-faced man, with black hair and beard closely cropped, and large black eyes,—a man of few words, but courteous and kindly. The children are Burt, a boy of fourteen, his uncle's namesake; Pearl, a lassie of ten, and little Sam, a six-year-old. These two and the Johnson pair became great friends in the Maine woods the last summer; they had one strong bond to start with, and that was their enthusiastic admiration for Uncle Hal.

"He is n't your *really* uncle, though," said Sam to Ben, one day.

"No, you 're right, kid," was the rejoinder. "But he said I was to call him uncle, all the same, and so I am."

"You don't like him 's much 's I do," persisted the young Buckeye, "cause I 've known him ever 'n ever so long 'fore you ever did."

"Yes, that 's all right," said Ben. "But don't you be scairt, sonny, I ain't agoin' to steal him. You pitch in and like him just as hard as ever you can; I guess there 'll be enough of him left for me to like after you 've got all you want."

So they all laughed off Sam's small jealousy, and were soon upon the best of terms. They meet this morning as old friends, and are all full to the brim of the excitement and fun of their enterprise.

"Is n't this the jolliest old time," says Burt. "Who ever thought of it?"

"That old gentleman over there," answers Ben, pointing to his father; "he 's the original inventor."

"I 'd like to hug him," Burt avows.

"Go ahead," laughs Ben, "I 'll give you leave. 'T won't be the first time, you bet."

"Well, we 'll consider him hugged," says Burt.

"Have you heard from your uncle, lately?" asks Ruby.

"Yes, got a letter just as we were starting. He wrote it himself; said he was getting on famously; would be on his pins again in two or three weeks. We wrote him a letter which he will get to-day, we hope, telling him how sorry we were that he could not be with

us, and urging him to come on as soon as he was well enough to travel. We told him that we should keep thinking of him all day Christmas—te! he! he!—so we will, won't we? and we told him, too, that we would set a plate for him at the dinner-table—oh, ho! ho! ho!"

"That was cruel," laughs Ruby, rather deprecatingly.

"Well, it 's true, is n't it?" rejoins Burt. "'T was a little rough, I 'll admit. But he 'll grin and bear it. And he 'll get over it pretty soon. The whole letter was a kind of melancholy, teary sort of thing; it makes me giggle to think how we 're playing it on him."

The old folks laugh at the children's fun, and enter almost as heartily as they into the spirit of the adventure; love and good-will are happy bonds of fellowship, and they are all young together.

"Have you had any word from Mattawamkeag?" asks Mr. Norton.

"Oh, yes," replies the captain. "I 've had a note from Aunty Carew. She and François are solid for our side. They 'll keep our secret, I know. Aunty is to have the Templeton house, next door to Todd's, all ready for us to-night; François will meet us at the station with the long sleigh, and take us quietly to our destination; to-morrow morning we 'll enter into the strong man's house and take possession."

"Do you suppose that we can keep all these youngsters still and out of sight until dinner-time to-morrow?" asks Mrs. Norton.

"I 'll manage that," replies her husband. "The boys and I will go sleigh-riding up to one of the lumber camps, if it is n't too cold; the girls can stay and help their mothers and Aunty Carew with the dinner. I think you can keep them quiet."

"Yes," answers Mrs. Norton. "The great living-room, where we will set the table, is at the opposite end of the house from Hal's bed room; we can surely conceal our presence from him until we want to see him."

In this innocent scheming the hours pass quickly. It is a bright winter day, and the snowy landscape shines like a sea of glass under the sun's brilliant beams. Beyond Bangor, our party have the Pullman car almost to themselves; and they fill in the time with stories and songs. The Johnson family, we may remember, are all musicians, and the Nortons are a good second in this enthusiasm; both sets of children happen to know some of the same Christmas carols, and there is a little rehearsal for to-morrow. Through the woods of Eastern Maine the train pushes; the dead pines, gaunt and white, look like the skeleton of a forest; it is a desolate country. Just before sunset, a mighty mass of rock, solitary and sublime, lifts itself up far away to the northward; its snowy summit is touched and glorified by the rosy light of the dying day.

Pearl is first to see it. "O Ruby! look! look!" she cries, with quivering voice. "Is that a—a temple?"

"That is a mountain, dearie," her mother replies; "that is Mount Katahdin! I don't wonder you thought it a temple. It looks like a fit foundation for the

New Jerusalem that cometh down out of heaven from God."

The children gaze silently upon the mighty mountain, and its awful beauty fills them all with wonder that is akin to worship.

The sun goes down and the stars come out; the bleak forests flitting past no longer attract the travelers' eyes, and they grow weary. It is welcome news when the porter comes to tell them that the next station is Mattawamkeag, and they bundle out with glee. There is François, with the great Percheron team and the long sleigh-box full of straw, into which they gaily climb. It is a keen winter night, but they are warmly clad, and they nestle in the soft oat straw and laugh at the cold. François brings word that his master is getting on well; he is "a leetle sorry," the good Frenchman says; he is "vaire melancholie" to-night; but to-morrow—"eh bien! it sall be all right with him!" And François laughs till the woods ring.

Under the runners the snow creaks and whines as the strong Norman horses tramp steadily over the three miles, and the company is soon quietly unloaded at the door of the Templeton house, where a roaring fire of wood burns in the great fire-place, and a nice supper awaits them, prepared by Aunty Carew.

"Jest warm yourselves a minute or tew, 'n then set right daown 'n hev a cup o' tea," says the kind old housekeeper. "Law sakes, ef it ain't good fer old eyes to see you all again! And how kind it is of you to come all this long ways on sech an urrand! Patience

alive! I don't know how Mr. Haliburton 'll stand it! I reckon he 'll want to jump out of his skin!"

"How is he to-night?" asks Ruby.

"O he 's putty tol'ble comf't'ble in his body. Doctor says the laig 's knittin' all right. But he 's been kinder daown in the maouth t'night, sartin! I never seen him quite so solemncholy. I tried to chirk him up a little, but seems like 't ain't no use sayin' nothin' to him. He got François to git him one o' his singin' books, and he 's been a porin' over that and kinder hummin' to himself most of the evenin',—somethin' 'bout the glory of the Lord—and peace and good-will to men—Christmas songs, I reckon.

"It 's 'The Messiah,'" cries Ruby.

"Like enough," answers Aunty.

"He 's thinking about a year ago to-night!" says the girl with swimming eyes. "O let me go and put my arms around his neck and kiss him, just once!"

"Rats!" explodes Ben. "That 's a girl, now! Would n't it be cute to run in there and give it all away."

"Of course not," laughs Ruby, through her tears. "I would n't go if I could. But I want to, all the same."

After the supper the weary travelers are soon disposed of for the night; for Aunty Carew has their rooms all in readiness; and the Christmas morning finds them awake early, and ready, after a light breakfast, for the morning's merry-making. Mr. Norton and the boys go off, as they have planned, for a sleigh-ride

to the lumber camp, with injunctions to be home before twelve o'clock; the rest make ready the feast. The big living-room of Mr. Todd's house affords ample space for such a festivity; there is a fire-place at one end; there is a bay window which Aunty Carew has crowded with house plants; in one corner is an upright piano; there are two great square tables that can be joined together for the occasion, and the winter sunshine makes the room as bright as an Italian summer noon.

It is a merry morning. The great hampers are brought in and unladen; the stupendous turkey, monarch of his tribe, who has been sacrificed to furnish forth this feast, browns prosperously in the great oven; the time draws on toward noon. All this work has been done as nearly without noise as was possible, yet now and then Mr. Todd, in the stillness of his room, has been aware, when the hall door opened, of some unusual clatter, and has demanded of François what it might mean.

"C'est la madame," says François; "Madame Carew! She mek mooch dinner to-day—beaucoup viande."

"That 's silly," says Mr. Todd. "Tell the old lady not to bother about the Christmas dinner."

"Oui, I sall tell her," answers François, departing, "but zese women,—it is useless to talk to zem; zey do what zey will."

Presently he returns and brings word that the dinner will be ready at precisely twelve o'clock, and that Madame Carew insists that he be prepared to come out and dine with her in the living-room.

"Whew!" exclaims the master of the house. "Well, François, we may as well surrender. Indeed, I think I 'd like to be wheeled out into the big room this afternoon; it will be a pleasant change; so you may help me on with my dressing-gown, and bring that afghan over there and tuck me up nicely, and we 'll make the journey very comfortably, I think."

"Oui, monsieur," answers François; "we sall be ready; but it is yet one half hour until noon."

"All right, I 'll read and doze till dinner is ready."

So he reclines there upon his couch, "luxurious as a Turk," he says, with his new smoking-cap on—Ruby's present, by the way—and tries to read a little in the volume of Dickens's "Christmas Stories," that he has had in his hand all the morning. To be as good as his word, he drops off, before he knows it, into a little nap.

Suddenly, in the midst of a happy dream, he seems to hear a voice singing. The door into the hall which communicates with the living-room has been set slightly ajar, and although he is hardly awake enough to trace the sound to its source, that is evidently where it comes from. It is a young girl's voice, with childish tone, but pure and true, and the accompaniment flows with a murmurous softness from the keys of the piano:

"'Angels ever bright and fair
Take, oh, take me to your care!'"

It is Ruby's favorite song, and she sings it now for Uncle Hal as though all her soul was in it.

He listens, looks quickly around, then shuts his eyes. His cheek flushes, his breast heaves, but he speaks not a word. When the song is finished he turns sharply to François:

"Who is out there?"

"C'est la Madame Carew; oui, je suppose so."

"Madame Carew's cat! you blockhead. Can Aunty Carew sing like that?"

"But ze cat of Madame Carew cannot sing so, certainement!" answers François with a twinkle in his eye. "I have heard ze cat sing one time; it was not so good as zis."

"Hush!" exclaims Mr. Todd.

This time it is a chorus. All the parts, children's treble, a firm contralto, a deep bass and a strong tenor; how it rings through the hall of the old country house:

"'From far away we come to you
—The snow under foot and the moon in the sky,—
To tell of great tidings strange and true,—
Christian men all, salvation is nigh;
From far away we come to you
To tell of glad tidings strange and true.'"

As the cadence dies away, Mr. Todd rises on his elbow and cries out, "François, you rascal, what are you up to? What kind of a racket is this? Who 's out there?"

"Monsieur asks so many questions zat je cannot remember any of zem!" answers François, grinning.

Just then the housekeeper opens the door.

"Aunty, what does this mean?" he shouts.

"Can't take time to tell," says the good dame quietly. "Better come out and see for yourself. Frank, ketch a hold on t' other side o' this couch, and we 'll trundle him out there in a hurry."

No sooner said than done. The private car moves through the hall, the door swings open into the living-room, and there the whole group stands, children in the front rank, grown folks in the rear, arms folded, eyes right!

What a shout it is that greets him! The boys are cheering, the men are laughing, the women are crying; Ruby and Pearl fly to him, one on either side, and give him a resounding kiss on both cheeks at once; and poor Mr. Todd, half dazed, sinks back on his couch and utters a theatrical groan. After the uproar has subsided a little, he finds his voice:

"Well, you are a pretty pack of banditti! What are you, any way? Ku Klux? White Caps? Molly Maguires? Why do you break into a man's house and wake him out of a quiet nap with such a confounded shivaree? Have n't you any mercy on a poor hystericky creetur? Don't you know that you might throw me into a catnip fit? Who is the instigator of this conspiracy? Let him stand forth!"

"Here he is!" cried Burt, slipping behind Mr. Johnson, and pushing him to the front.

"Brad Johnson!" exclaims Mr. Todd, "are you the miscreant? Come here, you old sinner, and let me wollop you!"

"No use in kickin', Uncle Hal," shouts Ben. "One-legged men can't kick to hurt anything!"

"Correct, youngster! But wait till I get well! M-m-m-m!"

So they all shout and laugh and cry together.

"I trust," says Uncle Hal, in a lull of the tumult, "that I have succeeded in conveying the impression that I 'm glad to see you. May be some other folks would n't say it in just my way, but fact is I had to let go of myself in some such fashion or I should have burst out crying before your faces. Blamed if I did n't come pretty near it."

"Well, naow," says Aunty Carew, a little bit disgusted with the company, "if you 've got over your hullaballoo, and kin ca'm daown a little, we 'll set on the turkey and the fixins, and have our dinner."

This practical suggestion restores order, and the merry party is soon seated. Uncle Hal's couch is drawn up at one end of the table, Ruby and Pearl on either side of him. Aunty Carew's cookery, eked out by the Boston and Cincinnati hampers, furnishes a royal feast, and there is appetite enough to do it full justice.

I will not try to tell of all that happened on that delightful day; of the Christmas games after dinner; of the Christmas story out of the "St. Nicholas," read by "Uncle Hal," whose story reading is always a Christmas treat to the young folks and the old ones, too; of the songs and carols in the twilight, and the quiet talk before the great fire after nightfall,—it would take too long.

The next day, as they are ready to depart, Uncle Hal gives them his parting blessing after this fashion:

"Well, you did play it on me this time, that 's a fact! You took a mean advantage of me, that you did, when I was on my back; you came right into my house and overpowered me! These two girls, think what they did! they came and fell upon me, in my defenseless state, and kissed me, they did!"

At which instigation they do it again.

"Well," he groans, "go on with your torture. I can't help myself now. But, mind you, there 's a Christmas day after to-day, and I 'll get even with you yet!"

"I have n't a doubt of it!" says the captain. "Anybody who expects to get ahead of Hal Todd in the little enterprise of making other folks happy, would have to be born a good while ago and follow the business pretty faithfully all his life-time."

"Avast there, shipmate!" shouts Mr. Todd. "No more taffy! Sheer off, now, and clear out, every one of you; and don't let me see you in these parts again, until the next time."

They climb merrily into the big sleigh, the bells jingle, the snow creaks under the runners, the boys stand up and give Uncle Hal a parting cheer; Ruby and Pearl wave their handkerchiefs as the sleigh passes the windows, and when they are out of sight the great-hearted man turns his face to the wall, and with a big tear standing in each of his eyes, murmurs the prayer of Tiny Tim, "God bless them every one!"

VII

EMIL'S CHRISTMAS GIFT

A STOUT, ruddy-faced boy of eighteen, with blue eyes and light-brown hair, is standing on the forward deck of a westward-bound North River ferry-boat, looking wistfully about him. The scene is evidently new to him, and he is taking it in with a boy's alert and insatiable curiosity. Some of us too quickly forget, and do not soon enough remember again, that a boy is as hungry for sights and sounds as he is for beefsteak and batter-cakes. But this boy has reasons for being wide-awake and watchful that the fellows near him, who are leaning lazily against the rail and chatting about last night's play, have not. He is in a foreign land. The great ships and steamers are not strange to him, for he has seen them often at the wharves of his own city; but multitudes of queer little tugs and fleets of unfamiliar craft are plying hither and thither, puffing and coughing and snorting as they go;

while the massive ferry-boats, with their decks black with passengers, and the great white river steamers, and the long, low docks, and the great grain-elevators there in front, and the towering piles of architecture in the great city behind, all make a picture that this boy is doing his best to see in the ten minutes permitted him by the swiftly crossing boat. He thinks it the fairest picture he has ever seen—this wide, quiet river, lying so calm under all this moving to and fro; the silent burden-bearer of so much noisy traffic; giving back the greeting of the bright December sun with smile as bright as if it had never known trouble or turmoil; this brave old river holding on its course serenely between these two great roaring cities; with the titanic masonry of the Palisades above these on the left, and the lovely slopes and groves of Riverside Park on the right; and, far away to the southward, the heights of Staten Island; and he turns, with a look of regret, when the boat bumps against the tough timbers of the slip, and, grasping his traveling-bag, is hurried along with the crowd over the clattering chains, and past the creaking windlass of the bridge upon the pier. Showing his railway ticket to a policeman, he is pointed through a gateway to the waiting train, and soon he is whisked through the purlieus of a town, and whistled through the heart of a hill, out of which the train goes flying over a wide expanse of salt marshes, which make him think of home; and so, before he knows it, his head drops upon the window-pane and the tears come into his eyes.

No. He is not a baby-boy at all; he is just as plucky a little German as ever stood on two legs. Wait and get acquainted with him, and you will see. If any boy of my acquaintance shows clear grit, Emil Keller is the boy. If you had been in his place you would have cried a little, too, if you could have done it quietly, and not been caught at it. If you would not, I would n't give much for you.

It is not many minutes, however, before Emil lifts up his head quickly and proudly, and dashes the tear from his cheek, and glances slyly around to see if any one has observed him. A gentle-faced lady is in the seat behind him, and is not looking at him now; but he is sure that she has been watching him, and that she only withdrew her gaze when he turned about; for her look is compassionate, and in her eyes there is a trace of moisture. Emil sits upright and looks out of the window; he does not want any pity; but, somehow, it has comforted him to look into that lady's face; she has not offered him any sympathy, but he feels sure that she is sorry for him, and would be glad if she could help him bear his trouble. He wonders how far she may be going on the train. Is he likely to find many faces as kind as hers in this strange land? Will she speak to him? He begins to wish that she would. Perhaps she might give him good counsel. Perhaps she could aid him in finding a home. As soon as he can, without seeming inquisitive, he turns his eyes backward again, and this time meets the look of the kind lady searching his own face. Emil knows that he is not mistaken.

The delicate sympathy, the tender solicitude, the readiness to help are all there. No words could have made it half so plain. No one but his mother ever looked upon him with such eyes as those. His mother! That thought is too much for him; and once more he leans up against the car-window and hides his face.

Meantime the gentle lady has been studying him, with eyes anointed by compassion, and she has made up her mind that she cannot be mistaken. A good lad, innocent but manly; alone and sorrowful. Not an American; the face shows that; the plain, but clean attire, in cut and seam, also discloses its foreign manufacture. Almost certainly he needs a friend, and that last wistful look seems to mean that he wants one. She will find out.

"Would you like to look at the pictures?" she says, as she hands him a copy of the new magazine.

"You are fery kind."

That is pretty good English, far better than the curt and heartless "Thanks!" which is all that Americans of the present generation find time to say.

The bright pages fasten the boy's eyes for an hour or so; then he fixes upon one of the illustrated articles and tries to read. It is evident that he has some knowledge of English. By and by he returns the magazine to its owner with a bow and a smile.

"I tank you fery mooch. You haf beautiful books in dis country," he ventures, blushing.

"Indeed we have," answered the lady. "Have you ever seen this one before?"

"Ya; I have seen one like it. Mine fater have one sent him sometimes from America."

"Your father does not live in America, then?"

"Nein," answers Emil, winking hard and crowding down the tremor in his voice. "Mine fater lifs not now any more; mine fater was det one year ago almost."

"Oh! pardon me for bringing your trouble to your mind," answered the lady, gently.

"Nein; it is not you that bring it; it is I that spoke first his name." Emil will not let the kind lady blame herself; he knows that she is careful to spare him pain, And, lest she may again reprove herself unjustly, he determines to open his heart to her.

"It is not mine fater only; it is mine mutter too. That was hartest drooble. She was det one month ago."

"My poor boy!" cries the gentle lady, softly. "Are you all alone in the world?"

"Ya; I haf no fater, no mutter, no bruder, no schwester; I haf myself only."

Both are silent for a little; the lady does not wish to draw from this poor lad all the secret of his sorrow, and the boy's heart is too full to venture upon speech. Presently she asks him:

"Where was your home?"

"Hamburg."

"In Germany?"

"Ya; Hamburg on the Elbe."

"Was it there that your mother died?"

"Ya; mine fater *und* mine mutter."

"Have you any friends there—any kindred?"

"Nein; mine gross-mutter's bruder is dere, but he dinks of me notting at all; he came to see my mutter when she was sick not one time; he will be bleased to hear that I am not dere any more."

"But where are you going now? Forgive me, my boy; I do not want you to tell me what I have no right to know. I would not be meddlesome—you understand?—but you have made me care for you, and desire to help you, if I can. I wish you would tell me all about yourself that you are willing to tell one who would like to be your friend."

The lady speaks so earnestly, and with such assurance of sincere sympathy, that Emil cannot doubt her. Perhaps he will be more skeptical when he is older; it is well for him now that he has not learned that bitter lesson; for this is a friend worthy of his trust, and he would be the loser if he should refuse to confide in her. If he pauses before answering, it is not because he is afraid to speak, but because the lady's kindness makes him so glad and happy that he cannot quickly find his voice.

"This is my name," adds the lady, as she hands Emil her card. "You speak English a little; can you not read it, also?"

"Yes, madam. I can read it mooch besser as I can spick it," answers Emil. "And you are most kind, Frau Baker," he adds, blushing, as he reads the neatly engraved card. "My words are poor when I try to tell you how mooch help in your kindness already I find. My

name is dis"; and he takes from the side-pocket of his coat a little diary, on the fly-leaf of which is written, in a round German hand, but in English letters, "Emil Lincoln Keller."

"Lincoln!" exclaims Mrs. Baker. "You have the name of our great President."

"Ya vohl, madam. Mine fater gave it me. He loved the Herr Lincoln best of all men. He was often in Washington, when Herr Lincoln was there. Ya, he was there on the day when the—what you call—assassin killed him. Ach! It was a day of sorrow for mine fater. He oft told me the story."

"So your father once lived in this country?"

"Yes; he was a boy so young as me when first he came, five years before the great war was making; and *his* fater and mutter they were det, in three years; and then he was a soldier in the great war; and when the war was done he went back to Deutschland."

"Did he never return to America?"

"Nein; he came not. It was not possible. He was not to mine mutter married until he went back to Hamburg; mine gross-mutter she was old, and she was not willing that mine mutter shall come; so they wait, and when mine gross-mutter was det mine fater was sick, and so they come not at all."

"He would have come, then, if he could?"

"Ya vohl, madam. It was in this land that his heart was at home. He was telling me always stories of this land; he was trying to teach me English. He was saying to me always: 'Emil, you shall to America

go, one day.' And when he was sick he made mine mutter to him promise that after he is gone she shall to America come mit me. 'It is the best country for the boy,' he said. 'He shall find dere friends and a home.' But when he was gone mine mutter was sick, and every day she grow white and weak, and she cannot come mit me. But by her own hands, while she lay dere on the bed, she make all my clothes ready."

Poor Emil turned suddenly round in the seat and covered his face with his hands, and his sturdy little frame quivered with the intensity of his grief. It is some minutes before he can command himself to go on with his story.

"You will forgif me," he says, as he turns back again, and meets the tearful eyes of his new friend, "but the looks and the words of the mutter so dear came back to me, and I could not hold still my heart."

"I know it, my boy. I wonder not," answers the lady, reassuringly.

"She made me all ready," Emil continues, "and told me how to pack my clothing in the old box that was mine fater's, and she said to me: 'Dere is enough, Emil, for one year, if you keep it mit care'; and she told me where, in a little coffer, was money, long saved, to pay for her burial, and plenty left to buy my ticket to America, and something more to keep me, that I may not starf until I can find work to earn mine bread."

"But this is a wide, wide land, my lad. How do you know where to look for a home in it?"

"Mine mutter told me that I shall go to the town that was the home of mine fater. It is dere I will go to-day."

"What town is that?"

Emil produces his railway ticket.

"Ah!" cried the lady, with a brightening face. "Onantico!" Then, after a moment's pause: "Do you know the name of any one in Onantico?"

"Nein, madam. Mine fater often was speaking the names of the good men in Onantico, but I haf them not any longer in my thoughts. I fear that I shall find not many who will remember mine fater; it is now dree-and-twenty years when he went away to the war, and he was not afterward many days in Onantico."

"Perhaps not," answers Mrs. Baker; "but that is the one place of all places to which I would have you go. I know a good man there; he is the husband of my sister; he will surely be a friend to you. I will give you a letter which you shall carry to him." And the lady takes from her pocket a little tablet and a stylograph, and writes a note which she folds, then addresses it to Mr. Charles F. Holden, 75 Front St., Onantico, and hands it to Emil.

"Take this note," she says, "and give it to Mr. Holden this very afternoon. You will reach Onantico about two o'clock. Any one will show you the way to his office. Tell him all your story. He will find it all out himself. I know him. You will not want to keep anything from him. Perhaps he knew your father. He was in the war."

"Of my heart, Frau Baker," cries Emil, "I tank you. You haf made me more happy as I ever hoped to be. Mine mutter prayed to the good God that he would keep me and watch me over, and I know that he has sent you to me."

"I hope so," says Mrs. Baker, smiling; "it is good to go on his errands. I would like to be always ready."

All this time the train has been speeding on through beautiful suburbs and lovely valleys, making few stops, and leaving the noisy centers far behind. The little pilgrim, journeying alone, by faith, into a far country in search of a home, and the generous woman whose heart has been so deeply enlisted in the strange story to which she has been listening, have both been so absorbed in the subjects of which they have been communing, that the sights without the car and the movements within have been like the scenery of a dream. Now the boy turns quietly around in his seat, places the precious letter carefully in his diary, and leans against the window. His heart is full of quiet content and joyful expectation. A great burden of doubt and anxiety has been lifted from his spirit. He muses upon the goodness of the guardian angel who has so strangely appeared to him in the way for his guidance and help; and his faith in the God to whom his mother commended him in her dying prayer is very strong. The relief from the anxiety that had never departed from his heart for an hour since his mother died is so great that every muscle of his body seems to relax its tension, and he leans his head against the window and drops into a

sleep, the most peaceful and natural that he has had for many a day.

At length the hand of his benefactor is gently laid upon his shoulder.

"I am sorry to waken you," she says; "but we shall soon be at Weston, which is my home, and I wanted to ask you, before we part, to write me a letter soon, and let me know how you are getting on."

"Ya vohl, allerdings," answers Emil, eagerly. "Most surely will I. Ach! that I slept! It is not a good way to make you see how grateful and happy I haf been made by you."

"Indeed, it is the very best way," answers Mrs. Baker. "I saw by the smile upon your face that your heart was at rest, and it made me more glad than anything you could have said to me."

"Oh! it was a dream! *sehr schön!* most lovely!" says Emil, musing. "It was mine fater who at the *Bahnhof*—what is it in the English?"

"Station?" suggested Mrs. Baker.

"Ya! At the station met me, and was leading me to Herr—what is the name?—Holden; and then I waked."

"You will find Mr. Holden easily," answers Mrs. Baker. "And you will write and tell me what he says to you. I shall sometimes visit my sister at Onantico, and I shall want to see you then. I shall think of you very often, and I hope you will not forget me."

"Nein; forget you I cannot; I shall not; I must not," cries Emil, passionately, struggling with the Eng-

lish auxiliaries. "And I shall wish to see you many times before ever you will come to Onantico."

There is a long whistle from the locomotive, and the train soon slackens its speed for the Weston Station.

"Good-bye, Emil," says the kind lady, cheerily, giving him her hand. "It is almost noon. You will be in Onantico in two hours. You are a good lad, and I know you will find friends and a home."

The boy cannot speak, but his look of gratitude is far more eloquent than words. His eyes follow her to the door; she waves her hand in another farewell from the platform of the station; and soon the train pushes on and he is once more alone.

The December air is frosty, and as the train penetrates the heart of the Appalachian ranges, the snow lies on the mountain tops. It is a wild and rugged country; the boy has never seen anything like it. Can there be hearts as kind among these rough hills as that of the lovely lady with whom he has just parted?

There is a frozen pond covered with skaters. "Oh!" thinks Emil, "if that is your pleasure, I shall be with you. That is a trade you cannot teach me." And he pulls from his bag a fine pair of skates, his father's gift to him last Christmas, and fingers their shining edges. "Last Christmas," he muses. "And what day is this?" He looks in his diary. "It is the twenty-fourth. It is the day before Christmas. To-night is the holy night." He has not thought of that before. The memory breaks up again the fountains of the great deep of sorrow in the boy's heart.

"Alas!" he muses. "I shall have no one to whom, on this beautiful festival of the Christ-child, I can offer any gift. Last year my poor, sick father was made happy by the little table I carved to stand by his bed, for his vials and his books; and my mother praised the pretty work-box that I made for her; to-morrow there will be none to whom I can give anything."

Is it wonderful that troubles like these should dim the brightness of the sunlight, and make the ragged hills look a little more inhospitable? But it is not long before the savage mountains are passed and the boy's journey lies along a beautiful valley, whose farms climb to the summits of the hills on either side—the thriftiest, loveliest river valley he has ever seen, and the shadow lifts from his face as he looks out upon its beauty; and soon the two lonesome hours are ended, and the train-man announces "Onantico."

Emil knows not whither to go. He stands for a moment on the platform, after the train has departed, and gazes about him. A beautiful river—the same river that he has been following—lies at his feet, disappearing in a graceful curve behind a little hill on his right, hidden in the other direction by a dark-browed mountain. Across the river, and half a mile from its banks, another bold mountain rises abruptly; between that mountain and the river lies the village. The principal business street is upon the river-bank, and the row of brick stores that back down to the river show him their worst side; but above the stores stretches a long avenue of beautiful homes, and the spires and towers

of the town, with the river in front and the hill in the rear, make a picture that charms the eye of the boy, whose life has been spent amid the desolate flatness of Hamburg on the Elbe. "No wonder," he thinks, "that my father loved this home, and longed for it so often."

Gathering his scanty luggage, he carries it to the door of a little hostelry across the way, with a German name upon the sign, and makes a thrifty bargain with the keeper for his temporary entertainment. After a comfortable meal, and such a bath as his rather meager quarters will allow, he arrays himself in his best and sallies forth to find the friend to whose good-will Mrs. Baker has consigned him.

The long bridge which spans the river offers him a still better view of the scenery as he crosses the town. The river is encased in transparent ice, except as here and there a ripple has kept it open; far above, yonder, at the curve of the stream, a crowd of skaters are filling the air with their merriment. The scene is full of beauty, and Emil lingers to enjoy it; but not long.

It is four o'clock when he reaches No. 75 Front Street, and the young man at one of the desks tells him that Mr. Holden has gone out, and will not be in again during the afternoon.

"It is Christmas to-morrow, you know," says the clerk, kindly; "and I guess that he is looking up Christmas presents."

"And he shall not come to this place to-morrow?" queries Emil, dubiously.

"No; he is never here on Christmas. You will find him here the day after to-morrow."

Emil turns away rather ruefully.

"Can't you leave your business with me?" says the clerk.

"Nein; it is Herr Holden himself that I must see."

Shall he inquire for Mr. Holden's house? No; he will not intrude upon the holiday. He will wait until the day after to-morrow.

So he walks slowly away, and turns his footsteps up the street. Christmas is in the air. Emil would not need to be told of it now, if he had not thought of it before. The crowds of eager purchasers; the throngs about the windows of the toy shops and the candy stores; the baskets and the bundles; the happy, anxious, hurrying multitudes; the bits of talk that he hears dropping from one lip and another:

"You ought to see!"

"How do you think she would like"—

"Could n't find a real baby doll."

"Would n't a silk muffler do?"

"Books are always suitable, but"—

"How am I ever going to get it into the house without letting her see it?"

Such are the loose strands of speech that Emil picks up as he walks along; and he knows enough English to put them together and to weave them into the harmonies of that majestic anthem of good-will to men which the angels sang on the first Christmas, above the plains of Bethlehem, but which, when the day returns,

they now bend from the skies themselves to hear, rising all over the earth from happy human voices.

But to the lonely boy the thought again comes back: "No one in this busy town; no one on this vast continent, on whom I have any right, for love's sake, to bestow a Christmas gift. Yes, there is Frau Baker. I would even venture to show her my gratitude if I could; but that I cannot do, for she is far away, and there is no one else." Nevertheless, Emil is resolved that he will not let gloomy thoughts have sway on this glad festival; he puts them out of his mind as quickly as he can; and, after sauntering up and down the streets for a while, watching the throngs and listening to the unfamiliar voices, he purchases a little parcel of cakes and sweetmeats for his own Christmas feast, and slowly recrosses the bridge to his lodgings.

After a long, refreshing night, the Christmas morning finds him as hopeful and happy as a boy in a foreign land, with neither home nor friends, could be expected to be; and, when breakfast is over, he determines to join the crowd of skaters upon the river above. That is a fraternity into which he will need no initiation. He is soon among them, sharing their sport, not at all abashed by the curious glances that scan his quaint costume and the angular pattern of his skates, for Emil is an admirable skater, and that fact soon finds recognition. As he spins about among the gliding groups some of them nod to him pleasantly, and now and then one hails him with a blithe "Merry Christ-

mas!" to which he answers by a touch of the hat and a courteous "I tank you!"

"See that queer-looking duffer, with the funny blue cap and the old-fashioned bobtail coat," says one to another. "Wonder when he snowed down? But he can skate, though! Takes the Dutch roll as easy as rollin' off a log." A few little boys, with their sleds, are laying tribute upon the skaters, each one eager to hitch his vehicle to some steel-clad Mercury, and go skimming over the ice with the skater's speed. When they can persuade no one to draw them, they run and fling themselves upon the sleds, and travel as far as they can by their own momentum. One beautiful, fair-haired boy, with long curls and blue eyes, not more that six years old, hails Emil.

"Mister, won't you draw me, please?"

"Ya," replies Emil. "It shall be to me mooch pleasure." And he gives the youngster a whirl up and down the river that nearly takes his breath away.

Just below the cove, where the skaters are thickest, there is a shallow, where the water runs swift, and where there is an opening in the ice a dozen rods in length, reaching out nearly as far from the shore. The lawn from one of the finest houses runs down to the river, opposite to this opening.

"Where do you lif, *lieblingskind?*" asks Emil, as he drops the rope of the little boy's sled.

"That is my house," answers the child, pointing to the mansion with the sloping lawn.

"Is there no one here to watch you over?"

"No; I just slid down the bank on my new sled, and come out here all alone. I wanted a good ride on the ice."

"Ach! It is not safe. I fear me. You must go not near that hole down dere. Will you?"

"No," answers the child, gaily, as he runs away, flinging down his sled upon the ice.

Emil turns up the river again; but he has not skated far when he hears a cry, and, swinging round, sees the skaters huddling near the upper edge of that danger-hole. The fair-haired boy has not heeded Emil's counsel; the ice near the edge of the water was glare; the sled went much swifter and much further than he thought it would; suddenly he was plunged into the swift current.

Now see them all hurrying to the spot, some wringing their hands and crying "Help!" some standing dazed and motionless; some of the young ladies pale and faint; some of the young men saying one thing and some another.

"Back from the edge!" shouts one strong voice. "You will all be in there together, pretty soon!"

The crowd surges backward.

"Get a rope!"

"Where is a pole?"

"Bring one of those planks from the shore yonder!"

"Can't somebody swim?"

Such were the confused and uncertain voices.

"Help me off with my skates?" cries one brave fellow, tugging at the fastenings that seem to be im-

movable. Meantime—it is only a few seconds—the child is floating steadily down the stream; sinking for one dreadful moment, then rising to the surface. And, meantime, the strange German boy has been flying like the wind to the spot. Through the group he forges in a twinkling; his coat is off already; down on the ice he goes; no loosening of the skates; skates and boots come off together; now a running jump, and in he goes. See him now! Blowing the water from his lips, taking long, steady, powerful strokes; he is after him; he is gaining on him; the child sinks again, he is drawing terribly near the ice below. If he goes under it! Oh! But the brave swimmer is hurrying his stroke; there are the flaxen locks once more at the surface, and the swimmer's left hand has grasped the red tippet round the child's neck. No; he will not risk the crumbling ice; he pulls for the shore, bearing up the river, holding the child at arm's length, swimming steadily and surely; no hurry now.

A great shout goes up from the skaters.

See yonder! A man, bare-headed, comes flying down the sloping lawn. It is the child's father. He has heard the cry from the river; the danger of the child and the daring rescue are in one moment revealed to him. As Emil nears the shore the father rushes into the water and grasps his boy.

"O, my darling!" he cries. "Yes, he is alive. You saved him, you brave boy! Come with me at once into the house. Bring his coat and shoes; will you?" he shouts to the group on the ice. The father, with the

child in his arms, leads the way; Emil, dripping and panting a little, follows. The mother, half frantic, meets them on the lawn; the father's quiet tones reassure her.

"Oh! yes; my dear. He is alive. I feel his heart beating; he is only chilled a little; he will be himself again in an hour or two! There is the boy that saved his life!"

The mother flings her arms around Emil's dripping shoulders, and kisses him. There is not time for much talk.

The father's word is true. It is but a little while before the child, stripped of his wet clothing, rolled in a warm blanket, and rubbed by the fire, is awake and clearly out of danger. Meantime Emil has been hurried up to a warm room by the young man whom he met in Mr. Holden's office the evening before, and there has been disrobed, and rubbed and clad in dry garments, somewhat too large for him. He has said but little, save in reply to the young man's questions. He has been thinking much.

Presently the young fellow turns, as Emil makes a reply in his strong German accent, and says:

"Say! Look here! Are n't you the fellow that came into the office yesterday?"

"Ya," answers Emil; "I was."

"You wanted to see Mr. Holden?"

"I haf a letter to gif him."

"Letter of introduction?"

"Sometings like dat, may be."

"Well, man alive, do you know that this is Mr. Holden's house, and that it is his boy that you pulled out of the river?"

"Nein; I knew not; aber I was wondering much when I see you here."

"Well, your won't need you letter of introduction now, very much. You 've got acquainted with him now I tell you, and don't you forget it!"

Emil blushes and looks down. He does not like the thought of claiming anything on the score of what he has done; he almost wishes that he had not the letter. But it is all out now, and he cannot help himself.

"Is he your fater?" asks the lad.

"No; he is my uncle, and I live with him. No better man in the town, either."

It is Mr. Holden himself who now knocks at the door.

"Come, my lad!" he says tenderly, "come down to the library. I want to know who you are and all about you."

"He has a letter for you," cries the nephew.

"A letter for me? From whom?"

"A letter of Frau Baker," answers Emil. "Of the beautiful lady who lifs at the West-town on the railway."

"Elizabeth Baker, of Weston?"

"Ya, I tink so."

"Come with me at once! Where is the letter?"

"It was in my schmall book, in the coat's pocket."

"Here is the coat," says the gentleman hastily, as

they enter the library. "The boys brought it up from the ice."

Emil brings forth the diary and the treasured missive from his friend. Mr. Holden's face brightens as he hurriedly reads it.

"It is a lad," he says to his wife, "with whom Elizabeth struck up one of her characteristic friendships on the cars yesterday, and she commends him to us. All right, my boy! We should hardly have needed her letter though; should we?" Then, after a pause, to Emil: "Your father and mother are both dead, she tells me."

"She tells you truth, Herr Holden."

"And you have come to this country seeking a home."

"Even so, I hope."

"She does not tell me your name."

"Emil Lincoln Keller."

"What is that?" sharply.

"Emil Lincoln Keller."

"What was your father's name?"

"Fritz Keller."

"Fritz Keller! Was he ever in this country?"

"Ya, Herr Holden; he was once living in dis town."

"O, my boy!" cries the gentleman, springing from his seat, and clasping Emil in his arms; "you have come home indeed! Your father marched by my side in the regiment. He was my dearest friend. In one of the last battles of the war, before Petersburg, when

I was left wounded on the field, and would have died, he crept out through the lines, after dark, and brought me to camp in his strong arms, God bless him! I was sent to the hospital then, and I have never seen him since, nor heard from him, though I have sought for him and longed for him. And now comes his son, in the moment of peril, and saves my child's life. Margaret, where is that old photograph of Fritz?"

"It is here," answers Mrs. Holden, bringing an album from a drawer.

"Do you remember any look like that?" asks Mr. Holden.

"Ya; he was once like dat, long times ago. I have in mine trunk the same."

They all sit musing for a little; the fair-haired boy, asleep on the sofa, is breathing quietly. Presently Mrs. Holden says: "You know that it is Christmas, Emil?"

"Ya wohl, madam. It was my sorrow that on this day of the Christ-child I could to no one give"—

He checks his impulsive speech.

"Bless your dear heart!" cries the lady. "That sorrow need not burden you. Have you not given us the life of our child?"

Emil is not suffered to return to his lodgings across the river. A messenger is sent for his luggage, and through the Christmas day and the Christmas-tide he abides most happily in this safe refuge. His modesty, his courtesy, his manliness, gain for him a stronger hold every day upon the hearts of his new friends, and there are many earnest consultations about his future, for

Emil has no thought of quartering himself upon them, and is often anxiously questioning about the work by which he may earn his bread.

On New Year's day, after dinner, Mr. Holden takes him by the hand and leads him up-stairs to a little chamber all newly furnished. The coziest of little rooms it is, with its white-covered bed, and its neat carpet, and its stout easy-chair, and its pretty writing-desk, and over the mantel an enlarged photograph, beautifully framed, of his father's face.

"Here, Emil," says Mr. Holden, "this is your New Year's present. This is your home, so long as you desire it. I know that you want to earn your own livelihood, and we want you to do it. Soon we shall find the right thing for you to do. But this will be your home, if you will have it. No; you need not say one word. It will take me a great many years, my boy, to pay you the debt that I owe you, for your father's sake and for your own."

VIII

SANTA CLAUS IN THE PULPIT

"ONE and a half for Billington!"

The speaker was standing at the ticket window in the station of the Great Western Railway. Evidently he was talking about tickets: the "one" was for himself, the "half" for the boy who was clinging to the small hand-satchel, and looking up rather sleepily at the ticket-seller's face.

"When do you wish to go to Billington?" inquired that official.

"On the next train: eleven o'clock, is n't it?" asked the traveler.

"That train does not run Saturday nights; no train leaves here for Billington until to-morrow, at midnight!"

"But this train is marked 'daily' in the guide."

"It was a daily train until last month."

"Well, here's a how-d'ye-do!" said the tall gentleman, slowly; "only three hours' ride from home, on the night before Christmas; and here we are, with no help for it but to stay in Chicago all Christmas day. How's that, my son?"

"It's bad luck with a vengeance," answered the lad, now thoroughly awake, and almost ready to cry. "I wish we had staid at Uncle Jack's."

"So do I," answered his father. "But there is no use in fretting. We are in for it, and we must make the best of it. Run and call that cabman who brought us over from the other station. I will send a message to your mother; and we will find a place to spend our Sunday."

This was the way it had happened: Mr. Murray had taken Mortimer with him on a short business trip to Michigan, for a visit to his cousins, and they were on their return trip; they had arrived at Chicago, Saturday evening, fully expecting to reach home during the night. The ticket-agent has explained the rest.

"Take us to the Pilgrim House," said Mr. Murray, as he shut the double door of the hansom; and they were soon jolting away over the block pavements, across the bridges, and through the gaily lighted streets. It was now only ten o'clock, and the Christmas buyers were still thronging the shops, and the streets were alive with heavily laden pedestrians who had added their holiday purchases to the Saturday night's marketing, and were suffering from the embar-

rassment of riches. Soon the carriage stopped at the entrance of the hotel, and the travelers were speedily settled in a second-story front room, from the windows of which the bright pageant of the street was plainly visible.

While Mortimer Murray is watching the throngs below, we will learn a little more about him. He is a fairly good boy, as boys average; not a perfect character, but bright and capable, and reasonably industrious, with no positively mean streaks in his make-up. He will not lie; and he is never positively disobedient to his father and mother; though he sometimes does what he knows to be displeasing to them, and thinks it rather hard to be reproved for such misconduct. In short, he is somewhat self-willed, and a little too much inclined to do the things that he likes to do, no matter what pain he may give to others. The want of consideration for the wishes and feelings of others is his greatest fault. If others fail in any duty toward him, he sees it quickly and feels it keenly; if he fails in any duty toward others, he thinks it a matter of small consequence, and wonders why they are mean enough to make such a fuss about it.

This is not a very uncommon fault in a boy, I fear; and boys who, like Mortimer, are often indulged quite as much as is good for them, have great need to be on their guard against it.

Before many moments Mortimer wearied of the bewildering panorama of the street, and drew a rocker up to the grate near which his father was sitting.

"Tough luck, is n't it?" were the words with which he broke silence.

"For whom, my son?"

"For you and me."

"I was thinking of your mother and of Charley and Mabel; it is their disappointment that troubles me most."

"Yes," said Mortimer, rather dubiously. In his regret at not being able to spend his Christmas day at home, he of course had thought of the pleasure of seeing his mother and his brother and sister and the baby; but any idea of their feelings in the matter had not entered his mind. Only a few hours before, in the Murrays' home, Nurse with the happy baby in her arms had said to Charley and Mabel:

"Cheer up, children, and eat your supper. Your papa and Master Mortimer will surely be here by to-morrow."

But Mortimer, so many miles away, had not heard this. Now he glanced up at his father and spoke again:

"When shall we have our Christmas?"

"On Monday, probably. We can reach home very early Monday morning. We should not have spent Sunday as a holiday if we had gone home to-night. Our Christmas dinner and our Christmas tree must have waited for Monday."

"Do you suppose that Mother will have the tree ready?"

"I have no doubt of it."

"CHEER UP, CHILDREN, AND EAT YOUR SUPPER," SAID THE NURSE.

"My! I'd like to know what's on it?"

"Don't you know of anything that will be on it?"

"N—no, sir."

Mortimer's cheeks reddened at the questioning glance of his father. He had thus suddenly faced the fact that he had come up to the very eve of Christmas without making any preparation to bestow gifts upon others. He had wondered much what he should receive; he had taken no thought about what he could give. Christmas, in his calendar, was a day for receiving, not for giving. Every year his father and mother had prompted him to make some little preparation, but he had not entered into the plan very heartily; this year they had determined to say nothing to him about it, and to let him find out for himself how it seemed to be only a receiver on the day when all the world finds its chief joy in giving.

Mortimer had plenty of time to think about it, for his father saw the blush upon his face, and knew that there was no need of further words. They sat there silent before the fire for some time; and the boy's face grew more and more sober and troubled.

"What a pig I have been!" he was saying to himself. Never thought about getting anything ready to hang on the tree! Been so busy in school all last term! But then I've had lots of time for skates and tobogganing, and all that sort of thing. Wonder why they did n't put me up to think about it! P'raps they 'd say I 'm big enough to think about it myself. Guess I am. I 'd like to kick myself, anyhow!"

With such discomforting meditations, Mortimer peered into the glowing coals; and while he mused, the fire burned not only before his feet but within his breast as well—the fire of self-reproof that gave the baser elements in his nature a wholesome scorching. At length he found his pillow, and slept, if not the sleep of the just, at least the sleep of the healthy twelve-year-old boy, which is generally quite as good.

The next morning, Mortimer and his father rose leisurely, and after a late breakfast, walked slowly down the avenue. The air was clear and crisp, and the streets were almost as full of worshipers as they had been of shoppers the night before; the Christmas services in all the churches were calling out great congregations. The Minnesota Avenue Presbygational Church, which the travelers sought, welcomed them to a seat in the middle aisle; and Mortimer listened with great pleasure to the beautiful music of the choir and the hearty singing of the congregation, and tried to follow the minister in the reading and in the prayer, though his thoughts wandered more than once to that uncomfortable subject of which he had been thinking the night before; and he wondered whether his father and mother and the friends who knew him best did really think him a mean and selfish fellow.

When the sermon began, Mortimer fully determined to hear and remember just as much of it as he could. The text was those words of the Lord Jesus that Paul remembered and reported for us, "It is more blessed to give than to receive." And Doctor Burrows began by

saying that everybody believed *that*, at Christmas-time; in fact, they knew it; they found it out by experience; and that was what made Christmas the happiest day of the year. Mortimer blushed again, and glanced up at his father; but there was no answering glance; his father's eyes were fixed upon the preacher. The argu-

ment of the sermon was a little too deep for Mortimer, though he understood parts of it, and tried hard to understand it all; but there was a register in the aisle near by, and the church was very warm, and he began looking down, and after awhile the voice of the preacher ceased, and he looked up to see what was the matter, and there in the pulpit was—who was it? *Could it be?*

It was a very small man, with long white hair and beard, and ruddy cheeks, and sparkling eyes, and brisk motions. Yes; Mortimer had quite made up his own mind that it must be he, when a boy by his side, whom he had not noticed before, whispered:

"Santa Claus!"

This was very queer indeed. At least it seemed so at first; but when Mortimer began to reason about it, he saw at once that Santa Claus, being a saint, had a perfect right to be in the pulpit. But soon this did not seem, after all, very much like a pulpit; it had changed to a broad platform, and the rear was a white screen against the wall; and in place of a desk was a curious instrument, on a tripod, looking something like a photographer's camera and something like a stereopticon.

Santa Claus was standing by the side of this instrument, and was just beginning to speak when Mortimer looked up. This was what he heard:

"Never heard me preach before, did you? No. Talking is not my trade. But the wise man says there 's a time to speak as well as a time to keep silence. I 've kept my mouth shut tight for several hundred years; now I 'm going to open it. But my sermon will be illustrated. See this curious machine?" and he laid his hand on the instrument by his side; "it 's a wonder-box; it will show you some queer pictures—queerest you ever saw."

"Let 's see 'em!" piped out a youngster from the front seats. The congregation smiled and rustled, and Santa Claus went on:

"Wait a bit, my little man. You 'll see all you want to see very soon, and maybe more. I 've been in this Christmas business now for a great many years, and I 've been watching the way people take their presents, and what they do with them, and what effect the giving and the taking has upon the givers and takers; and I have come to the conclusion that Christmas certainly is not a blessing to everybody. Of course it is n't. Nothing in the world is so pure and good that somebody does not pervert it. Here is father-love and mother-love, the best things outside of heaven; but some of you youngsters abuse it by becoming selfish and greedy, and learning to think that your fathers and mothers ought to do all the work and make all the sacrifices, and leave you nothing to do but to have a good time."

Just here Mortimer felt his cheeks reddening again, and he coughed a little, and opened a hymn-book, and held it up before his face to hide his blushes.

"So the fact that Christmas proves a damage to many is nothing against Christmas," Santa Claus continued; "but the fact that some people are hurt by it more than they are helped is a fact that you all ought to know. And as Christmas came this year on Sunday, it was my chance to give the world the benefit of my observations, and there could n't be a better place to begin than Chicago, so here I am."

This last statement touched the local pride of the audience, and there was a slight movement of applause; at which the small boys in front, who had

begun to grow sleepy, rubbed their eyes and pricked up their ears.

"There is one thing more," said the preacher, "that I want distinctly understood. I am *not* the bringer of all Christmas gifts." Here a little girl over in the corner under the gallery looked up to her mother and nodded, as if to say, "I told you so!" "No; there are plenty of presents that people *say* were brought by Santa Claus, with which Santa Claus had nothing at all to do. There are some givers whose presents I would n't touch; they would soil my fingers or burn them. There are some takers to whom I would give nothing, because they don't deserve it, and because everything that is given to them makes them a little meaner than they were before. Oh, no! You must n't believe all you hear about Santa Claus! He does n't do all the things that are laid to him. He is n't a fool.

"And now I 'm going to show you on this screen some samples of different kinds of presents. I have pictures of them here, a funny kind of pictures as you will see. Do you know how I got the pictures? Well, I have one of those little detective cameras—did you ever see one?—that will take your portrait a great deal quicker than you can pronounce the first syllable of Jack Robinson. It is a little box with a hole in it, and a slide, that is worked with a spring, covering the hole. You point the nozzle of it at anybody or anything, and touch the spring with your thumb, and, click! you have it—the ripple of the water, the flying feet of the racer, the gesture of the talker, the puff of steam from the

locomotive, the unfinished bark of the dog. I 've been about with this detective, collecting my samples of presents, and now I 'm going to exhibit them to you here by means of my Grand Stereoscopic Moral Tester, an instrument that brings out the good or the bad in anything, and sets it before your eyes as plain as day. You will first see on the screen the thing itself, just as it looks to ordinary eyesight; then I shall turn on my æonian light through my ethical lens, and you will see how the same thing looks when one knows all about it: where it came from, and why it was given, and how it was received.

"First, I shall show you one or two of those presents that I said I would n't touch. Here, for example, is an elegant necklace that I saw a man buying for his wife in a jewelry store yesterday; I caught it as he held it in his hands. There! is n't it a beauty? Links of solid gold, clasp set with diamonds; would you like it, girls?"

"H'm! My! Is n't it a daisy!" murmured the delighted children, as they gazed on the bright picture.

"Don't be too sure!" cried the preacher. "Things are not always what they seem. Look!"

A new light of strange brilliance now lit up the pictures, and every link of that golden chain was transformed into an iron fetter that fastened a woman's wrist,—a woman's wrist that vainly strove to release from its imprisonment a woman's hand. The chain itself was a great circle of women's hands,—wan, cramped, emaciated, pitiful hands,—each one holding a

needle, each one clutching helplessly the empty air. Within this circle suddenly sprung to view a little group—a woman, bending by the dim light of a winter afternoon over a garment in her hands, and two pale children lying near her on a pallet covered with rags, while the scanty furniture of the room betokened the most bitter poverty. It was evident enough that the poor creatures were famishing; the hopeless look on the mother's face, as she plied her needle with fierce and anxious speed, glancing now and then at the sleeping children, was enough to touch the hardest heart; a low murmur of pitiful exclamation ran around the room, and there were tears in many eyes.

"She is only one of them," cried Santa Claus. "There are four hundred just like her, working for the man who bought this necklace for his wife yesterday; it is out of their life-blood that he is coining his gold. And to think that such a man should take the money that he makes in this way to buy a Christmas present. Ugh! What has such a man to do with Christmas?" And the good saint shook his fist and stamped his feet in holy wrath. Then the group faded, leaving what looked like a great blood-stain in its place; but that, in its turn, shortly disappeared, and the white screen waited for another picture.

"The next one," said the preacher, "was purchased yesterday, in a fur-store, by the keeper of one of your great drinking and gambling saloons, for his grown-up daughter; I caught the photograph of it while she was putting it on."

It was a magnificent sacque of ermine fur, very costly; and there were suppressed "ohs" and "ahs" among the young ladies when it appeared. But again the strange light flashed upon the screen, and the snowy fur was drenched and dripping with blood.

"Let me show you the other side," said Santa Claus, after a few moments; and the purple lining of soft silk quilted in diamond figures appealed to the admiration of all; but soon they saw developing in every one of those diamonds the outline of a dead face; bloated and brutal faces of men; haggard faces of women; pinched faces of little children; bloody faces, with marks of deadly wounds on cheek or forehead; maniac faces glaring out from the screen with meaningless rage; a more ghastly array could never have been mustered by the King of Terrors.

"All these," said the preacher, in a low voice that trembled with suppressed emotion—"all these owe something of their woe to the man who bought this elegant garment; he helped them all on the way to ruin; he got his money by helping them travel that road; the faster they went that way, the faster his money came in. He is a rich man now, but there is not a thing that he owns, if you could look at it through my lenses here and see it as it really is, that is not stained with blood and painted all over with dead faces. I don't know, but I think that sometimes when he wakes up in the night, he sees them. I 'm sorry for the poor girl who has to wear this horrible thing. It is n't her fault. But what can a Christmas

WITHIN THIS CIRCLE SUDDENLY SPRUNG TO VIEW A LITTLE GROUP."

present mean to a man who has gained the money with which he buys it by helping his fellow-men on the road to ruin?

"I have many pictures that are even more painful than this," said the preacher, "but I am not going to let you see any more of them. I only want you to know how the rewards of iniquity look in the æonian light. There are a few more pictures, less terrible to see, but some of them will be a little unpleasant for some of you, I fear. Here is a basket of fruit; it looks very tempting, at first; but let the true light strike it. There! now you see that it is all decayed and withered. It is really as bitter and disgusting as it now looks. It was given, this morning, by a young man to a politician. The young man wants an office. That was why he made this present. A great many so-called Christmas presents are made for some such reason. Not a particle of love goes with them. They are smeared all over with selfishness. Christmas presents! Bah! Is this the spirit of Christmas?

"But here is one of a different sort."

A pretty crimson toilet-case now appeared upon the screen.

"Elegant, is it not? Now see how it looks to those who live in the æonian light."

The crimson plush slowly changed to what looked like rather soiled canton flannel, and the carved ivory to clumsily whittled bass-wood.

"What is the matter with this? I shall not tell you who gave it, nor to whom it was given; it is no real

wrong-doing on the part of the giver that makes the gift poor; it is only because the gift represents no effort, no sacrifice, no thoughtful love. In fact, the one who gave it, got the money to buy it with from the one who received it. There are a great many Christmas presents of this sort; it is n't best to say any hard words about them; but you see that they are not, really, quite so handsome as they look. Nothing is really beautiful, for a Christmas present, that does not prove a personal affection, and a readiness to express it with painstaking labor and self-denial. Now I 'm going to show you another, which will enable you to get the idea."

It was a little picture-frame of cherry wood, rather rudely carved, that now appeared upon the screen.

"The boy who made this for his mother works hard every day in school and carries the evening papers to help with the family expenses; he carved this at night, when he could gain a little time from his lessons, because he could n't afford the money to buy anything, and because he thought his mother would be better pleased with something that he himself had made. You think it does n't amount to much, don't you? Well, now look!"

The transfiguring light flashed upon the screen, and the little cherry frame expanded to a great and richly ornamented frame of rosewood and gold, fit to hang upon the walls of a king's palace; and there, in the space that was before vacant, surrounded by all that beautiful handiwork, was the smiling face of a handsome boy.

The people, old and young, forgot that they were in church and clapped their hands vigorously, Santa Claus himself joining in the applause and moving about the platform with great glee.

"Yes," he cried, "that 's the boy, and that 's the beauty of this little frame of his; the boy is in it; he put his love into it, he put himself into it, when he made it; and when you see it as it really is, you see him in it. And that 's what makes any Christmas present precious, you know; it comes from your heart and life, and it touches the heart and quickens the love of the one to whom it is given.

"I have a great number of presents of this sort that I should like to show you if I had time. Here, for instance, is a small glass inkstand that a little boy gave his father. It is one of half a dozen presents that he made; it cost only a dime or two, and you think it is not worth much; but now, when I turn the truth-telling light upon it, you see what it is—a vase of solid crystal, most wonderfully engraved with the richest designs. The boy did not make this with his own hands, but he gained every cent that it cost by patient, faithful, uncomplaining labor. He begged the privilege of earning his Christmas money in this way, and right honestly he earned it; leaving his play, whenever he was summoned for any service, without a word of grumbling, and taking upon himself many little labors and cares that would have burdened his father and mother. When he took his money and went out to spend it the day before Christmas, he was happy and proud, because he

could fairly call it his own money; and the presents that he bought with it represented him.

"And now there is only one thing more that I shall show you, but that is a kind of thing that is common, only too common, I 'm afraid. It is a present that was all beautiful and good enough till it left the hands of the giver, but was spoiled by the receiver. Here it is."

A silver cup, beautifully chased and lined with gold, now came into view.

"A boy whom I know found this in his stocking this morning. He was up bright and early; he pulled the presents out of his stocking rather greedily; he wanted to see whether they had bought for him the things he had been wishing for and hinting about. Some of them were there and some were not; he was almost inclined to scold, but concluded that he might better hold his tongue. But this boy had made no presents at all. He is one of the sort that takes all he can get, but never gives anything. This is what Christmas means to him. It is a time for getting, not for giving. And I want you to see how this dainty cup looked, as soon as it got into his greedy hands."

Again the revealing light fell upon the cup and its beauty and shapeliness disappeared, and it was nothing but a common pewter mug, all tarnished and marred, and bent out of form.

"There!" cried the preacher; "that is the kind of thing that is most hateful to me. It hurts me to see lovely things fall into the hands of selfish people, for

such people can see no real loveliness in them. It is love that makes all things lovely; and he who has no love in his own heart can discern no love in anything that comes into his hands. What does Christmas mean to such a one? What good does it do him? It does him no good; it does him harm, every time. Every gift that he gets makes him a little greedier than he was before. That is the way it works with a certain kind of Sunday-school children. They come in, every year, just before Christmas, only because they hope to get something; they take what they can get, and grumble because it is n't more, and go away, and that 's the last of them till Christmas comes around again. That 's what they think of Christmas. They think it is a pig's feast. Precious little they know about it. I know them, thousands of them! But they never get anything from me,—never! They think they do, but that 's a mistake! I don't like to see my pretty things marred and spoiled like this cup. I 'm not going to give to those who are made worse by receiving.

"No! I can do better. I can find people enough to whom it is worth while to give Christmas gifts because there is love in their hearts; and the gift of love awakens more love. Those who know the joy of giving are made better by receiving. And there are hosts of them, too, millions of them; tens of millions, I believe; more this Christmas than ever before since the Babe was born in Bethlehem; people whose pleasure it is to give pleasure to others; good-willers, cheerful workers, loving helpers, generous hearts, who have

learned and remembered the words of the Lord Jesus, how he said, 'It is more blessed to give than to receive.'"

Through all this part of Santa Claus's sermon Mortimer had known that his face was growing redder and redder; he was sure that the eyes of all the people in the church were being fixed on him; he felt that he could not endure it another moment, and he caught up his hat and was going to rush out of the building, when suddenly the voice was silent, and he looked up to see what it meant—and Santa Claus was not there; it was Dr. Burrows again, and he was just closing the Bible and taking up the hymn-book. Mortimer glanced about him and drew a long breath of relief.

As they walked back to the hotel, Mr. Murray asked Mortimer how he liked the sermon.

"Which sermon?" asked Mortimer.

"Why, Dr. Burrows's sermon, of course."

"Oh, yes; I forgot. It was a good sermon, was n't it?"

"Excellent. What was the text?"

"'It is more blessed to give than to receive.' Was n't that the way he ended up?" asked Mortimer, brightening.

"It was."

"I thought so."

"Thought so; did n't you hear it?"

"Yes, I heard that. But—I was hearing—something else about that time, and I was n't sure."

"What else did you hear?"

"Lots. P'raps I 'll tell you some time," replied the lad.

Mr. Murray did not press the question, and Mortimer was silent. All that day and the next Mortimer seemed to have much serious thinking to do; he was a little reluctant to take his Christmas presents, and he received them at last with a tender gratitude that he had never shown before.

"It must have been Dr. Burrows's sermon," said Mr. Murray to his wife as they were talking it over the next night. "I did n't think Mortimer could get much out of it; in fact I thought he was asleep part of the time, but it seems to have taken hold of him in the right way. It was a good sermon and a practical one. I 'm going to ask our minister to exchange some time with Dr. Burrows."

"I wish he would," said Mrs. Murray.

That was the way Mr. and Mrs. Murray looked at it. But I think that if they had asked Mortimer, Mortimer could have told them that it would be a much better idea to suggest to their minister that he exchange some time with the Reverend Doctor Santa Claus.

THE END.