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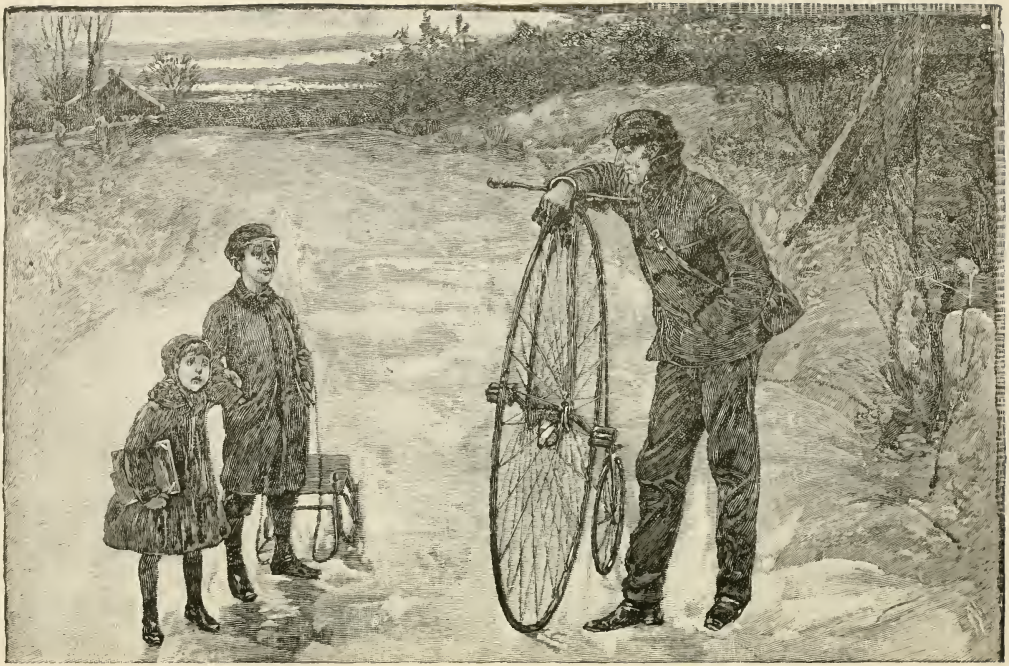

THE WHIZZER LOOKED PITIFUL OUT OF HIS EYES AT MRAR.

Who Ate the Pink Sweetmeat?

By SUSAN COOLIDGE

AND OTHER CHRISTMAS STORIES

WHO ATE THE PINK SWEETMEAT?
Susan Coolidge

THE WHIZZER,
Mary Hartwell Catherwood

THE PATRONCITO'S CHRISTMAS,
F. L. Stealey

CHERRY PIE,
Kate Upson Clark

BERTIE'S RIDE,
Lady Dunboyne

ASAPH SHEAFE'S CHRISTMAS,
E. E. Hale

Illustrations from Original Drawings by Smedley, Lungren, and other artists

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WHO ATE THE PINK SWEETMEAT?

ONLY three pairs of stockings were left in the shop. It was a very little shop indeed, scarcely larger than a stall. Job Tuke, to whom it belonged, was not rich enough to indulge in the buying of any superfluous wares. Every spring he laid in a dozen dozen of thin stockings, a bale of cheap handkerchiefs, a gross of black buttons, a gross of white, a little stationery, and a few other small commodities. In the autumn he added a dozen dozen of thick stockings, and a box full of mittens and knitted comforters. Beside these he sold penny papers, and home-made yeast made by Mrs. Tuke. If the stock of wearables grew scant toward midwinter, Job rejoiced in his heart, but by no means made haste to replenish it. He just laid aside the money needed for the spring

outfit, and lived on what remained. Thus it went year after year. Trade was sometimes a little better, sometimes a little worse, but whichever way it was, Job grew no richer. He and his old wife lived along somehow without coming on the parish for support, and with this very moderate amount of prosperity they were content.

This year of which I write, the supply of winter stockings had given out earlier than usual. The weather had been uncommonly cold since October, which may have been the reason. Certain it is, that here at Michaelmas, with December not yet come in, only three pairs of stockings were left in the little shop. Job Tuke had told his wife only the week before that he almost thought he should be forced to lay in a few dozen more, folks seemed so eager to get 'em. But since he said that, no one had asked for stockings, as it happened, and Job thinking that trade was, after all, pretty well over for the season, had given up the idea of replenishing his stock.

One of the three pairs of stockings was a big pair of dark mixed gray. One pair, a little


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smaller, was white, and the third, smaller still and dark blue in color, was about the size for a child of seven or eight years old.

Job Tuke had put up the shutters for the night and had gone to bed. The stockings were talking together in the quiet darkness, as stockings will when left alone. One pair had been hung in the window.

It had got down from its nail, and was now straddling carelessly with one leg on either side of the edge of the box in which the others lay, as a boy might on the top of a stile. This was the big gray pair.

"Our chances seem to be getting slim," he said gloomily.

"That is more than you seem," replied the White Stockings, in a tart voice. "Your ankles are as thick as ever, and your mesh looks to me coarser than usual to-night."

"There are worse things in the world than thickness," retorted the Gray Stockings angrily. "I'm useful, at any rate, I am, while you have no wear in you. I should say that you would

come to darning about the second wash, if not sooner."

"Is that my fault?" said the White Pair, beginning to cry.

"No; it's your misfortune. But people as unfortunate as you are should mind their P's and Q's, and not say disagreeable things to those who are better off."

"Pray don't quarrel," put in the Little Blues, who were always peacemakers. "Think of our situation, the last survivors of twelve dozen! we ought to be friends. But, as you say, matters *are* getting serious with us. Of course we are all thinking about the same thing."

"Yes; about the Christmas, and the chimney corner," sighed the White Pair. "What a dreadful thing it would be if we went to the rag-bag never having held a Christmas gift. I could not get over such a disgrace. My father, my grandfather — all my relations had their chance — some of them were even hung a second time!"

"Yes; Christmas is woven into our very substance," said the Gray Stockings. "The old

skeins and the ravellings tell the story to the new wool, the story of the Christmas time. The very sheep in the fields know it. For my part," he added proudly, "I should blush to lie in the same ash-heap even with an odd stocking who had died under the disgrace of never being hung up for Christmas, and I will never believe that my life-long dream is to be disappointed!"

"Why will you use such inflated language?" snapped the White Pair. "You were only woven last July. As late as May you were running round the meadow on a sheep's back."

"Very well; I don't dispute it. I may not be as old as Methuselah, but long or short, my life is my life, and my dream is my dream, and you have no call to criticize my expressions, Miss!" thunders the Big Pair.

"There you are again," said the Little Blues. "I *do* wish you wouldn't dispute. Now let us talk about our chances. What day of the month is it?"

"The twenty-seventh of November," said the Gray Stockings, who, because they hung over the

penny papers in the window, always knew the exact date.

"Little more than four weeks to the holidays," said the White Pair dolorously. "How I wish some one would come along and put us out of suspense."

"Being bought mightn't do that," suggested the Little Blues. "You might be taken by a person who had two pairs of stockings, and the others might be chosen to be hung up. Such things do happen."

"Oh, they wouldn't happen to me, I think," said the White Pair vain-gloriously.

As it happened, the three pairs of stockings were all sold the very day after this conversation, and all to one and the same person. This was Mrs. Wendte, an Englishwoman married to a Dutch shipwright. She had lived in Holland for some years after her marriage, but now she and her husband lived in London. They had three children.

The stockings were very much pleased to be bought. When Job Tuke rolled them up in paper

and tied a stout packthread round them, they nestled close, and squeezed each other with satisfaction. Beside, the joy of being sold, was the joy of keeping together and knowing about each other's adventures.

The first of these adventures was not very exciting. It consisted in being laid away in the back part of a bureau drawer, and carefully locked in.

"Now what is this for?" questioned the White Stockings. "Are we to stay here always?"

"Yes; that is just what I should like to know," grumbled the Big Gray ones.

"Why, of course not! Who ever heard of stockings being put away for always?" said the very wise Little Blues. "Wait patiently and we shall see. I think it is some sort of a surprise."

"But day after day passed and nothing happened, surprising or otherwise, till even the philosophical Little Blue Stockings began to lose heart and hope. At last, one evening they heard the key click in the lock of the drawer, a stream

of light flashed into their darkness, and they were seized and drawn forth.

"Well, mother, let us see thy purchase. Truly fine hosen they are," said Jacob Wendte, whose English was rather foreign.

"Yes," replied his wife. "Good, handsome stockings they are, and the children will be glad, for their old ones are about worn out. The big pair is for Wilhelm, as thou knowest. Those must hang to the right of the stove."

The Big Gray Pair cast a triumphant glance at his companions as he found himself suspended on a stout nail. This *was* something like life!

"The white are for Greta, and these small ones for little Jan. Ah, they are nice gifts indeed!" said Mrs. Wendte, rubbing her hands. "A fine Christmas they will be for the children."

The stockings glowed with pleasure. Not only were they hung up to contain presents, but they themselves were Christmas gifts! This was promotion indeed.

"Hast thou naught else?" demanded Jacob Wendte of his wife.

"No great things; a kerchief for Greta, this comforter for Wilhelm, for the little one, mittens. That is all."

But it was not quite all, for after her husband had gone to bed, Mrs. Wendte, a tender look on her motherly face, sought out a small, screwed-up paper, and with the air of one who is a little ashamed of what she is doing, dropped into each stocking a something made of sugar. They were not sugar almonds, they were not Salem Gibraltars — which delightful confections are unfamiliar to London shops — but irregular lumps of a nondescript character, which were crumbly and sweet, and would be sure to please those who did not often get a taste of candy. It was of little Jan that his mother had thought when she bought the sweetmeats, and for his sake she had yielded to the temptation, though she looked upon it as an extravagance. There were three of the sweetmeats — two white, one pink — and the pink one went into Jan's stockings. Mrs. Wendte had not said anything about them to her husband.

"Well, this is satisfactory," said the Gray

Pair, when Mrs. Wendte had left the room, and he was sure of not being overheard. "Here we are all hanging together on Christmas Eve. My dream is accomplished."

"Mine isn't," said the White Pair plaintively. "I always hoped that I should hold something valuable, like a watch, or a pair of earrings. It is rather a come-down to have nothing but a bit of candy inside, and a pocket handkerchief pinned to my leg. I don't half like it. It gives me an uncomfortable pricking sensation, like a stitch in the side."

"It's just as well for you to get used to it," put in the Gray. "It doesn't prick as much as a darning needle, I fancy, and you'll have to get accustomed to that before long, as I've remarked before."

"I'm the only one who has a pink sweetmeat," said the Little Blues, who couldn't help being pleased. "And I'm for a real child. Wilhelm and Greta are more than half grown up."

"Real children are very hard on their stockings, I've always heard," retorted the White Pair,

who never could resist the temptation to say a disagreeable thing.

"That may be, but it is all in the future. This one night is my own, and I mean to enjoy it," replied the contented Little Blue.

So the night went, and now it was the dawn of Christmas. With the first light the door opened softly and a little boy crept into the room. This was Jan. When he saw the three pairs of stockings hanging by the stove, he clapped his hands together, but softly, lest the noise should wake the others. Then he crossed the room on tiptoe and looked hard at the stockings. He soon made sure which pair was for himself, but he did not take them down immediately; only stood with his hands behind his back and gazed at them with two large, pleased eyes.

At last he put his hand up and gently touched the three, felt the little blue pair, gave it a pat, and finally unhooked it from its nail. Then he sat down on the floor, and began to put them on. His toe encountering an obstacle, he pulled the stocking off again, put his hand in, and extracted the

pink sweetmeat, with which he was so pleased that he laughed aloud. That woke up the others, who presently came in.

"Ah, little rogue that thou art! Always the first to waken," said his mother, pleased at his pleasure.

"See, mother! see what I found!" he cried. "It is good—sweet! I have tasted a crumb already. Take some of it, mother."

But Mrs. Wendte shook her head.

"No," she said. "I do not care for sugar. That is for little folks like thee. Eat it thyself, Jan."

It was her saying this, perhaps, which prevented Wilhelm and Greta from making the same offer—at least, I hope so. Certain it is that neither of them made it. Greta ate hers up on the spot, with the frank greediness of a girl of twelve who does not often get candy. Wilhelm buttoned his up in his trousers pocket. All three made haste to put on the new stockings. The three pairs had only time to hastily whisper as they were separated:

"To-night perhaps we may meet again."


GRETA
© Edmund H. Garrett

The pink sweetmeat went into the pocket of Jan's jacket, and he carried it about with him all the morning. He did not eat it, because once eaten it would be gone, and it was a greater pleasure to have it to look forward to, than to enjoy it at the moment. Jan was a thrifty little boy, as you perceive.

Being Christmas, it was of course an idle day. Jacob Wendte never knew what to do with such. There was his pipe, and there was beer to be had, so in default of other occupation, he amused himself with these. Mrs. Wendte had her hands full with the dinner, and was frying sausages and mixing Yorkshire pudding all the morning. Only Greta went to church. She belonged to a parish-school where they gave Christmas prizes, and by no means intended to lose her chance; but, apart from that, she really loved church-going, for she spoke English and understood it better than either of the other children. Wilhelm went off on errands of his own.

Little Jan spent the morning in admiring his stockings, and in wrapping and unwrapping his

precious sweetmeat, and taking it out of his pocket and putting it in again.

"Why dost thou not eat it, dear?" asked his mother, as she lifted the frying-pan from the stove.

But he answered: "Oh! not yet. When once it is eaten, it is over. I will wait."

"How long wilt thou wait?" she asked.

Jan said bashfully: "I don't know."

In truth, he had not made up his mind about the sweetmeat, only he felt instinctively that he did not want to hurry and shorten his pleasure.

Dinner over, he went out for a walk. Every now and then, as he marched along, his hand would steal into his pocket to finger his precious candy and make sure that it was safe.

It was a gray afternoon, but not snowing or raining. Hyde Park was not too far away for a walk, and Jan went there. The Serpentine was skimmed over with ice just strong enough to bear boys, and quite a little crowd was sliding or skating upon it. Jan could skate very well. He had learned in Holland, but he made no attempt to join the crowd. He was rather shy of English

boys, for they sometimes laughed at his Hollander clothes or his Dutch accent, and he did not like to be laughed at.

So he strolled away, past the Serpentine and the skaters, and watched the riders in the Row for awhile. There were not a great many, for people who ride are apt to be out of London at the Christmas time; but there were some pretty horses, and one fair little girl on a pony who took Jan's fancy very much. He stood for a long time watching her trot up and down, and the idea occurred to him that he would like to give her his sweetmeat. He even put his hand into his pocket and half pulled it out, but the little girl did not look his way, and presently her father, with whom she was riding, spoke to her, and she turned her horse's head and trotted off through the marble arch. Jan dropped the sugar-plum again into his pocket, and felt as if his sudden fancy had been absurd; and indeed I think the little girl would have been surprised and puzzled what to do had he carried out the intention.

After the pony and his little mistress had de-

parted, Jan lost his interest in the riders, and walked away across the park. Once he stopped to look at a dear little dog with a blue collar, who seemed to have lost his master, for he was wandering about by himself, and smelling everybody and everything he met, as if to recover a lost trail. Jan called him. He came up in a very friendly way and allowed himself to be patted, and once more the sweetmeat was in danger, for Jan had taken it out with the intention of dividing it with this new friend, when a whistle was heard which the little dog evidently recognized, and he darted off at once to join his master. So again the pink sweetmeat was put back into Jan's pocket, and he walked on.

He had gone quite a distance when he saw a number of people collected round the foot of a tree. A ladder was set against one of the lower branches, and a man had climbed up nearly to the top of the tree. Jan, like a true boy, lost no time in joining the crowd, but at first he could not make out what was going on. The boughs were thick. All that he could see was the man's back

high up overhead, and what he was doing he could not guess.

A benevolent-looking old gentleman stood near and Jan heard him exclaim with great excitement.

"There, he's got him! No, he's not; but it was a close shave!"

"Got what, sir?" he ventured to ask.

"Why, the rook, to be sure."

Then, seeing that Jan still looked puzzled, he took the trouble to explain.

"You see that rook up there, my lad, don't you?" Jan had not seen any rook at all! "Well, it is caught in some way, how, I can't tell you, but it can't get away from the tree. It has been there three days, they say, and all that time the other rooks have brought food to it, and kept it from starving. Now some one has gone up to see what is the difficulty, and, if possible, to set the poor thing free."

"Thank you, sir," said Jan.

And the old gentleman looked at him kindly, and said to himself:

"A very civil, tidy little lad! I like his face."

Jan had now become deeply interested in what was going on. He stood on tiptoe, and stretched his neck; but all he could see was the man's back and one of his feet, and now and then the movement of a stick with which the man seemed to be trying to hit something. At last there was a great plunge and a rustling of branches, and people began to hurrah. Jan hurrahed too, though he still saw nothing very clearly; but it is easier to shout when other boys shout, if you happen to be a boy, than it is to keep still.

Slowly the man in the tree began to come down. He had only one hand to help himself with now, for the other held the heavy rook. We in America do not know what rooks are like, but in England they are common enough. They are large black birds, something like our crows, but they look wiser, and are a good deal bigger.

As the man neared the ground every one in the crowd could see what had been the matter with the rook. A kite-string caught among the tree branches, had tangled his legs and held him fast. He had pulled so hard in his efforts to escape that

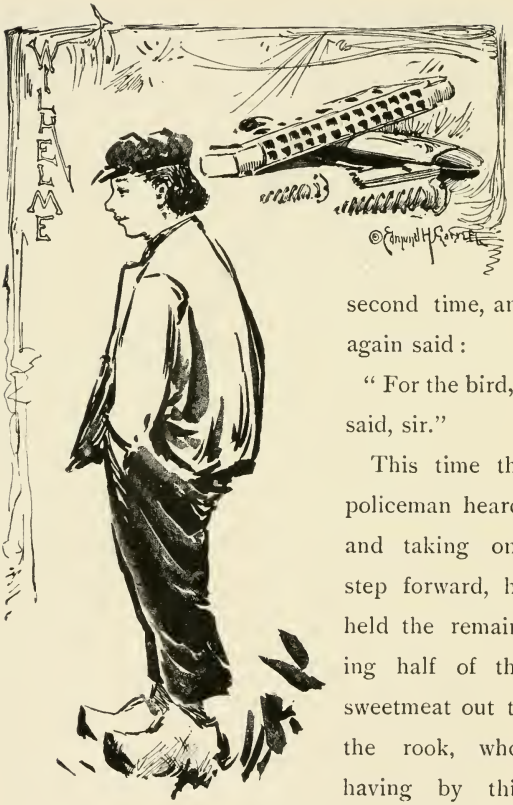
the string had cut into one of his legs and half broken it. It was stiff and bleeding, and the rook could neither fly nor hop. People searched in their pockets, and one little girl, who had a half biscuit, fed the rook, who, for all the kindly efforts of his friends, seemed to be half-famished. The poor thing was too weak to struggle or be frightened, and took the crumbs eagerly from the girl's hand.

Jan thought of his sweetmeat, and took it out for the third time. Everybody was crowding round the man who held the rook, and he could not get near. A tall policeman stood in front of him. Jan pulled his arm, and when he turned, handed him the sweetmeat, and said in his soft, foreign English :

"For the bird, sir."

"Thank you my dear," said the policeman.

He had not understood what Jan said, and in an abstracted way, with his eyes still fixed on the rook, he bit the pink sweetmeat in two, and swallowed half of it at a mouthful. Fortunately Jan did not see this, for the policeman's back was turned to him ; but observing that the man made no attempt to go forward, he pulled his sleeve for the



second time, and again said:

"For the bird, I said, sir."

This time the policeman heard, and taking one step forward, he held the remaining half of the sweetmeat out to the rook, who, having by this time grown used to being fed, took the offered dainty greedily. Jan saw the last pink crumb vanish into the long

beak, but he felt no regret. His heart had been touched by the suffering of the poor bird, and he was glad to give what he could to make it forget those painful days in the tree.

So that was the end of the pink sweetmeat, or not quite the end. The kind old gentleman to whom Jan had spoken, had noticed the little transaction with the policeman. He was shrewd as well as kind.

He guessed by Jan's clothes that he was a working-man's son, to whom sweets were not an everyday affair, and the generous act pleased him. So he put his hand into *his* pocket, pulled out a half-crown, and watching his opportunity, dropped it into Jan's pocket, quite empty now that the sweetmeat was gone. Then, with a little chuckle, he walked away, and Jan had no suspicion of what had been done to him.

Gradually the crowd dispersed, Jan among the rest walking briskly, for he wanted to get home and tell his mother the story. It was not till after supper that he discovered the half-crown, and then it seemed to him like a sort of dream, as if fairies

had been at work, and turned the pink sweetmeat into a bit of silver.

That night the three pairs of stockings had another chance for conversation. The blue ones and the green ones lay close together on the floor of the room where Jan slept with his brother, and the white ones which Greta had carelessly dropped as she jumped into bed, were near enough the half-opened door to talk across the sill.

"It has been an exciting day," said the White Pair. "My girl got a Keble's *Christian Year* at her school. It was the second-best prize. It is a good thing to belong to respectable people who take prizes. Only one thing was painful to me, she wriggled her toes so with pleasure that I feel as if I were coming to an end in one of my points."

"You probably are," remarked the Big Gray. "Yes, now that I examine, I can see the place. One stitch has parted already, and there is quite a thin spot. You know I always predicted that you would be in the rag-bag before you knew it."

"Oh, don't say such dreadful things," pleaded the Little Blues. Mrs. Wendte will mend her, I am

sure, and make her last. What did your girl do with her sweetmeat?"

"Ate it up directly, of course. What else should one do with a sweetmeat?" snapped the White Pair crossly. "Oh, dear! my toe feels dreadfully ever since you said that; quite neuralgic!"

"My boy was not so foolish as to eat his sweetmeat," said the Big Gray stockings. "Only girls act in that way, without regard to anything but their greedy appetites. He traded his with another boy, and he got a pocket-knife for it, three screws, and a harmonica. There!"

"Was the knife new?" asked the Blue.

"Could the harmonica play any music?" demanded the White.

"No; the harmonica is out of order inside somehow, but perhaps my boy can mend it. And the knife isn't new — quite old, in fact — and its blade is broken at the end; still it's a knife, and Wilhelm thinks he can trade it off for something else. And now for your adventures. What did *your* boy do with his sweetmeat, Little Blues? Did he eat it, or trade it?"

"It is eaten," replied the Blue Stockings cautiously.

"Eaten! Then of course he ate it. Why don't you speak out? If he ate it, say so. If he didn't, who did?"

"Well, nobody ate the whole of it, and my boy didn't eat any. It was divided between two persons — or rather, between one person and — and — a thing that is not a person."

"Bless me! What are you talking about? I never heard anything so absurd in my life. Persons, and things that are not persons," said the White Pair, "what do you mean?"

"Yes; what *do* you mean? What is the use of beating about the bush in this way?" remonstrated the Big Gray Pair. "Who did eat the sweetmeat? Say plainly."

"Half of it was eaten by a policeman, and the other half by a rook," replied the Little Blues, in a meek voice.

"Ho, ho!" roared the Gray Stockings, while the White Pair joined in with a shrill giggle. "That beats all! Half by a policeman, and half

by a rook! A fine way to dispose of a Christmas sweetmeat! Your boy must be a fool, Little Blues."

"Not a fool at all," said the Blue Pair indignantly. "Now just listen to me. Your girl ate hers up at once, and forgot it. Your boy traded his away; and what has he got? A broken knife, and a harmonica that can't play music. I don't call those worth having. My boy enjoyed his sweetmeat all day. He had more pleasure in giving it away than if he had eaten it ten times over! Beside he got half a crown for it. An old gentleman slipped it into his pocket because he was pleased with his kind heart. I saw him do it."

"Half a crown!" ejaculated the White Pair, with amazement.

"That *is* something like," admitted the Big Gray Stockings. "Your boy did the best of the three, I admit."

The Little Blues said no more.

Presently the others fell asleep, but she lay and watched Jan as he rested peacefully beside his brother, with his wonderful treasure — the silver

coin — clasped tight in his hand. He smiled in his sleep as though his dreams were pleasant.

"Even if he had no half-crown, still he would have done the best," she whispered to herself at last.

Then the clock struck twelve, and the day after Christmas was begun.

THE WHIZZER.

THAT was a cold evening. The snow was just as dry as flour, and had been beat down till the road looked slick as a ribbon far up and far down, and squeaked every step. I pulled Mrar on our sled. All the boys went home by the crick to skate, but I was 'fraid Mrar would get cold, she's such a little thing. I like to play with the girls if the boys do laugh, for some of the big ones might push Mrar down and hurt her. She misses her mother so I babies her more than I used to.

We's almost out of sight of the schoolhouse, and just where the road elbows by the Widow Briggs's place, when something passed us like whiz! I'd been pulling along with the sled rope over my arm, and my hands in my pockets, and didn't hear a team or anything, but it made me

shy off the side of the road, and pretty near upset Mrar. School lets out at four o'clock, and dusk comes soon after that, but it was woolly gray yet, so you could see plain except in the fence corners, and the thing that passed us was a man riding on nothing but one big wheel.

"O, see there!" says Mrar, scared as could be. I felt glad on her account we's close to Widow Briggs's place. It would be easy to hustle her over Briggs's fence; but the thing run so still and fast it might take fences as well as a straight road.

The man turned round after he passed us, and came rearing back, away up on that wheel, and I stood as close before the sled as I could. He sat high up in the air, and wiggled his feet on each side of the wheel, and I never saw a camel or elephant, or any kind of wild thing at a show that made me feel so funny. But just when I thought he's going to cut through us, he turned short, and stopped. He had on an overcoat to his ears, and a fur cap down to his nose, and hairy gloves on, and a little satchel strapped over his shoulder, and I saw there was a real small wheel behind the big

one that balanced him up. He wasn't sitting on the tire neither, but on a saddle place, and the big wheel had lots of silver spokes crossing back and forward.

"Whose children are you?" says the man.

"Nobody's," says I.

"But who owns and switches you?" says he.

"The schoolmaster switches me," says I; "but we ain't owned since mother died."

Mrar begun to cry.

"We live at uncle Mozy's," says she. "They don't want to give us away."

The man laughed, and says: "Are you right sure?" But I hated to have her scared, so I told her the wheel couldn't hurt her, nor him neither.

"I've seen the cars many a time," I says, "and I've seen balloons, and read in the paper about things that went on three wheels, but this"—

"It's a bicycle," says he. "I'm a wheel-man."

"That's what I thought," says I.

Then he wanted to know our names.

"Mine's Steele Pedicord," I says, "and this is my little sister Mrar."

His eyes looked sharp at us and he says :

"Your mother died about six weeks ago?"

"Yes, sir," says I.

"To-morrow won't be a very nice Christmas for you," says he.

"No, sir," says I, digging my heel in the snow, for he had no business to talk that way, and make Mrar feel bad, when I had a little wagon all whittled out in my pocket to give her, and she cried most every night, anyhow, until aunt Ibby threatened to switch her if she waked the family any more. I slept with the boys, but when I heard Mrar sniffling in the big bed, a good many nights I slipped out and sat by her and whispered stories to take her attention as long as my jaws worked limber; but when they chattered too much with the cold, I'd lay down on the cover, with my arm across her till she went to sleep. I like Mrar.

"They said we might go up to cousin Andy Sanders's to stay over," says I. "We don't have to be at uncle Moze's a Christmas."

"That's some consolation, is it?" says he.

I was not going to let him know what the rela-

tions did, but I never liked relations outside of our place. At aunt Ibby and uncle Moze's the children fight like cats. And they always act poor at Christmas, and make fun of hanging your stocking or setting your plate; for you'd only get ashes or corn-cobs. Aunt Ibby keeps her sleeves rolled up so she can slap real handy, and uncle Moze has yellow streaks in his eyes, and he shivers over the stove, and keeps everybody else back. At cousin Andy Sanders' they have no children, and don't want them. You durse hardly come in out of the snow, and all the best things on the table will make you sick. If there is a piece in the paper that is hard to read, and ugly as it can be, they will make you sit still and read it; and if you get done too quick, they will say you skipped, and you have to read it out loud while they find fault. I knew cousin Andy Sanders never had any candy or taffy for Christmas, but Mrar and me could be peaceable there, for they don't push her around so bad.

"Well, hand me your rope," says the man, "and I'll give you a ride."

I liked that notion; so I handed him the rope, and he waited till I got on the sled in front of Mrar.

"That's Widow Briggs's homestead; isn't it?" he said, just before he started.

I told him it was, and asked if he ever lived down our way. He laughed, and said he knew something about every place; and then he set the wheel a-going. Mrar held tight to me, and I braced my heels against the front round of the sled. The fence corners went faster and faster, and the wind whistled through our ears, while you could not see one dry blade in the fodder shocks move.

"Ain't he a Whizzer?" says I to Mrar.

We turned another jog, and the spokes in the wheel looked all smeared together. It did beat horse-racing. I got excited, and hollered for him to "Go it, old Whizzer!" and he went it till we's past cousin Andy Sanders's before I knew the place was nigh.

"Cast loose, now, Mister, we're much obliged," says I.

But he kept right on like he never heard me.

So I yelled up louder and told him we's there, and he turned around his head a minute, and laughed.

"Please let go, Mister," I says. "That's cousin Andy Sanders's away back there. We're obliged, but we'll have to go back."

The Whizzer never let on. He whizzed ahead as fast as ever. I thought it was a mean trick for him to play on Mrar, and wished I could trip up his wheel. It would be dark long before I got her back to cousin Andy Sanders's; and the Whizzer whizzed ahead like he was running off with us.

I had a notion to cut the rope, but there was no telling when I'd get another, and it was new. I made up my mind to do it, though, when we come along by our old place; but there the Whizzer turned round and jumped off in the road.

I picked up the end of my rope, and shook my head, because I was mad.

"Why didn't you let go?" says I.

"Haven't I brought you home?" he says.

I looked at the shut-up house, and felt a good deal worse than when I thought he was running off with us.

"O Steeley," says Mrar, "le's go in and stay. I want to come home so bad!"

"Now you see what you done!" says I to the Whizzer. He was man grown, and I's only ten years old, but he ought to knowed better than to made Mrar cry till the tears run down her chin.

I'd been to look at the house myself, but never said a word to her about it. Once at noon I slipped up there by the cornfields roundabout, and sat on the fence and thought about mother till I could hardly stand it. The house looked lonesomer than an old cabin about to fall; because an old cabin about to fall has forgot its folks, but all our things were locked up here, except what aunt Ibby and cousin Andy Sanders had carried off. Our sale was to be in January. The snow was knee-deep in the yard, and drifted even on the porch, but tracks showed where aunt Ibby walked when she got out a load of provisions and bedclothes. She had the front door key, and took even the blue-and-white coverlid with birds wove in, that I heard mother say was to be Mrar's, and the canned fruit for fear it would freeze, when our

cellar is warmer than their stove. She said to uncle Moze, when I was by unbeknown, that Mrar and me would have ten times as much property as her children, anyhow, and she ought to be paid more for keeping us. She might had our money, for all I cared, but I did not know how to stand her robbing things out of mother's house, and wished the sale would come quick, and scatter them all.

The Whizzer leant his chin on his breast and looked pitiful out of his eyes at Mrar, for seemed like the tears had a notion to freeze on her face, only she kept them running down too fast; and he says:

"Let's go into the house."

"Oh, do, Steeley!" says Mrar, hugging my knee, for I was alongside the sled. "And I'll cook all your dinners. And we'll hang up our Christmas stockings every Sunday," says she, "and aunt Ibby's boys won't durse to take away my lead pencil mother give me, and if you see them coming here, you'll set Bounce on them."

"Mrar," says I, "we will go in and make a fire

and act like mother's just gone out to a neighbor's."

Then she begun to laugh, and one of her tears stuck to an in-spot that comes and goes in her face like it was dented with your finger.

"But now you mind," I says, "if aunt Ibby or uncle Moze goes to whip us for this, you tell them I put you up to it and made you go along with me."

Mrar looked scared.

"And you tell them," says the Whizzer, lifting his wheel across the snow toward the gate, "that I put you both up to it and made you go along with me."

I pulled Mrar over the drifts, and we went to the side door.

"Aunt Ibby's got the big key," I says, "and I'll have to raise a window while you wait here."

The windows were all locked down, but we went round and round till the one in the shed give way, and I crawled through and bursted the latch off the kitchen door. I breathed so fast it made my heart thump when I unlocked the side door and let

the Whizzer and Mrar into the sitting-room. I noticed then he'd hung his wheel on the limb of a tree, for it glittered.

"Bounce ain't here to jump on us, is he, Mrar?" says I.

"No; and he hates to stay at cousin Andy Sanders's," says she.

Bounce would come to the schoolhouse and kind of cry till I asked the master, "Please may I go out?" And then Bounce and me'd have a talk behind the schoolhouse, and I'd tell him I could not help it, and he'd own that he might live at aunt Ibby's with us if he could only keep from chawing up their miserable yellow dogs; and we'd both feel better.

But I did miss him that minute I opened the door, when here he come like a house a-fire, and lit down on the floor panting and pounding his tail and laughing; and then he jumped up and pawed us in the dark till Mrar had to hold him round the neck to keep him still while I got a light. He must snuffed our tracks when we whizzed past cousin Andy Sanders's.

I felt to the pantry and put my hand in the candle box, but aunt Ibby never left one. I knew there's a piece in a candlestick in the shed cupboard, though. It burnt half out the night mother died. So I got it, and the Whizzer scraped a match, and lit the wick. The Whizzer and me set to, then, and brought in loads from the woodhouse. We built a fire clear up into the chimney, and Mrar took the broom, and swept all the dust into it. Bounce laid on the carpet and licked at us, and whacked his tail till we's in a broad laugh.

The fire got me warmer than I'd been since mother died. The Whizzer took out a thick gold watch, and wound our clock and set it. Then he says:

"Let's go over the house."

And we did. I carried the candle, and Mrar and the dog went along.

The Whizzer looked in all the up-stairs presses, and opened the bureau drawers. I staid outside of the parlor, and Mrar and Bounce did too. I did not want to think of the sheet stretched in the corner, for it was not like mother under the sheet.

But her picture hung up in there, and so did my father's.

The Whizzer staid in with the candle a good while. I heard him going from one thing to another, and wondered what he was about. I'd rather gone out to the graveyard, though, and set on the fence watching mother's and father's graves, and heard the dry sumac bushes scrape together, than to stepped into the parlor. Father died a year before mother, but I didn't like him the same as I did her.

Then we looked down cellar; and I thought I ought to tell the Whizzer about the provisions and bedclothes being taken out of the house, or he'd suppose mother never kept us nice. He smiled under his cap; and I found one jar of cand'ed honey behind some bar'ls where aunt Ibby overlooked it. We carried that up to the sitting-room. Mrar likes cand'ed honey better than anything.

Just as we come into the sitting-room, I heard somebody pound on the front door.

"They're after us!" says Mrar.

"Let me see to it," says the Whizzer.

So he stepped around the house, and came back with his wheel on his arm, and held the door open. The snow made out-doors light; and we saw a little fellow lead a horse and buggy through the yard into the barn lot, and he came right in, carrying a couple of baskets.

"All right, Sam," says the Whizzer. "Put your horse in the stable, and then build a fire in the kitchen stove."

The man he called Sam stopped to warm himself at our hearth, and I never saw such a looking creature before. He had a cap with a button on top of his head, and his hair was braided in a long tail behind. He laughed, and his eyes glittered; and they sloped up like a ladder set against the house. He was just as yellow as brass, and wore a cloth circular with big sleeves, but the rest of him looked like other folks. Mrar went back into the corner, and I noticed the Whizzer set his wheel against the wall, and I wondered if he'd left it out for a sign so the little yellow man would know where to stop.

The yellow man went out to his horse, and the

Whizzer took off his cap and gloves and coat, and hung them in the sitting-room closet. He looked nice. His eyes snapped, and his hair was cut off close, except a brush right along the middle of his head. We set our chairs up to the fire, and I watched him and watched him.

"If you and that fellow travel together," I says, "what makes him go in a buggy, and you on a wheel?"

"Oh, I like the bicycle," says he. "I've run thousands of miles on it. I sent Sam out from San Francisco by the railroad, but I came through on the wheel. It took me three months."

I thought he was a funny man, but I liked him, too.

When Sam came in from the stable, Mar and I went to the kitchen and saw him cook supper. For one of the baskets was jam-full of vittles. He heated a roasted turkey, and made oyster soup and mashed potatoes and chopped cabbage. There were preserves the Whizzer called Scotch, and hot rolls, and jelly, and cold chicken, and little round cakes that melted in your mouth, and pickles, and

nuts, and oranges; and we put the cand'ed honey on the table. The coffee smelt like Thanksgiving. Sam waited on us, and I eat till I's ashamed. We never expected to have such a dinner in mother's house any more.

When Mrar and I got down and begun to toss our oranges, the Whizzer told Sam to clear the things away and have his supper in the kitchen, and then to fix the beds as comfortable as he could. I'd made up my mind even if the Whizzer did travel ahead that Mrar and m'd stay there all night. Aunt Ibby's would think we were at cousin Andy Sanders's, and cousin Andy Sanders's would think we were at aunt Ibby's.

He sat in mother's big chair before the fire and I felt willing. If it had been uncle Moze in the chair I wouldn't felt willing. When a stick broke on the dog-irons we piled on more wood, and the clock ticked and struck nine, and I wished we's never going away from there again. Mrar and I played and jumped, and he was blind man, and we had solid fun till we's tired out. I showed him my books, for I never took one to uncle

Moze's. The boys there make you give up everything, and they lick their dirty thumbs to turn leaves.

Mrar and I stood and looked into the glass doors of the bookcase like we used to when the fire made them like a looking-glass, and there were our faces, hers round and wide between the eyes, and curly-headed; and mine long, and narrow between the eyes, and my hair in a black roach.

I told the Whizzer she better have a bed made down by the fire, considering the blankets and comforts were most all out a-visiting, and he guessed so, too; and Sam helped me bring lots of quilts and a feather tick from my old room to fix up the lounge with. Sam went into the kitchen and slept by the stove.

Then I undressed Mrar, and heard her prayers after I tucked her in. She's six years old, and dressed herself before mother died, all but hooking up. I hooked her up, and sometimes she'd swell out for mischief when she ought to swell in. But now I tended to her entirely because she missed

her mother. The Whizzer acted like he saw something in the fire, but when Mrar was asleep and I sat down by him, he pushed up my roach, and he says:

"You're a very fatherly little fellow, Steele Pedicord."

It put me in mind to ask him if he's Sam's father, but he laughed out loud at the notion.

"Sam's smaller than you and he minds so well," says I. "And I never saw a man that was so handy at girl's work."

"Sam is an excellent fellow," says the Whizzer, "but I don't deserve to have a Chinaman called my son."

"Oh!" I says. "Is he a Chinaman? Well, I've read about them, but I never saw one before."

Then I concluded to ask the Whizzer what his own name was. But just then he got up from his chair and brought the other basket to the fire.

"Do you know who Santa Claus is?" he says, talking low.

"I found that out two years ago," says I.

"Well, get her little stockings, then," he says.

"I thought you'd like to do this yourself," says the Whizzer. He acted just like mother.

We took the things out of the basket. There were toy sheep and dogs, and dolls and tubs and dishes, and underneath them all kinds of candies, enough to treat a school. I felt like the Whizzer was Santa Claus. We stuffed her little stockings till they stood alone, like kegs, and tied bundles to them, and fastened them together and hung them on the mantel-piece. Bounce'd wake up and watch us, and then he'd doze off, for Bounce was fuller of turkey-bones than he ever expected to be again; and Mrar slept away, looking like a doll in the fireshine.

But all at once Bounce gave a jump and a bark. Back went the door like the wind had tore it open, and there stood uncle Moze, and aunt Ibby, and cousin Andy Sanders, and the Widow Briggs's grown son, and two or three men behind them. They all looked scared or mad, and aunt Ibby's face was so white that her moles all bristled.

"This is a pretty how-to-do," says she, speaking up loud like she did on wash-days, or times she took a stick and drove the boys to the wood-pile. "What's going on in this house to-night? fires, and candles burning, and travellers putting up, and children running away when they're let go some place else to stay all night! You little sneak," says she, "you'll get one such a whipping as you ached for when your mother was alive."

"Stop, stop," says the Whizzer peaceably.

"What are you doing in this house?" says cousin Andy Sanders. "Are you the man I saw go past my place to-night on that wheel, pulling the children?"

"I am," says the Whizzer, "and I've been making notes of the personal property that has been carried out of the house."

"Well," says uncle Moze, "I'm the constable and this is my posse."

The Whizzer laughed, and he says, "This thornbush is my thornbush, and this dog my dog."

I did not know what he meant and they acted as if they did not either.

"I arrest you," says uncle Moze, "for breaking into a house and disturbing the peace."

"You can't do it," says the Whizzer.

"Go in and take him," says uncle Moze to the other men.

"Because this is my house," says the Whizzer.

I swallowed my breath when he said that.

"I wish you'd shut the door," he says; "and since to-morrow is Christmas, and I don't want to harbor any ill-will, you can shut it behind instead of in front of you. I'm Steele Pedicord, this boy's father as you might all know by looking at me."

Even cousin Andy Sanders didn't jump any more than I did, but I jumped for gladness, and seemed like he jumped for something else.

"I'm appointed guerdeen to the children," he says, "and I don't want any impudent talk from a stranger."

"You pretend you don't know me, Andy Sanders," says the Whizzer, "but I always knew you. You expected to settle on their land, while Moze and his wife pillaged their goods. I didn't grow up with you for nothing."

"Steele Pedicord died when that boy was a year old," says aunt Ibby, and she looked so awful and so big I could hardly bear to watch her. "He was killed by the Indians on his way from Californy, after he sent his money home."

"He was only kept prisoner by the Indians," says my father, "and sick and ill-used. But he had no notion he was dead till he got away after a few years, and heard his widow was married again, and even mother to another child."

"It's a likely story," says cousin Andy Sanders, "that a man wouldn't come forward and claim his own in such a case."

"Your notion of a man and mine never did agree, Andy Sanders," says my father. "She wasn't to blame, and her second husband was my best friend. The boy and girl are mine now."

"It's some robbing scheme," says aunt Ibby, but she looked as if she knew him well enough.

"I've more to give them than you could have taken from them," he says, "and you may begin to investigate to-night. Is that the Widow Briggs's boy?" he says.

The Briggs boy came up and shook hands with him, and the other men stepped in and shook hands, too. They all begun to talk. But uncle Moze, and aunt Ibby, and cousin Andy Sanders left the door, and I heard them slam the gate.

Mrar slept right along, though the neighbors talked so loud and fast; and I sat down on the lounge at her feet, wondering what she would say Christmas morning when she found out the Whizzer was my own father, that mother thought was dead since I's a year old!

I felt so queer and glad that something in me whizzed like the wheel, and while my father was not looking, and everybody sat up to the fire asking questions, I slipped over and tried to hug it around the cranks that he wiggled with his feet.

You can read pieces about Santa Claus coming on a sledge, but that's nothing to having your own father — that you think is dead and gone — ride up like a regular Whizzer and open the house for Christmas!

THE PATRONCITO'S CHRISTMAS.

DRIVEN downwards by the storm which had raged incessantly for two days about the lofty red ramparts of the Sierra Roja, the black-tail deer, in broken bands, sought refuge in the lower foot hills. Here, also, a light "tracking snow" had fallen, and their trails lay fresh for hunters' following.

Cherokee Sam had been early abroad, long rifle on shoulder, and lank deer hound at heels. Not all for pleasure did the gaunt half-breed slip like a shadow in his hunting moccasons through the cañons clad in pine. Meat was needed in the dirt-roofed cabin in the gulch. And for that matter, bread also, and this, too, despite the fact that the stubble sticking up through the snow in the bottom, marked the site of a harvested corn patch.

The swarthy hunter had indeed planted there; but other hands had gathered the harvest.

Mixed, like his blood, were the half-breed's occupations, and his sinewy hands as often swung the pick and shook the pan, as pointed the rifle. When his company of gold-hunters from the Nacoochee had struck the Sierra, they had scattered through it to prospect for *placer*, and he had then first come upon the gulch, and though it had never panned out even "a color," the charm of its virgin solitude had smitten the half-savage heart of this wanderer after the will-o'-wisp of fortune. Too tangled for trail lay the storm-felled trees, and no man's foot but his own ever trod the gramma grass or brushed the wild cypress bending by the stream. By this, just where the beavers had built their dam, Cherokee Sam had pitched his cabin. Standing by the margin of the silent pool, in close proximity to the uncouth beaver huts, at the first glance its mud-be-daubed exterior might have been taken for the mud palace of the king beaver himself, but for the thin smoke that slowly melting into air marked the abode of

fire-making man. In the rich "bottom" near, the half-breed, with provident mind for "ash-cakes," and "fatty bread," had planted a corn patch, and at evening as he came over the hill above, returning from his day's hunting, and saw the cabin, and the corn greenly waving, he hailed the spot as home.

But one day as he sat idly before his open door, a little gray *burro* came ambling agilely through the fallen trees, his rider, a dwarfish man of haughty aspect, whose cheeks were wrinkled, and beard grizzled, but whose eyes were as piercing and elf-locks as black as the half-breed's own. Seated on his little long-eared palfrey, he accosted the half-breed and gravely inquired, in tolerable English, if he knew that he was trespassing on the lands of the *patron*, who lived at the plaza, on the plain below.

"No; I don't know nothing about no *patron*," said Cherokee Sam shortly, as he arose and stood towering in giant height above the dwarfish rider of the *burro*.

Bien, then he was sorry to have to tell him, said

the Spanish stranger in suave reply. He was the *mayordomo*, and this was the *patron's* land, and the coyote (half-breed) that killed all the deer must seek some other spot. Far he must go, too, for the *patron's* land was far-reaching, and he pointed with his willow wand to the Sierra rising above, and the plain rolling far away below. On all sides far as the eye could see was the *patron's* land. His it was by virtue of a Spanish grant.

The coyote giant laughed in scorn. "I've heerd of them thar grants. What good are they? Squatters' rights and squatters' rifles rules in this here free country, I reckon. Go back, little Mr. Mexican, to your *patron*, and tell him that here I've took up my homestead, and here I'll stay, and you uns may do your do!"

As he spoke he threw his rifle on his hollowed arm, and looked black thunder from his beetling brow upon the burro-rider. Perhaps had he been less haughty in his defiance, he would have fared better at the *mayordomo's* hands. For when the corn was yellow, and he returned from one of his

periodical prospects to gather it, he found only the bare stubble field awaiting him.

Thus it was that Cherokee Sam, hunter, prospector and squatter, despite his triad of trades, was now at Christmas without a "corn-pone," and this state was likely to continue through the winter.

Returning home at sunset with the legs of a doe tied across his breast, and her slender head, with its big ears trailing behind against the muzzle of the eager hound, the hunter strode from the timber on the slope, and struck the snow from his frozen leggins and moccasons as he paused on the Shut-in. A lofty upheaved ledge of red sandstone was this, which arose from the slopes on either hand, and shut in the gulch from the plain below, leaving only a narrow portal for the passage of the stream.

Above him, as he stood, were the foot-hills, and his wild home all snow-covered and cold in the shadow of the Sierra. But below the snow had not fallen, and the plain shone brown and warm in the lingering light of the setting sun. There, softened by the distance, with a saffron shimmer

about its dark outlines, lay the gray *adobe* plaza, sleeping by the silver stream.

There were gathered corn and oil, the fat of the land; and he would have nothing but the deer on his shoulders for Christmas cheer. A bad gleam came in the half-breed's eyes as he thought of his harried corn-patch, and gazed at the abode of his enemy.

As if in sympathy with his master, the hound put up his bristles, and growled savagely. Looking down, the hunter was astonished to see a small figure standing motionless at the foot of the Shut-in, and gazing up at him.

The stranger was a young boy. He was very richly and somewhat fantastically dressed in a silken jacket, and silken *pantalones*, much be-buttoned about the outer seams, and confined at the waist by a silken sash. On his feet were buckskin *zapatos*, soled with raw-hide, and tied with drawstrings of ribbon, and over his long and flowing hair a white sombrero with gay silk tassels.

This he reverentially removed as the hunter de-

scended, and resting on him his soft black eyes, said :

"Good evening, Señor don San Nicolas. To-night is *Noche Buena* (Christmas eve), and Padre Luis told me you would pass through the Shut-in on your way to the plaza. So I've come to meet you."

His manner was eager and full of trustful confidence. The half-breed was taken aback.

"I don't go by no such name as that," he replied gruffly. "I'm Cherokee Sam, and I live down thar;" and he pointed to the dirt-roofed cabin in the gulch.

"I wanted badly to see the saint," said the stranger, as his face fell; "and I never could when he comes to the plaza, because I'm then always asleep. I'm the *patroncito*, señor."

He had replaced his sombrero, and his air as he declared himself was princely.

Cherokee Sam's face darkened. The young *patron* — the son of his enemy — the despoiler of the corn-patch. Even now they must be seeking him, and here he was in his hands. And there

THE BOY REVERENTIALLY REMOVED HIS SOMBRERO.

was no snow below, and they could find no trail to follow.

"What did you do that for?" asked the *patroncito*, in a tone of authority, as he laid his hand on the ragged bullet-hole behind the doe's shoulder.

"I had to have meat for my Christmas dinner," said Sam. "Come with me, and I will show you that thar Spanish Santy Claus you're huntin' for," he added, and held out his hand.

The *patroncito* placed his own in it promptly. For a moment the giant stayed his stride to the other's puny steps. Then the *patroncito* stopped and said commandingly:

"The snow is deep; take me up!"

Never had the wild hunter known a master; but now, without a word, he stooped and, like another giant St. Christopher, set the child upon his shoulder, and plunged through the drifts for the cabin.

In a moment he had the doe gambrelled to a pine in front of the cabin. Then he pushed open the slab door, and entering, blew up the covered embers in the rough fireplace, and piled on

the pitch pine. As it blazed up, he drew a couple of deerskins from his bed in the corner and flung them down before the fire and bade the *patroncito* be seated.

He obeyed; and the half-breed looked at him with stern satisfaction. Many a long day should it be ere the *patron* saw again his son and heir. But these reflections were disturbed. His guest pointed to his gay *zapatos*.

"Will you please take them off, Don Cherokee Sam?" he said. "My feet are wet and my fingers are numb."

The half-breed knelt and undid the ribbons, and drew them off, and also his long silk stockings.

"*Muchas gracias, Don*," said the *patroncito*, as he reclined at ease and toasted his bare toes before the fire.

His fearlessness pleased his hunter host well. His manner, too, was patronizing, and the half-breed entered into the jest with savage humor.

"If you'll 'scuse me, Mister *Patroncito*, I'll git supper."

He spoke as if this were an operation requiring

great culinary skill and much previous preparation. It consisted in cutting three steaks, with his sheath-knife, from the deer's ham, and placing them with a lump of fat in the frying-pan over the fire. These turned and browned, two tin cups filled with water, and the supper was ready.

The guest took kindly enough to the venison. He tasted the water and paused. "I'll thank you for a cup of hot coffee, Don Cherokee Sam, with plenty of sugar in it, if you please."

Don Cherokee Sam was embarrassed at this polite but luxurious request.

"Coffee's bad," he said, shaking his head. "It spiles my nerve so 's I can't draw a stiddy bead. Water 's best, *patroncito*."

The guest was truly polite. He emptied his cup with the best of grace. But presently he paused again in his consumption of venison.

"Pardon me, but you have forgotten the bread."

The host arose. What could he set before this youthful sybarite from the plaza?

"Bread 's been mighty scarce with me this win-

ter," he muttered. "And I planted a good plenty of corn out thar too."

The recollection roused his rankling resentment, and he paused.

"Why didn't you gather it, then, like the *peones* do?" asked the *patroncito* placidly.

"It was stole," muttered the host; but he checked himself, and added in a softer tone, "by b'ars and other varmints, I reckon."

And with this compromise between anger and truth, Cherokee Sam reached up and took down a small sack hanging to the great centre roof-log. It contained a few nubbins found on the harried field, his seed for next spring.

"*Patroncito*," he remarked in a tone of conciliating confidence, as he shelled an ear in the frying-pan, "thar's nothing like deer meat, and running water, and the free air of heaven, and maybe parched corn oncet in a while, to make a man a man."

Under this encomium the parched corn was partaken of with gravity. And supper being over, the host cleaned up, a simple process, performed by

dashing cold water in the red-hot frying-pan, and hanging it on a nail.

"San Nicolas, you said you'd show him to me," then politely hinted the *patroncito.*

"It's early yet for him," said Cherokee Sam. "He's jist about taking the trail in the Sierra, and the drifts is mighty deep, too. But he'll be here."

"My stockings, Don — they should be ready; and they're wet. Will you oblige me by holding them to the fire?" said the princely *patroncito.*

Cherokee Sam held the damp stockings to the blaze. The *patroncito* watched him sleepily.

"He's a long time coming, Don Cherokee Sam," he murmured, as he nodded — nodded yet again, and slipped down upon the deerskin, fast asleep.

The half-breed lifted him like a feather, and laid him on his bed and drew the covering softly over him. Noiselessly he replenished the fire, and squatted before it, resuming the stocking-drying process.

The resinous boughs burst into flame, and a pungent perfume and a red glow pervaded the smoke-blackened cabin. The light fell on the *pa-*

troncito as he lay on the couch of skins, caressed the slender foot he had thrust from out the covering, and danced on the silver buttons strung on his gay *pantalones*. Over him, like an ogre, hovered the wavering shadow of the giant's head, rendered more grotesque by his towering cap of badger-skin, plumed with a flaunting tail.

As he sat on his heels in the brilliant light, this savage head-covering lent additional fierceness to the half-breed's hatchet-face. Wild-eyed, too, was he as any denizen of his chosen haunts. But stolid in its composure as his saturnine countenance was, it was free from all trace of the petty passions that cramp the souls of his civilized half-brothers. And as he looked at the soft stockings, now dry in his hands, a smile parted his thin lips.

Just then the firelight flared up and went suddenly out, and the threatening shadow on the wall was lost. And though the door never opened, and even the hunter's vigilant ears caught no sound, he felt a presence in the cabin. Looking up, he dreamily beheld, shadowed forth dimly in the gloom, the form of San Nicolas, long belated by

the drifts. But how that Spanish Christmas saint looked, or what he said to remind the half-breed of that hallowed time when all should be peace on earth and good will towards men, must ever remain a secret between him and his lawless host.

The *patroncito* awoke, and through the open doorway saw the snow sparkling in the sun of Christmas morning. Over the fire Cherokee Sam was frying venison, and on either side hung the long silk stockings, filled.

"And I never saw him!" said the *patroncito* reproachfully, as he looked at them. "Oh, why didn't you wake me, Don Cherokee Sam?"

"I didn't dar to do it, *patroncito*," explained Sam. "'Twasn't safe when he told me not to."

He watched the *patroncito* anxiously as he took the stockings down. But he need have had no fear. As their contents rolled out on the deerskin the *patroncito* uttered a cry of delight.

A handful of garnets, bits of broken agate, a shivered topaz, shining cubes of iron pyrites, picked up on otherwise fruitless prospects by San Nicolas; a tanned white weasel-skin purse, and

ornaments of young bucks' prongs, patiently carved by that good saint on winter evenings. Certainly, never before, with all his silk and silver, had the petted *patroncito* received gifts so prized as these.

"Never mind about breakfast," he said imperiously, as he gathered them up. "Take me to the plaza right away."

The half-breed humbly complied. But scarcely had they emerged from the granite gateway of the Shut-in when they were met by a party from the plaza, headed by the *patron* himself, searching, in great trouble, for the wanderer. They had been abroad all night. Happily, Cherokee Sam remembered the admonitions of San Nicolas over night.

"*Patron*," he said, haughtily, as he led the *patroncito* forward, "I bring you a Christmas gift."

Then, as Cherokee Sam afterwards described it, "there was a jabbering and a waving of hands by them thar Mexicans." And he, turning, strode back to his cabin, and his unfinished breakfast. Still his resentment rankled. But it vanished later on that day.

Once more the gray *burro* ambled up the gulch

bearing the dwarfish *mayordomo*, but this time on a mission of peace. After him came a *burrada* (pack-train) well laden, and drew up before the door of the astonished Cherokee Sam. With uncovered head and courtesy profound, the *mayordomo* stood before him and asked would Don Cherokee Sam indicate where he would have the Christmas gifts, sent by the *patroncito*, stored.

"In the cabin," replied Sam, glancing at the loaded *burros* in dismay, "if it will hold 'em. I ain't got nowhars else."

The *mayordomo* waved his wand to the attendant packers, and in a moment the cabin was filled with box, bag, and bale, closely piled. Assuredly Don Cherokee Sam had luxuries of life to last until Christmas came again.

CHERRY PIE.

YET it isn't such a bad house," said little Elsie Perch to herself, as she looked upward at the tall tenement-house in which she lived; "to be sure, there's a good many folks in it—Grandpa 'n Grandma Perch, 'n Grandpa 'n Grandma Finney, 'n uncle John's folks, 'n us — 'n *her* house hasn't got anybody in it but *them* — but it's a good enough house. I ain't going to cry because that little girl that goes to Sunday-school with me has nicer clothes 'n lives in a nicer house. She hasn't got any cherry-tree, anyway!"

Elsie spoke these last words with an air of great triumph, for, sure enough, right in the back yard of Elsie's home stood a great, generous cherry-tree; and though as she looked at it now, in the gray solemnity of a December twilight, she had to use considerable imagination to recall the luscious

red fruit it had borne last summer, and the glossy richness of the green leaves, under whose shade she had been cool and happy when many of her neighbors were sweltering in the August heats; still Elsie was quite equal to it, especially as to-morrow was Christmas day. For there was to be a splendid Christmas dinner at Grandma Perch's, on the lower floor, and uncle John and his family, and Elsie's father and mother, and Grandma and Grandpa Finney were all to be at the dinner. The cherry-pie was always the crowning glory of Christmas dinner with the Perch family. To be sure, it was made of canned cherries; but then, couldn't Grandma Perch can cherries so they tasted just as nice in winter as in summer? And nobody else knew so well just how much sugar to put in, nor how to make such flaky, delicious pie-crust.

All these things occurred pleasantly to Elsie as she ran up and down the walk in her warm hood, and cloak, and mittens. There was a shade of repining, to be sure, as she thought of the velvet clothes, and various other privileges belonging to the "girl who went to Sunday-school;" but this

grew less as she ran, and especially as she looked down to the square below and saw how much more squalid and miserable the houses looked down there, she felt a thankful glow that *her* home was better, and that her papa and uncle John never came home in a cruel, drunken fury like the fathers of the children down there.

"Pretty good times come Christmas!" said Elsie aloud, in a burst of joy, hopping merrily up and down, and forgetting her discontent. "Why, there's Millie!" and she ran across the street to a little girl who had just come out of the tall house opposite. Millie looked very forlorn.

"What's the matter?" asked Elsie.

"Mamma says I can't have any Christmas present," said Millie, beginning to sob wretchedly; "she was expecting some work, but it didn't come, and the rent's overdue, and — and I can't have a thing!"

"That's too bad," said Elsie; "I'm going to have lots — and we are going to have cherry-pie for dinner."

"Oh, my!" cried Millie, drying her tears to

contemplate Elsie's future; "cherry-pie! It must be so good! It sounds good."

"Didn't you ever have any cherry-pie?"

Millie shook her head.

"Oh, it's splendid!"

Millie's eyes shone.

Just then some of the blue, pinched, half-dressed little children, who lived below, came running up the walk. There were two boys whom the children knew to be a certain Sammie and Luke, and two girls whose names were Lizy and Sally. They were shouting and racing, but they stopped to listen to the conversation. The word "Christmas" loosened their tongues at once. "I'm going to our Sunday-school to a Christmas-tree," said Sammie.

"I can't go to Sunday-school," said Lizy, ready to cry, "I hain't got no clo'es."

Elsie's heart reproached her anew for her covetous, ungrateful thoughts of a few moments before. Her self-reproaches grew stronger still when Millie remarked to the little crowd of listeners, as though proud of the acquaintance of so distin-

guished an individual, that Elsie Perch was going to have cherry-pie for her Christmas dinner.

"Oh, my!" "Is she?" "Ain't that fine!" cried one and all, with enthusiasm.

"Yes," rejoined Elsie, her heart swelling with pride, "my grandma always has a cherry-pie for Christmas."

Silence fell on the little group, and in the midst of this silence, a light footfall was heard pattering along the side street, and there burst into view a little girl — little Maude from the street above — the very little girl of whom Elsie had been envious. She wore a broad gray hat, with a lovely Titian red feather, and a Titian red velvet Mother Hubbard cloak, and velvet leggings to match, and carried a lovely muff, while by a silken cord she led a dear little white dog, in a buff-and-silver blanket.

"Oh," cried this beautiful little creature, bounding toward Elsie, "there you are! I saw you come around here after Sunday-school, and I've been hunting for you. See my little new dog! It's a Christmas present, only it came yesterday. Is this where you live?" She looked shrinkingly up

and down the narrow street, and at the squalid buildings in the distance. "And are these your brothers and sisters?"

Elsie laughed, and said no.

"What do you think?" began Lizy seriously, her large, wistful eyes, and chalk-white face, lending a strange pathos to her funny little speech, "this girl here," and she pointed to Elsie, "is going to have cherry-pie."

"Is she?" said Maude; "that is nice. I like cherry-pie, but we don't have any in winter."

"*We* do," said Elsie proudly. "My grandma puts up lots of cans of cherries, when our cherry-tree bears, and Christmas-time we have cherry-pie, and sometimes, when we have company, we have cherry-sauce for tea."

"I'd like some cherry-pie," said Maude imperiously. "Little girl, give us some of your cherry-pie?"

The hungry group of ragged boys and girls gathered about with Maude. She was beginning some sort of an explanation, that the cherry-pie was her grandma's, and not hers, when a bell

rang in the distance, and Maude darted away.

"That's for me," she cried, hastening away, and pulling the buff-and-silver-coated doggie after her. "Good-by, little girl! I wish I could have some of that cherry-pie."

She tripped daintily away down the side street, and the children watched her until she was out of sight. "I 'spose," said Luke, with a sigh, "I 'spose she has dinner every day."

"*I* have dinner every day," cried Elsie.

"Do you?" said Lizy, devouring this favored child of fortune with her great, wistful eyes. "I don't. Oh! I'd like some of that cherry-pie."

Just then Elsie saw her father coming up the street and ran to meet him, while the other children started for their homes in the square below.

The next morning there was so much excitement that Elsie never thought of the poor children on the next square, nor of Millie, nor of Maude, until the Christmas dinner was nearly over and the cherry-pie came on.

"Oh!" she cried, "you don't know, grandma,

how nice everybody thinks it is that we can have cherry-pie."

"Do they?" said grandma kindly. "Well, I do hope the pie's turned out well."

Elsie noticed that some of the pie was left after all had been served. A bright idea darted into her head, and she was out of the room in a trice. On went cloak and hood, and she dashed around the corner to see if she could find Maude. Yes, there she was, playing with her blanketed doggie on the broad sidewalk.

"Come!" cried Elsie, catching hold of Maude's hand. "Come quick! There's lots of cherry-pie! Come and have some!"

As they neared Millie's house they met that little girl on the walk, and she was easily persuaded to join the party.

"Now," said Elsie, running on in advance, "let's get Sammie and Lizy, and those other ones."

They flew down the street, and soon found the objects of their search. The watchword, "cherry-pie," was sufficient, and in the twinkling of an eye,

they were at Grandma Perch's door. Then, for the first time, Elsie felt a little misgiving. Perhaps there wasn't pie enough to go round. And what would grandma say?

But she marched bravely in, her eager little crowd of companions at her heels.

"See here, grandma," she said, "here are a lot of children who want some cherry-pie."

"Dear heart!" exclaimed grandma, in dismay, looking down at the motley group with lifted hands. "Why, Elsie! there isn't pie enough for more'n three little pieces, but, bless 'em!" for the look on some of those pinched, hungry faces went to grandma's heart, in the abundance and mirth of her own Christmas day, "I'll have a cherry-pie made for 'em in less'n no time. There's pie-crust in my pan, and the oven is hot; just go out and play, children, and I'll call you in presently."

And "presently" they were called in to behold a mammoth cherry-pie, baked in a tin pan, and they had just as much as was good for them, even to Maude's doggie. Maude left first, for *she* wasn't hungry, and, besides, she knew that her

mamma would worry about her long absence; but the little starved boys and girls from "the square below," didn't go for a long time. To tell the truth, grandma didn't stop at giving them cherry-pie. They had some turkey, and some mashed potato, and turnip, and some hot coffee, besides.

"Tain't often I can give," said grandma afterward. "But we've been prospered, and I can't bear to see anybody hungry on Christmas day."

After they had all gone, Elsie sat with her heart full of quiet happiness, rocking in her little rocking-chair. She was meditating vaguely on the envy she had felt toward Maude, and her general feeling of discontent. At last she spoke to grandma, who happened to be sitting beside her.

"Most everybody has things some other folks don't have," she remarked, rather vaguely.

Grandma understood her.

"Dear heart!" she cried again, for that was her pet name for Elsie. "That's right! There's mercies for everybody, if they'd only reckon 'em up — and Christmas day's a first-rate time to remember it!"

BERTIE'S RIDE.

HERE'S a nice state of things! We have run short of candles for the Tree, and of course the shops will be shut to-morrow, and the day after. What *is* to be done? Almost anything else might have been managed in some way, but a Christmas Tree in semi-darkness — can anything more dismal be imagined?" And Alice Chetwynd's usually bright face looks nearly as gloomy as the picture she has called up.

"What's the row?" cries schoolboy Bertie, planting two good-natured, if somewhat grubby hands on his sister's shoulders. "Alice in the dumps? That is something quite new. Can't you cut some big candles in two and stick them about? Here's Cousin Mildred — ask her. She'll be sure to hit upon something."

"No, don't bother her," whispers Alice, giving

him a warning pat, as a pretty girl some years older than themselves, enters the room. "She is so disappointed at getting no letter again to-day — I am so sorry, for it has quite spoiled her Christmas. Hush! don't say I told you anything about it."

"What mischief are you two children plotting?" Cousin Mildred tries to speak cheerily, and to turn her face so that they may not see any traces of tears about her pretty blue eyes, but there is a little quiver in her voice which betrays her.

In a moment Alice's arm is round her neck and Bertie is consoling her after his rough and ready fashion.

"Cheer up, Cousin Milly! I'll bet anything you'll get a letter to-morrow."

"I can't do that, Bertie, I'm afraid, for the postman doesn't come on Christmas Day."

"Doesn't he? What á beastly shame! I declare I'll speak to Father" —

"No, no — your father knows all about it — it's quite right, and I'm so glad the poor old man has one day to spend comfortably with his wife and

children. I don't quite know why Cecil has not written — but worrying about it won't do any good. Now let us talk about something else Alice, when you can be spared from the tree. Mother wants all the help she can get for the Church-dressing."

"Is she down at the Church now? All right, darling — I'll come in two minutes. Isn't it a plague about these candles? The shops are sure to be shut in Appleton the day after Christmas, and the poor children will be so disappointed if we have to put off the tree."

"The poor, dear school-children! Oh, that is a pity. But candles — oh, dear! I don't know how we can do without them. Is it quite impossible to send to Appleton to-day?"

"Why, to say the truth I asked Father this morning, and he said there was no one to go. You see Coachman is away for a holiday, and Sam is as busy as he can be — and there is no one else who can be trusted with a horse — and one cannot ask anybody to trudge five miles and back through the snow, though it is not at all deep."

"And there is more snow coming, I fear," says Mildred looking out at the grey, thick wintry sky — it is awfully cold. Ah! there is a feeble little ray of sunshine struggling out! Well, I must go back to my occupation of measuring flannel for the old women's petticoats — it is nice and warm for one's fingers at any rate. And, Ally dear, tell Mother I'll join her at the church as soon as ever I can. The keepers have brought us such lovely holly out of the woods — you never saw such wealth of berries. The wreaths will be splendid this year."

And Mildred goes away humming a little Christmas carol, and bravely trying to forget the sore anxiety that is pressing on her heart, for the far-away soldier lover whose Christmas greeting she had so hoped to receive to-day.

"Isn't she a trump?" cries Bertie, who can see and appreciate the effort his cousin is making. "I know she has half cried her eyes out when she was by herself, but she didn't mean us to find it out. I say, Alice, I'll have another try for that letter of hers, and get your candles too. Grey Plover has been roughed, and he's as sure-footed

as a goat — the snow is nothing to hurt now, and I'll trot over to Appleton and be back in no time at all."

"Oh, Bertie, don't! Cousin Mildred said there was a snow-storm coming, and you might get lost like the people in the Swiss mountains" —

"Or the babes in the wood, eh? You little silly, don't you think I'm man enough to take care of myself?"

And Master Bertie who is fifteen, and a regular sturdy specimen of a blue-eyed, sunburnt curly-haired English lad, draws himself up with great dignity and looks down patronizingly at his little sister.

Alice, of course, subsides, vanquished by this appeal, but she cannot help feeling some very uncomfortable qualms of conscience when it appears that she is to be the only person admitted into the young gentleman's confidence.

"Don't go bothering poor Mother about it — she always gets into such a funk, as if no one knew how to take care of themselves. And be sure not to say a word to Cousin Mildred — I want to sur-

prise her by bringing her letter by the second post. And if Father asks where I am — oh! but that will be all right. I shall get back before he comes home from shooting" — and Bertie is gone before his sister has time to put into words the remonstrance she has been struggling to frame.

"He'll miss his dinner — poor dear" — she thinks compassionately, but is consoled by the remembrance of an admirable pastry-cook's shop in Appleton where the ginger-bread is sure to be extra plentiful on Christmas Eve of all days in the year.

"A real old-fashioned Christmas, Father calls it!" thinks Alice as she goes to the window and looks out at the whitened landscape, amongst which the leafless branches of the trees stand out like the limbs of blackened giants. The snow which has been falling at intervals for some days is not deep, but there is a heavy lowering appearance about the sky betokening that the worst is yet to come. The little birds, which Alice has been befriending ever since the winter set in, come hopping familiarly round the window, and one saucy robin gives a

peck to the glass, as if to intimate that a fresh supply of crumbs would be acceptable.

Alice feels in her pocket for a bit of bread and finding some fragments hastily scatters them on the window-ledge, promising a better repast by-and-bye. Then she gives a last look at the half-dressed Christmas Tree, shakes her head over the insufficient candles, and murmuring that Bertie really is the dearest boy in the world, runs off to aid her mother in decorating the old village Church.

Meanwhile Grey Plover is swiftly and resolutely bearing his rider over the half-frozen snow in a manner worthy of his name. He is a handsome, strong-built pony, Squire Chetwynd's gift to his son on his last birthday, and a right goodly pair they make, at least in the fond father's eyes.

Perhaps if either Mr. Chetwynd, or his steady old coachman had been at home, Master Bertie would not have found it quite so easy to get his steed saddled for that ten miles' ride, with the ground already covered with snow, and the heaviest fall that has been known for many a year, visibly impending.

There is a keen north-easter blowing, but Appleton lies to the west, so that for the present it only comes on the back of his neck, and Bertie turns up his collar to keep out the flakes which seem scattered about here and there in the air, and trots bravely along, whistling and talking by turns to his pony, and to a wiry little terrier, which is really Cousin Mildred's property, but in common with most other animals, is deeply devoted to Bertie.

"Steady, lad, steady," and Bertie checks his steed as they descend a somewhat steep incline, bordered by high hedges, of which the one to the north is half concealed by a bank of snow.

"I declare I never thought it could have grown so deep in the time," mutters Bertie to himself. "I hope it won't snow again before to-night, or I shall have some work to get home. What's the time? Just two — all right — two hours more daylight at any rate — more if a fog doesn't come on. Good-day, John, Merry Christmas to you," as the village carrier, his cart heavily laden with Christmas boxes and parcels, passes him leading his old horse carefully up the hill.

"The same to you, Master Bertie, and many of them. How be the Squire and Mrs. Chetwynd, and" —

"All well, thank you, John, but I can't stop to go through the list now. I've to get to Appleton and back as soon as I can."

"To Appleton! Laws now, Master Bertie, don't 'ee do nothing of the kind. As sure as I'm alive there's awful weather coming, and you and that little pony will never get back it you don't mind."

"Little pony indeed, John! Grey Plover is nearly fourteen hands — and do you suppose I care for a snow-storm?"

Old John points to the wall of gray cloud advancing steadily from the north-east.

"You just look yonder, Master. If that don't mean the worst storm that we have known for many a long year, my name's not John Salter."

"Well, then, I must make all the more haste. If I don't turn up by church-time to-morrow, you and old Moss will have to come and dig me out! Come along, Nettle!" and whistling to the terrier which

has been exchanging salutations with the carrier's old half-bred-colly, Bertie canters on.

"I don't think I can find time to go home to luncheon," says Mrs. Chetwynd casting an anxious eye round the half-decorated church, which presents a one-sided appearance, two columns being beautifully wreathed with glossy dark leaves and coral berries, shining laurel and graceful ivy, and the third as yet untouched.

"Mildred, when you come back, will you and Alice bring me some biscuits, and I can eat them in the vestry. The daylight now is so short, and I think to-day is even darker than usual. We shall have to work very hard to get finished in time."

"I'll stay with you," replies her cousin, "and Alice shall bring provisions for us both," and by this means the secret of Bertie's absence from the early dinner remains unobserved.

It is snowing heavily as Alice, in fur cloak and snow-boots, trips back to the church some quarter of a mile distant from her home.

The girl is beginning to be very anxious about

her brother, and sorely repents her extorted promise of secrecy as to his intentions.

"We are getting on," says Mrs. Chetwynd glancing round, "I wonder if your father will look in on his way back from shooting. I suppose Bertie must have gone to join him, as we have seen nothing of the boy. I hope they won't be late; the snow is getting quite deep."

A hasty knocking at the Church-door makes Alice start and turn so pale that her cousin laughs at her for setting up nerves. Before however they can open it the intruder makes his own way in, and proves to be the stable-helper, with a face so white and scared that the alarm is communicated to Mrs. Chetwynd.

"Milly," she says faintly, "there has been some accident — ask him — quick — Herbert's gun " —

"No, no," says her cousin bent only on re-assuring her, "speak out, James — don't you see how you are frightening your mistress?"

"If you please ma'am, Gray Plover has come home alone, and " —

"The pony! Master Bertie wasn't riding?"

"Yes, ma'am — he started to ride to Appleton about half-past one o'clock" —

"To ride in such weather!"

"Yes, ma'am —he *would* go — and the Squire not being at home I could not hinder him — and now the pony's just galloped into the yard, and"—

"Mary, dearest, don't look so frightened!" cries Mildred, fearing her cousin is going to faint. "I daresay he got off to walk and warm himself, and the pony broke away — Bertie rides so well, he would not be likely to have a fall" —

"But the snow! Isn't it quite deep in some places, James?"

"Yes, ma'am — six or seven feet they say in the drifts, though most part of the road was pretty clear this morning. But it's been snowing heavily these two hours and more, and nearly as dark as night — and Grey Plover must have been down some time or other, for when he came in *the saddle was all over snow!*"

Mrs. Chetwynd gives a gasp, and for a moment her cousin thinks her senses are going, but with a brave struggle she rallied her powers.

"James, you and the gardeners had better go off at once, two of you try each road to Appleton, to meet Master Bertie. Alice dear, run up to the house, and fill father's flask with a cordial — and see that they take it, and — and a blanket — and tell some one to go and meet your father — he will know best what to do — I must go myself to look for my boy — God help me — what shall I do if he has come to harm?"

"You cannot walk, darling," and Mildred tenderly leads her to one of the open seats, and strokes her hands in loving but vain efforts at encouragement — "don't imagine anything bad till it comes — Bertie is sure to have taken some of the dogs with him, and they would have come home to tell us if anything were wrong!"

"There was only little Nettle at home," Mrs. Chetwynd answers with a sigh — "Jerry and Nell are out shooting with Herbert, and the new dog is no use. Oh Milly, my bright bonny boy, where can he be? See how dreadfully dark it has grown and the cold — think if he should be lying helpless in the snow!"

About the same time on this December afternoon a young man is getting out of the one-horse omnibus which the George Hotel (a small third rate inn, albeit the best in Appleton) usually sends down to meet the afternoon train from London. He is a tall soldierly looking person, with bright dark eyes, and a brisk imperative manner which ensures a certain amount of attention even from the surly landlord.

But when, instead of demanding luncheon, or any creature comforts for himself, the traveller orders a "dog-cart, or any sort of trap with a good horse," to take him to Mr. Chetwynd's house, five miles distant, the host demurs.

"Impossible! The omnibus horse is the only one roughed, and he has been out twice to-day already. Besides there is likely to be a heavy fall of snow before night: even if a horse and trap could get to Edenhurst there would be no possibility of getting back before night-fall — mine host is very sorry to disoblige the gentleman, but it is quite out of the question."

The young man, who is evidently not accustomed

to stolid opposition, begins to chafe, and his dark eyes give an angry flash. However he forces himself to speak quietly and persuasively, and even descends to bribery, in his anxiety to spend his Christmas at Edenhurst.

Still the landlord remains obdurate, the fact that he has a big commercial dinner impending at five o'clock making him the less inclined to spare any of his men.

"Well, hang it all!" cries the young man impatiently, "then I declare I'll get there on my own legs. I can carry my bag," swinging it stoutly over his shoulder as he speaks, "and you must find some means of sending the other things over to-morrow morning at latest. It would be too tantalizing," he adds to himself, "after coming two thousand miles to see the little woman, if we could not spend our Christmas Eve together after all."

And turning a deaf ear to the landlord's remonstrances and prophesies of evil, he sets forth briskly on the road, well-known to him although untrodden for two long years. "Dear little soul," he is saying to himself as he strides through the snow, "what a

surprise it'll be to her! I am half sorry now I did not write — perhaps she'll be startled — but I don't believe in sudden joy hurting anyone. I wonder if she'll be altered — I hope not — the little face couldn't be sweeter than it was. And Herbert Chetwynd is a rare good fellow — what a welcome I shall get from him and his kindhearted wife — it's almost worth toiling and broiling for two years in India to come home for such a Christmas. I wonder if that jolly pickle Bertie is much grown! Capital little companion he used to be I remember. How far have I come? Oh! just past the second milestone — the snow is getting plaguy deep and I can hardly see ten yards ahead — I can't say it is pleasant travelling — how I shall appreciate the splendid fire in the big hall fire-place at Edenhurst. They will be burning the Yule-log for Christmas. How I shall enjoy taking up all the old home customs once more. I wonder if the Waits go round now? What a brute I used to feel, lying snug in bed and listening to the poor little shivering mortals singing outside in the frosty morning air, almost before it was light —

but I believe Herbert's wife and Milly always took care that they had a warm breakfast and a toast at the kitchen fire afterwards — but hulloa! I say, what little dog are you, out alone in the snow in this lonely part of the road? Lost your master, have you, poor little beggar? Never mind — you had better follow me home to Edenhurst for to-night — they wouldn't refuse a welcome even to a stray dog on Christmas Eve. I say, you are very pressing in your attentions my friend — I'm afraid you are on a wrong tack, sniffing and prancing around me — I'm not your master nor have I the honor of that gentleman's acquaintance, unless — by Jove, if it isn't little Nettle — the dog I gave Mildred when I went to India. What can she be doing out here alone? And what does she want me to do I wonder?" as the terrier, delighted at the sudden recognition dances round him more energetically than ever, catches his hand and the skirts of his coat gently in her teeth, then runs on a little way ahead, looking back to see if he is following. "Lead on — I'll follow thee — that seems to be what you want me to say, eh, little Net-

tle? All right there!" and the traveller's two long legs contrive to make quite as rapid progress along the road as the terrier's four short ones especially as the poor little animal occasionally lights on a snowy heap softer and deeper than the rest and is nearly lost to sight altogether for some seconds.

Presently however, in spite of all obstacles she scurries on ahead, and stops short with a joyful self-satisfied bark, in front of a dark object which is half sitting, half lying in a bed of partially melted snow under the hedge — an object which upon closer inspection proves to be a slight curly-headed boy, clad in heather-colored jacket and knicker-bockers. His cap has fallen off, and his eyes are nearly closed, as he leans back on his cold couch, with an expression of half-conscious suffering on his young face.

"Come, this won't do!" exclaims the traveller in a tone of no small surprise and concern. "I say, young sir, have you forgotten that this is December, and not exactly the season for enjoying life in gypsy fashion?"

The boy's eyes open dreamily and scan the keen

brown moustached face which is bending over him, but he neither moves nor makes any response. The traveller lays a hand on his shoulder and speaks again, somewhat more peremptorily.

"I say, young one, get up — do you hear? Do you want to get frozen to death?"

If there is some roughness in the tone, there is none in the manner and gesture with which dropping on one knee in the snow, the traveller proceeds to chafe the cold nerveless hand, which, in answer to this appeal, the boy slowly tries to lift. He points to his left foot which is stretched out in an uncomfortable twisted attitude, and his new friend is not long in discovering that a sprained ankle is the cause of the mischief.

A serviceable many-bladed knife is quickly produced, and the boot dexterously slit open, to the instant relief of the injured limb, which is much swollen.

The boy gives a gasp of satisfaction, and murmurs "Thank you," as he makes a still unsuccessful effort to scramble to his feet.

"Take care — let me give you a hand. Poor

IT IS SNOWING HEAVILV AS ALICE TRIPS BACK TO THE CHURCH.

little chap — " as the patient collapses again, "here, have a pull at this," taking a restorative from a medicine case in an inner pocket; "that's right — you'll be able to tell me all about it presently. Nettle, little lass, it's a pity you can't speak, isn't it?"

"How do you know the dog's name?" the boy inquires, now almost roused into curiosity.

"How do I know it? Why because she belonged to me for six months before I went to India, and then I gave her to the lady who I hope is to be my wife now I've come back."

"What — are you Cecil Gordon?"

"The same — at your service 'Cousin Cis,' as your little sister used to call me, if, as I suppose, you are my old playfellow Bertie. Two years have made a difference in your size, my lad — and this snow gave your face a blue sort of look which prevented my knowing you at first. And now tell me what pranks have you been playing to get into such a plight?"

"I rode Grey Plover to Appleton this afternoon to get — some things the girls wanted — and the

snow-storm came on heavily — and it got horribly dark as you see — and somehow we stumbled into a snow-drift — I'd marked the bad places as I came and thought I could keep clear of them — but the darkness misled me, and the snow got into my eyes. We rolled over together — and my foot caught in the stirrup and came out with an awful wrench — but it's ever so much better since you cut the boot open."

"And then I suppose, the pony made off?"

"Yes, I believe so. I felt awfully sick when I got up, but I managed to crawl out of the drift, for I'd just sense enough left to mind being smothered. I don't suppose I could have lain here very long when you came, or I should have been frozen."

"Well the great thing will be to get you home as soon as may be — but the snow is getting so deep that it won't be very pleasant travelling. Can you bear to put that foot to the ground? No? Then don't try — my legs must do duty for two."

"Oh! I'm too heavy — you'll never be able to carry me, especially through the snow."

"Nonsense! If you begin making difficulties I

shall have to treat you as one of our fellows (so the story goes) did the wounded sergeant in Zululand."

"Oh what was that?"

"Why the enemy were close upon them, and B—— (that was the officer) was bent upon rescuing the sergeant of his troops who was wounded and helpless, and whose own horse had been killed. So he told him to get up behind on *his* horse—and the sergeant refused, and told B—— to save himself and leave him to perish, and B—— answered in peremptory fashion, 'If you don't obey orders at once, I shall punch your head!'"

"Don't punch mine to-day," says Bertie with a rather feeble laugh. "It feels so queer and top-heavy. I'll give you leave to try as soon as I'm all right again."

"All right. But now about this getting home? Here! you take the bag, and I'll carry *you*. Will you ride in ordinary pick-a-back fashion, or as I've seen soldiers do at what they call 'chummy races' lengthwise across their bearer's shoulders?"

Bertie prefers the former method, and with some

little difficulty is hoisted into the required position.

"How are they all at home?" asks Captain Gordon, after they have advanced some little way in silence.

"Very well — and very jolly — only to-day Cousin Milly was out of spirits, because" —

"Well what?" The tone is sharp and impatient.

"Because you hadn't written, and she did so want a letter for Christmas. And I thought there might be one by the afternoon post — they do come then sometimes."

"And that was the reason for your taking that crazy ride through the snow? My dear little fellow," and the brisk voice is very kind and gentle now, "I am sorry to have been the cause of all this trouble."

"Oh! never mind — it was partly too to get Alice the candles she was bothering about for the Christmas Tree. — By-the-bye, I hope they've not fallen out of my pocket — no, here they are, all right."

"I'm afraid you found no letter at the post-office after all. You see the orders for home came to us rather suddenly, and when I found I could be in England as soon as a letter could reach, I didn't write. I am so sorry it happened so!"

"You had lots of real fighting among the Afghans, hadn't you?"

"Yes — I'll tell you about it some day. Just now I want my breath for something more than talking. How deep the snow is between these high hedges!"

"Yes — if only we could get over into the fields it would be better — and there is a short cut too."

"Can we find it?"

"I'll try — but my head is so stupid somehow — don't I hear some one whistling behind us?"

As Bertie speaks a young laboring man comes up to them, looks with some surprise at the pair, and answers with a surly grunt to Captain Gordon's inquiry as to the nearest way to Edenhurst.

"Why Jack, you can show us!" cries Bertie impatiently.

"There's a stile somewhere that leads right past

your mother's cottage, and then we can get across Higgins' fields."

"If there is a cottage I shall be glad of five minutes' rest by the fire-side," says Cecil who is beginning to get decidedly "blown."

"I was just thinking what an awfully lonely road this was."

"Jack Brown is a surly fellow," whispers Bertie in his ear, but not so low but that the man catches the last words.

"Surly! And who wouldn't be, young master, I'd like to know, in my place? Didn't the Squire have me up for poaching, and didn't I get three weeks in jail along of snaring a few worthless pheasants? Much he or anyone would have cared if my old mother had starved the while!"

"For shame!" Bertie's wrath is making him quite energetic. "As if mother and Mildred didn't go to see the old woman nearly every day, and make sure she wanted for nothing."

"Well, well," interrupts Cecil, "don't rake up bye-gones on Christmas Eve of all days in the year. Forgive and forget — peace and goodwill — that's

what the bells always seem to me to be saying. I say, my friend, I'm sure your Mother would be willing to let the young master sit by her fire for five minutes, after he's nearly got himself killed — and buried too — riding to Appleton to do his sister and cousin a good turn."

A shadow of a smile lurks on Jack's grim visage at this appeal, and he proceeds to lead the way across a difficult "hog-backed" stile, over which he helps to lift Bertie with more gentleness than might be expected. Then striding before them through the snow, which is more even, and easy to wade through in the open field, he presently stops at the door of a little thatched cottage which is opened by a tidy old woman.

Bertie is soon established in her own high-backed wooden chair by the fire, drinking hot if somewhat hay-scented tea, and obtaining great relief from the attentions his friend is now better able to bestow upon the injured foot. Meanwhile this is becoming a very sad Christmas Eve to the anxious watchers at Edenhurst. The Squire has returned home, puzzled and half incredulous at

the confused report of Master Bertie's disappearance which has reached him, but when the snow-soaked saddle and the riderless pony have been shown him, he too grows seriously alarmed, and without waiting to change his wet things sets off in the direction of Appleton.

Other messengers have already been despatched but the hours pass by and no news is obtained, no one happening to think of the short cut and old Mrs. Brown's cottage. Even the bells are mute — the villagers cannot bear to ring them when their dear lady is in such trouble. She is trying hard to force herself to believe that nothing *can* be so very wrong — it is foolish to be so over-anxious.

No one has any heart to carry on the joyous preparations for Christmas in which Bertie usually bears an active part, but Mrs. Chetwynd will not let the poor people suffer, and their gifts of warm clothing and tea and sugar are all looked over and carefully ticketed by Mildred and Alice.

Poor girls! they have little spirit for the work, but it is better for them than the dreary waiting which follows. At last Alice can bear it no longer.

She throws a cloak round her and steals out into the avenue. The air is clearer now and the snow has ceased to fall. The earth is covered with a brilliant white sheet, and overhead the wintry stars are shining out one by one in the deep blue vault. The girl begins to feel more hopeful, as the still frosty air cools her hot cheek, and the stars look down upon her with their silent greeting of peace.

"Glad tidings of great joy" — the Christmas message of nearly nineteen centuries ago — surely it cannot be that a heart-breaking grief is to come on them on this, of all nights in the year! A prayer is in her heart — on her lips — and even in that moment, as if in answer, there burst forth the most joyous of all sounds to Alice's ear — their own village bells ringing a Merry Christmas peal! It had been understood that this was to be the signal of Bertie's being found and safe. Louder and louder it comes, and eager congratulations are exchanged by the anxious watchers. Mrs. Chetwynd wants to fly to meet her boy, but is gently restrained by Mildred, who reminds her that his

father must be with him. Nor is it long before a happy group are seen approaching.

There is Bertie (who has insisted on putting his injured foot to the ground lest his mother should be frightened by seeing him carried) bravely hopping along with the aid of his father's strong arm faithful little Nettle trotting close at his side and Jack Brown, with whom the Squire has shaken hands and exchanged a "Merry Christmas" slouching behind — but whose is the tall figure on Bertie's other side? Ah! cousin Mildred knows, and well is it perhaps that the growing darkness throws a friendly veil over the joyous blushes and the happy thankful tears that mark that meeting.

ASAPH SHEAFE'S CHRISTMAS

ASAPH had just the Christmas presents he wanted. "Wanted" is hardly the word: he had not supposed that a boy like him could have such things for his own. His father and mother gave him one present, it was a camera obscura, and thirty glass plates all ready to take photographic views. They were made to work by the new dry process, so that, without over-nice manipulation of chemicals, Asaph could go where he pleased and make his own photographs.

What the children gave him I must not tell, we have so little room. But, of all the children in Boston who had their Christmas presents at breakfast, none was better pleased than Asaph as he opened his parcels.

It was afterwards that his grief and sorrow came. When his mother's turn came, and she opened the parcels on her table, for in the Sheafe house each of them had a separate present-table, after she had passed the little children's she came to Asaph's present to her. It was in quite a large box done up in a German newspaper. She opened it carefully, and lifted out a Bohemian coffee-pot, which Asaph had bought at the German woman's shop in Shawmut avenue. Mrs. Sheafe eagerly expressed her delight, and her wonder that Asaph knew she wanted it. But alas! all her love could not hide the fact that the nose of the coffee-pot was broken at the end, and what was left was all in splinters.

Poor Asaph saw it as soon as she. And the great big tears would come to his manly eyes. He bent his head down on his mother's shoulder, and the hot drops fell on her cheek. She kissed the poor boy, and told him she should never mind. It would pour quite as well, and she should use it every morning. She knew how many months of his allowance had gone for this coffee-pot. She remembered how much she had been pleased with Mrs. Henry's;

and she praised Asaph for remembering that so well.

"This is the joy of the present," she said, "that my boy watches his mother's wishes, and that he thinks of her. A chip more or less off the nose of the coffee-pot is nothing."

And Asaph would not cheat the others out of their "good time." And he pretended to be soothed. But, all the same, there was a great lump in his throat almost all that day.

When the children were going to church he walked with Isabel, and he told her how it all happened. He would not tell his mother, and he made Isabel promise not to tell. He had spent every cent of his money in buying his presents. He had them all in that big basket which they bought at the Pier. He was coming home after dark, on foot, because he could not pay his fare in the horse-car. All of a sudden a little German boy with a tall woman by him, stopped him, and said with a very droll accent, which Asaph imitated, "East Canton street," and poked out a card on which was written, "Karl Shoninger, 723 East Canton street."

"Belle, I was in despair. It was late; I was on Dwight street, and I led them to Shawmut avenue and tried to explain. Belle, they did not know one word of English except 'East Canton street.' They kept saying, 'East Canton street,' as a dog says 'Bow-wow.' I looked for an officer and could not find one. It snowed harder and harder. I was coward enough to think of shirking. But then I said, 'Lie and cheat on Christmas eve, that you may lug home your Christmas presents; that is too mean.' And I said very loud, 'Kom hier.' I guess that's good German any way. And I dragged them to their old 723 East Canton street. It is a mile if it is an inch. I climbed up the snowy steps to read the number. But I slipped as I came down, and knocked my own basket off the step where it stood. That is how mamma's coffee-pot came broken, I suppose; but all looked so steady in the basket that I never thought of it then. That's how I came late to supper. But, Belle, don't you ever tell mamma as long as you live."

And Belle never did. She told me.

IN EAST CANTON STREET.

When the Christmas dances were half over; when they had acted *Lochinvar* and *Lord Ullin's Daughter*, but before they acted *Villekens* and *Johnny the Miller*, supper was served in Mrs. Sheafe's dining-room. All the best china was out. Grandmamma's "Spode" was out, and the silver pitcher the hands gave papa on his fiftieth birthday; and Mrs. Sheafe's wedding breakfast-set — all that was left of it; and Asaph's coffee-pot held the place of honor. One wretched bit of broken ware had consented to be cemented in its place. But yet it was but a miserable nose, and the lump came into Asaph's throat again as he looked at it. And he almost wished his mother had put it away so that he need not hear her tell uncle Eliakim the hateful story.

The lump was in his throat when he went to bed. But he fell asleep soon after. I must confess that there were a few wet spots on his pillow. His last thought was the memory that all his hoarded monthly allowances had gone for the purchase of a broken-nosed pitcher.

The two angels who watch his bedside saw this, and one of them said to the other, "Would you not

tell him?" But the other said, "Wait a little longer."

What the angels would not tell him I will tell you. For it happened that I was driving round in my sleigh that Christmas night, on the very snow which was falling, while Asaph was fumbling up the steps in East Canton street, and I stopped at a house not far from Boylston station as you turn into Lamartine street, and found myself in the midst of the drollest home festivity.

The father was sitting with two babies on his knee. The other children were delving in a trunk to find something which would stay in the bottom. The house-mother clearly did not know where anything was in the trunk or anywhere else. But a broad grin was on every face, and whatever was said was broken by ejaculations and occasional kisses.

At last the lost parcel revealed itself, and opened out into some balls for a Christmas-tree, which these honest people had brought all the way from Linz on the Danube, quite sure that no such wonders would be known in that far-off America.

There are many other tales to be printed in this volume, so that I must not tell you, as I should be glad to do, all the adventures that that house-mother and her three boys and her two girls and the twin babies had encountered as they came from Linz to join Hans Bergmann, the father of the seven and the husband of their mother.

He had come the year before. They had come now by the way of Antwerp, and had landed in Philadelphia. But the *Schiller* had made so short a run that, when they arrived, Hans Bergmann was not in Philadelphia to meet them. Of course the Frau Bergmann should have waited in Philadelphia as Hans Bergmann had bidden her. But, on the hint of a voluble woman who spoke pure Bohemian, whom she met on the pier — who knew just where he boarded in New York — she took her charge to New York, to find that he had left that boarding-house three months before. Still, eager to spend Christmas with him, she had hurried to Boston to ask his uncle where he was. She had arrived in Boston, with the snow-storm, the day before Christmas itself, having made an accidental detour by Bridgeport and

Westfield. Happily for her, the boy Asaph had led her to uncle Karl's lodgings just as uncle Karl was leaving them forever on his way to Chicago.

Happily for Hans Bergmann, uncle Karl had the wit to pile them all into a carriage and to send them to a friend of his at the Boylston station, bidding him keep them under lock and key.

Then to Hans Bergmann uncle Karl telegraphed: "Find your wife at Burr street, number 40, Boylston station."

Then Hans Bergmann, who had been bullying every police station in New York to know where his family was, had taken the early train and had spent his Christmas in ploughing through snow-drifts to Boston.

And so it was, that, at nine on Christmas night, I saw the children in a Christmas party, not quite as well arranged, but quite as happy, as any I saw that day.

And all this came about because a kind Asaph Sheafe forgot himself on Christmas eve, and showed Frau Bergmann the way to East Canton street.

As it happened, I saw the diamond necklace that John Gilder gave his bride that night.

But it did not give so much pleasure as Asaph Sheafe's Christmas present to the Bergmanns did.

And yet he never knew he gave it.