

Saints Above...

By MARY LOUISE VINCENT
This is the fourth and last installment of "Saints Above." It concerns an archangel, St. Bertram, who was determined to do some good will work toward men during Christmas season on earth. His efforts were somewhat ineffective until he met Michael Appleby.

Mollie Appleby wasn't one to let men bully her, she'd always said they were just overgrown boys, and she ended up patching St. Bertram expertly with a small piece of white linen she had left from her kitchen curtains while he sat on the organ stool in front of her. This really started things off, for St. Bertram, decided that being embarrassed in front of ladies like Mrs. Appleby was a waste of time, added to the occasion by playing the organ so conveniently before him. At first he only pumped gently, so as not to interfere with Mollie's work, and played soft Christmas hymns as an accompaniment to Mr. Appleby's tenor, but the spirit of the party soon ran away with all three of them.

Within half an hour the enfeebled organ was straining its pipes to keep up with the violent strains of "God Rest Ye Merry Gentlemen" which St. Bertram was pumping out vigorously with both feet flailing up and down on the pedals in an attempt to keep the old organ resuscitated sufficiently to supply the demands of the hands which thumped the keys, turned pages, directed Mr. Appleby over the difficult parts and conducted eggoggs to St. Bertram's mouth at the intervals when the thundering basso voice wasn't essential to harmony.

Mollie Contributes

Mollie contributed her bit with a tremulous soprano, marking off the beats with jabs of her needle into a part of St. Bertram's robe that was dangerously near to St. Bertram.

AFTER a long evening of music they finished off with "Deck the Hall With Boughs of Holly" and fell laughingly exhaustedly, St. Bertram into the big chair and Mollie and Michael on the couch, in front of the fire. A lull fell in the conversation momentarily and Michael took the center of the stage, clearing his throat a little embarrassedly.

"Well, Mollie," he began, "it's nearly midnight, and I've got something here somewhere that St. Nicholas asked me to give you personally."

He reached into his coat pocket, drew out a little white box, carefully protecting the tiny red bow that perched atop it, and placed it gently in her lap.

"Too Much"

"Oh no, Michael, you promised you wouldn't this Christmas. All that we have in each other is so much—too much," but her eyes were shining and her hands were clasped excitedly to her breast.

"St. Nicholas wouldn't like it if you didn't open it," Michael reproved, giving all his attention to filling his pipe in apparent nonconcern.

Mollie untied the ribbon, smoothed and folded it, and then gently lifted the little lid. A tiny gold heart-shaped locket lay within on a bed of white cotton, glistening as it caught the firelight. "It's much too pretty to ever wear," she sighed and dried the happy tears in her eyes with a tidy little white handkerchief she drew from her sleeve.

"Nonsense," Michael blustered, flinging his half-filled pipe into the tobacco pouch and shaking himself free from all the tobacco

he had spilled. "Nonsense, Mollie, nothing's too pretty for you to wear. Here now," and he lifted the little charm from the box and clumsily fastened the fine chain about her neck, awkwardly patting her collar into place.

St. Bertram Returns

"Isn't it beautiful?" Mollie asked, turning to St. Bertram who had been enjoying the little scene as detachedly as if he had been in heaven looking down.

He made a quick attempt to recover himself and answered "Oh madame, it is beautiful!" which, although not as eloquent an answer as he would have wished, seemed to satisfy her completely.

Mollie, suddenly breaking into a gentle laugh, said, "And now, Michael, even though you've been a pretty bad boy, St. Nicholas left me something for you too." She leaned down and drew from her knitting bag on the floor a fat blue package and held it out to him. Michael tore impatiently through the wrappings and drew out about the longest, reddest, hand-knitted muffler that St. Bertram had ever seen. Michael draped it around his neck proudly and then turned to Mollie, a foolish grin on his face.

"Well, Mollie," he said chokingly, then cleared his throat, blew his nose and made another attempt. "Well, Mollie, this is about the finest present a fellow could get," he finally uttered, and the two of them sat adorned with their Christmas finery, beaming at each other.

"Hold Onto Him"

Then Mollie looked toward St. Bertram. "But what would you do with a husband who promises every year that this time he won't bring me gifts, and yet when Christmas rolls around, there he

is with something lovely?" she asked, taking Michael's hand.

"I'd hold onto him; the next one you get might keep those promises," Michael quickly retorted.

They all laughed; but soon the hypnotism of the soft yellow flames in the hearth crept over them and they became thoughtful.

A Real Christmas

"Michael, I believe this is one of the happiest Christmases I've ever had, what with all the fun and music, and all the joy we have to share and a good friend to share it with. That's what makes a real Christmas," Mollie mused dreamily, smiling warmly at St. Bertram.

"Yes, Mollie, it's been all that," Michael softly answered.

And St. Bertram re-echoed, "A real Christmas!"

Just then the soft strains of "Silent Night" swelled up outside as some carollers strolled by, and the trio hushed to listen. When the singers finally moved on St. Bertram reluctantly rose and shook out his big wings ready to thank the Applebys and make his departure, for it was after midnight and Christmas day in Heaven as well as on earth.

He nearly spoke but noticed just in time that Michael was making funny noises, never intentionally duplicated by him in making life. St. Bertram bent over Mollie but she too was lost in gentle slumber, Michael's hand held tightly in hers. St. Bertram went quietly to the door turning once more before he slipped out, back toward the parlor where the rudy embers in the fireplace silhouetted two nodding old heads.

"May the blessings of a welcomed stranger keep the happi-

ness you kindled in his heart on Christmas Eve aglow for you all year," he whispered, and slipped out into the night.

* * *

ST. BENNIE leaned on the gates of Heaven, stifled a yawn and then peered downward again towards the earth, straining his eyes against the blanket of night that enfolded it. Finally something seemed to strike a spark for he blinked, then gaped again.

"Nope," he said, disbelievingly, "can't be him, he'd never fly like that. Must be a stratospheric duck or something."

And indeed the feathery object that he watched was making its ascent in a strange manner. It dipped and swooped in an alarming fashion, gaining altitude crazily, but undeniably with some kind of strange rhythm. When whatever it was drifted within ear-shot, St. Bennie turned his back on the sight and closing his eyes groaned, "It can't be, not him, not St. Bertram, Archangel, flying to heaven to the tune of 'God Rest Ye Merry Gentlemen!'" But it doubtlessly was, and soon St. Bertram came hurdling over Heaven's parapets to light at St. Bennie's side.

Good Will to Men

"You were right, St. Bennie," the big figure admitted with humiliation in his voice, "I just didn't know how to do it. I just messed up practically everybody down there—mostly myself. Even then I was coming back to Heaven with a wrong idea of humanity until a couple of wonderful old people showed me what the world is really like. Me, St. Bertram, Archangel, trying to take good will to men! That's very funny!"

"Now wait a minute, not so fast!" St. Bennie interrupted. "I kept track of you—frankly I was worried. I'll admit you made a very inferior beginning but

what do you think really made Christmas for the Applebys. It was having company, a friend in to add cheer—and boy! did you add it!" he chortled.

"Me?" St. Bertram asked astounded.

"Yes, you. How many of those eggoggs did you drink?" St. Bennie queried, shoving his halo back on his head.

"Oh, about six, they were pretty good—change from manna you know," St. Bertram said offhandedly, then earnestly, "You said I made them happy? Brought good will to men, St. Bennie?"

"Yes sir, St. Bertram, I owe you an apology."

"No, St. Bennie, I owe you my thanks."

A little embarrassed by all this reciprocal gratitude the two angels stood looking at the ground for a moment, self-consciously kicking up little pieces of cloud with their toes.

White Christmas

"Well, you old ostrich," St. Bennie finally broke in, "it is Christmas; let's go on over and listen to the heavenly host sing carols." He dragged the reluctant St. Bertram from the parapet where he was looking affectionately down towards earth while a gold and white dawn announced Christmas day.

They walked rather giddily arm in arm down the shining streets of heaven and the inhabitants of Paradise leaned sleepily out of their crystal windows to see what was breaking the silence of early morning. With one glance most of them redrew the blinds and went back to sleep for another half hour; but the little angel with the moulted wings and the big angel with the patch on his robe strolled blissfully on down the street, singing at the tops of their voices:

"Peace on Earth; Good Will to Men!"

(Concluded)

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