

A CHRISTMAS STORY.

BY MRS. M. F. BETTS.

"They call it Merry Christmas,
And all the world is gay;
But I never was so lonesome
As I have been to-day.
The people seem so happy,
As they hurry through the storm,
I only wish 'twas summer,
That we might all be warm."
"I saw them carry garlands,
With holly berries bright;
And standing by a window,
I saw a dazzling sight;
With toys the place was crowded,
I thought of little Molly,
And wished that I could buy her
One twenty tiny doll."
"But more than all I wanted
Something to make me well;
I looked at the bright ladies,
And wished that I could tell
That you were cold and hungry;
The tears came to my eyes,
As I thought that—maybe Christmas
Was for the rich and wise."
Then said the gentle mother
To the grieving boy, "Nay, nay,
The poor can have the Saviour
For a guest on Christmas Day.
His love is cheery sunshine,
His voice a heavenly chime,
That rings away the sorrow
Of the dismal wintry time."
"Go read to little Molly,
The story strange and sweet,
Of the Baby and his mother,
With the wise men at their feet.
All riches and all honor
Must yield when He is near;
As kneel the adoring magi,
That day in old Judea."
While thus they sat together,
And read the story o'er,
A child came to the threshold,
And I opened wide the door.
The little Molly saw her,
And cried out, "Mamma, see,
The Christ has sent his sister,
With a loaded Christmas-tree."
Oh there was such rejoicing,
As they had never seen,
When the candles all were lighted,
And sparkling on the green;
And lo, among the branches,
Quite hidden by a toy,
A bill purse was discovered,
By the wander-mitten boy.
Soon there was food in plenty,
And fire upon the hearth;
And hearts were never sayer
Upon the great round earth.
Then said the grateful mother,
To the child that brought the tree,
"If you do the Father's bidding,
Christ's sister you shall be."

ANNIE AND WILLIE'S PRAYER.

BY MRS. A. E. SNOW.

'Twas the eve before Christmas: "Good-night!" had
been said,
And Annie and Willie had crept into bed;
There were tears on their pillows, and tears in
their eyes,
And each little bosom was heaving with sighs,
For to-night their stern father's command had
been given,
That they should retire precisely at seven,
Instead of at eight; for they troubled him more
With questions unheard of, than ever before.
He had told them he thought this delusion a sin,
No such being as "Santa Claus" ever had been,
And he hoped after this, he should nevermore
hear
How he scrambled down chimneys with presents
each year.
And this was the reason that two little heads
So restlessly tossed on their soft downy beds.
Eight, nine, and the clock on the steeple tolled
ten.
Not a word had been spoken by either till then,
When Willie's sad face from the blanket did peep,
And whispered, "Dear Annie, is you fast asleep?"
"Why no, brother Willie," a sweet voice replied,
"I've tried but in vain, for I can't shut my eyes,
For somehow it makes me so sorry because
Dad says he said there is no 'Santa Claus.'
Now we know there is, and it can't be denied,
For he came every year before mamma died.
But then, I've been thinking that she used to pray,
And God would hear everything mamma would
say.
And perhaps she asked him to send Santa Claus
here.
With the sack full of presents he brought every
year."
"Well, why can't we pray just as mamma did then,
And ask God to send him with presents again?"
"I've been thinking so too," And without a word
more,
Four little bare feet hounded out on the floor,
And four little knees the soft carpet pressed,
And two tiny hands were clasped close to each
breast.
"Now, Willie, you know we must firmly believe
That the presents we ask for, we're sure to re-
ceive.
You must wait just as still, till I say the 'Amen.'
And by that you will know that your turn has
come then.
Dear Jesus, look down on my brother and me,
And grant us the favor we are seeking of thee.
I want a wax dolly, a tea-set and ring,
And an ebony watch-box they shute with a spring;
Bless papa, dear Jesus, and cause him to see
That Santa Claus loves us far better than he;
Don't let him get fretful and angry again;
At dear brother Willie and Annie. Amen."
"Pious, Deana, 'at Santa Claus tum down to-
night,
And bring us some presents before it is 'light,
I want he should give me a nice 'tillie's red,
With 'bight shinin' 'ummers, and all painted 'ol.
A box full of tandy, a book and a toy;
Amen, and den, Deana, I'll be a good boy."
Their prayers being ended they raised up their
heads,
And with hearts light and cheerful, again sought
their beds.
They were soon lost in slumber both peaceful and
dear,
And with fairies in dreamland were roaming in
slumber.
Eight, nine, and the little French clock had
struck ten,
Ere the father had thought of his children again.

He seems now to hear Annie's half-suppressed
sighs,
And to see the big tears stand in Willie's blue
eyes.
"I was harsh with my darlings," he mentally
said,
"And should not have sent them so early to bed,
But then I was troubled; my feelings good vent,
For bank stock to-day has gone down ten per
cent.
But of course they've forgotten their troubles
ere this,
And that I denied them the three asked for kiss:
But just to make sure, I'll steal up to the door,
For I never spoke harsh to my darlings before."
So saying, he softly ascended the stairs,
And arrived at the door to hear both of their
prayers.
His Annie's "Bless papa" draws forth the big
tears,
And Willie's grave promise falls sweet on his
ears.
"Strange, strange I'd forgotten," said he, with a
sigh,
"How I longed, when a child, to have Christmas
draw nigh.
I'll atone for my harshness," he inwardly said,
"By answering their prayers ere I sleep in my
bed."
Then he turned to the staircase, and softly went
down,
Threw off velvet slippers, and silk dress-
gowns,
Dropped hat, coat, and boots, and was out in the
street,
A millionaire facing the cold, driving sleet.
Nor stopped he until he had bought everything,
From a box full of sweets to the tiny gold ring.
Indeed he kept adding so much to his store,
That the various presents outnumbered a score.
Then homeward he turned, with his holiday load,
And, with Aunt Mary's help, in the nursery 'twas
stowed.
Miss Dolly was seated beneath a pine-tree,
By the side of a table spread out for her tea.
A work-box, well filled, in the centre was laid,
And on it a ring, for which Annie had prayed.
A soldier, in uniform, stood by a stand,
"With bright, shining russets, and all painted
red."
There were balls, dogs, and horses, books pleasing
to see,
And birds of all colors were perched in the tree;
While Santa Claus, laughing, stood up in his top.
As if getting ready more presents to drop,
And as the fond father the picture surveyed,
He thought for his trouble he had amply been
paid.
And he said to himself, as he brushed off a tear,
"I'm happier to-night than I've been for a year;
I've enjoyed more true pleasures than ever before,
What care I if bank stock fall ten per cent. more?
Hereafter I'd make it a rule, I believe,
To have Santa Claus visit us each Christmas
Eve."
So thinking, he gently extinguished the light,
And tripped down the stairs to retire for the
night.
As soon as the beams of the bright morning sun
Put the darkness to flight, and the stars, one by
one,
Four little blue eyes out of sleep opened wide,
And at the same moment the presents opened.
Then out of their beds they sprang with a bound,
And the very gifts prayed for were all of them
found.
They laughed and they cried in their innocent
glies,
And shouted for "papa" to come quick and see
What presents old Santa Claus brought in the
night,
(Just the things that they wanted), and left before
light.
"And now," added Annie, in a voice soft and low,
"You'll believe there's a Santa Claus, papa, I
know."
While dear little Willie climbed up on his knee,
Determined no secret between them should be,
And told, in soft whispers, how Annie had said
That their blessed mamma, so long ago dead,
Used to kneel down and pray, by the side of her
chair,
"Den we dot up and p'ayed den as well as we
could,
And Dad answered our prayers. Now, wa'n't he
good."
"I should say that he was, if he sent you all these,
And know just what presents my children would
please."
"Well, well, let him think so, the dear little elf,
To-would be cruel to tell him I did it myself."
"Blind father! Who caused your staru heart to
rebel."
And the hasty words spoken so soon to repent!
'Twas the being who bade you steal softly up
stairs,
And made you his agent to answer their prayers.

CHRISTMAS GIFTS, ETC.

BY MRS. A. E. SNOW.

Surely the river of life which flows
on ordinary days and weeks, is not
the river of life which flows from
Christmas day to the second day
of January, and the cynics who ask
with the one in Mr. Dickens's tale,
"What is the 25th of December to
me?" are in a miserable minority. For
one of the greatest charms of the festi-
val, is, that during it, cynicism is lost in
universal charity and good-will; we are
pitiful to the poor, tolerant with heretics,
and do not even object to our poli-
tical opponents enjoying their turkey
and mince pie.
Then, "good people all, a merry
Christmas to you," and how infinitely
preferable is this genial old-fashioned
salutation, to the modern "Compliments
of the Season," whose frigid in-
anity affects one like a cold shower-bath
on a winter morning.
True, to the middle-aged, and to
those growing old, all anniversaries are
personally melancholy, yet

"The winter mood
Mourns less for what age takes away
Than what it leaves behind."

and good people do not keep Christ-
mas on their own private enjoyment.
The beauty and the virtue of Christmas
is, that we keep it for somebody else;

for the poor, for the children, for the
glad future when every bell will be a
Christmas chime, and all the year round
be Christmas. Besides, Christmas binds
us to our own old existence. Oh, if
every one of these festivals in our sepa-
rate lives, were painted in a series of
pictures, what a gallery they would
make! Each 25th of December is a
"high place" in our history; let us
erect on them a memorial pillar, and
name it Jehovah-Jireh.

No two Christmas festivals are quite
alike; even the popular superstitions
regarding their observance have visibly
changed in our sight. Where are the sta-
tely ceremonies of our ancestors? Scarcely
their shadow is left to us, and yet we do
not regret their departure; for to simplify
life, to get rid of unnecessary forms, is
one of the triumphs of civilization. No one
but children or people of immature minds
are exhilarated by a set resolution to be
merry; generally nothing is so depressing
as trying to be cheerful to order. I doubt
however if even the more intelligent
children of this generation are an excep-
tion. Mirth cannot be ordered for them,
they will have a reason for it, and at
very early years they have imbibed
enough of the spirit of the age to vote
the games and dances of their ancestors
vulgar and slow. I simply state the
fact without in any way endorsing the
nil admirari principle which our juvenile
Dundrearys affect.

With the decay of splendid and
quiet ceremony we have also dropped
much of the old-time effusiveness. We
do not indulge now in loud and demon-
strative expressions of friendship and
good-will; we have come back to the
more delicate oriental fashion of inti-
mating our feelings by our gifts. Hence
the importance of rightly considering
this subject, for a present may lose all
its value for want of thought even
where there has been no want of affec-
tion.

Christmas presents should be either
useful, beautiful, costly, or rare, "A
rare present to a rare person," says
Leigh Hunt; for rarity is greater than
cost, because money cannot always
command it. It is generally an elege-
ance to omit the costliness, though if
the giver be rich he must give some-
thing equal to his means, or else he
sets his riches above his friendship and
generosity, which would be a contempti-
ble mistake. "With no presents
should there be any pretence; givers
must never say, they could get no other,
or afford no better, nor keep asking
about it after it is given."

For my part I think it is a pity that
the pleasant fashion of exchanging nice
things to eat is going out of use. It is
a great delusion to suppose that such
presents are not welcome; none bring
the donor more vividly and pleasantly
to remembrance. But these are "earnest"
and intellectual days, and we get
no *cadeaux* but books. Truly Christ-
mas books are wonderful; and com-
pared with the "Keepakes" and "An-
nals" of a quarter of a century ago,
they are vastly improved; but they are
in many ways unsatisfactory as pres-
ents.

First, they are rarely new or original;
publishers dare not risk such splendor
of purple and gold, such wonders of
typography and illustration on untried
and unknown authors; so they dress
up in new and attractive forms accre-
dited and impeccable classics. Johnson,
Goldsmith, Milton, Shakespeare, Wash-
ington Irving, etc., are always safe;
they stand serene, faultless and above
all criticism. Now the people who
give books are not usually the people
to whom books are no rarity and who
know all about them. Book-givers
are more likely to be of that class who
have the highest respect for literature,
yet know little of it, and wisely dis-
trust their own taste; people who are
quite willing to give a large price for
a fine copy, but who would greatly he-
sitate about identifying themselves with
a doubtful author. For instance, it is
friendly to religion to present a hand-
some edition of *Paradise Lost*; but
Carlyle, or Darwin, or Swinburne, is
open to suspicion and objection. Then
Christmas books are generally merely
show books, they are too fine to be
read, they are too big for the pocket,
they are too magnificent for the winter
fireside or the summer boat.

If the object of a present is to give
pleasure I think a boy would like a
five-dollar piece, a girl a pretty bracelet,
the seniors an exchange of silver
vases or handsome shawls, perhaps bet-

ter than either poetry or philosophy
just at this time. Not but what poetry
and philosophy are admirably addenda
to other good things, but if we are to
have a holiday, what kind of one would
it be if all the world sat reading Christ-
mas books?

It is almost as fine a thing to receive
a present properly as to give one—not
to show hesitation, not to be churlish
and shrink immediately of having to
give one in return—not to be sensitively
annoyed at the obligation—but to take
it with a conspicuous and frank enjoy-
ment of the gift and the kindness it
implies; to look upon it as so much
gain—not in goods—but in good-will,
and to be glad of the privilege which
it accords to express our own feelings
in a similar manner. It takes as liberal
a nature to receive as to give.

But they who would know the full
measure of delight in giving, and see
the perfection of grace in receiving
presents, must give gifts to the little
children. Now this is a hard thing to
do, unless you have dined with skip-
ping ropes, and galloped on hobby-
horses, and flirted with dolls; and are
thoroughly *en rapport* with that won-
drous condition we call childhood. But
if you are of the initiated, then I will
tell you how to spend a marvelous day
—visit all the toy stores, and let a little
child lead you. Follow with docile
feet your merry chattering guide from
street to street and store to store; cram
your pockets with Noah's arks, and tin
trumpets, and speaking dolls, and cats
and dogs, and candies and oranges, then
go home and gradually surrender the
whole ergo of treasures to the "young
barbarians" at play in the nursery.

In their reception there will be no
affectation, no doubts, no suspicions, no
considerations; their gratitude will find
voice in musical and untranslatable cries
of delight, in happy faces, dimpling and
rippling and beaming with wonder and
joy. Then don't say one word of dis-
approbation if destruction at once com-
mences. Remember how strong the
passion for handling is, even in adults;
so strong that men and women have to
be constantly warned away from rare
and valuable objects, by labels of "Do
not touch;" they may then surely ex-
cuse that lust of the hand in a child
which is often stronger than the lust of
the eye; for who is ever satisfied with
seeing a thing until he has seen it in
his own hands?

Even a ten-dollar toy, if it has nothing
moveable or changeable about it,
soon tires a child. After his eye is sat-
isfied he wants to tie a string to it,
to pull it about, to pull it to pieces. And
if he may not do this, the thing is a de-
lusion and a weariness to him. No
toys are better for children than mag-
netic or mechanical ones; they excite
wonder and speculation, and children
attain through wonder unto knowledge.
The Greeks, from whom we have yet
something to learn, gave their boys a
piece of wet clay and encouraged them
to model every conceivable thing; thus
early creating and developing the cre-
ative and imitative qualities.

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