

LITTLE JIM, THE CARRIER.

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He came along one April day
And seemed a very part of spring.
It must have been his joyous way,
Or else the sweet and hearty ring
Of song and truth within his voice.
At any rate, the office choice
For carrier went at once to him
As if the place had waited long
And patiently for Little Jim,
The lad whose work and merry song
Went hand in hand, whose winning smile
Was waiting for you all the while.



Why Little Jim was made his name
Not any one around could tell.
He was little. All the same
The title seemed to fit him well.
For there were gentleness and grace
And wisdom within his face;
Likewise the solid place he had
In every heart by all the men
Was a protector to the lad.
The editor within his den
And every other felt that he
Was watching o'er Jim's destiny.

The lad was slender, but it seemed
His suppleness thereby increased.
His eyes were blue and ever beamed
With kindly light. They never ceased
To have a look of candor bold.
But way within their depths was told
A tale of sadness, though he tried
To keep them twinkling, merry, bright,
And bravely sought to always hide
Whate'er distress he knew. And freight
Had never known the time or how
To place its mark upon his brow.

His lips were cherry red and round,
But gathered for his whistling oft,
And tuneful was the cheery sound
He made, so sweet and clear and soft.
His hearers listened, filled with joy,
And smiling said, "God bless the boy!"
His hair, light brown and all astray,
Curled over at its graceful will.
His nose, half pugged, in saucy way
Provoked your warm affection still,
And scattered freckles, growing dim,
Completed "looks" for Little Jim.

Beneath appearances which showed
The youngster rather homely, plain,
He had a heart which ever flowed
With gentleness, and never pain
He caused to anything if he
Could help it, and to always be
Of some assistance seemed his aim.
'Twas Jim to whom the office cat
First showed a sign of being tame;
'Twas he who made her sleek and fat
By giving from his lunch the meat.
In fact, he saved her from the street.



Of friends within the printing "shop"
The editor was first and best.
The foreman, too, would always stop
To say a word. "Quoth he, 'I'm blessed
If Little Jim ain't just the lad
Of whom I'd like to be the dad.'"
The pressman, a sullen said to be,
Was glad to have the youngster near.
And everybody smiled to see
The strangely large and glistening tear
That trembled in his saddened eye—
He looked on Jim through years gone by.

The men who daily at the "case"
Set up the type would always turn
To see the bright and gentle face.
Reporters, young or old and stern,
Could better stories write, said they,
While cheered by Little Jim each day.
When on his route he made his rounds,
His friends were counted hundreds strong.
And many, listening for his sounds,
Looked out to see him romp along.
He never failed, was never late
With papers at the door or gate.

'Twas strange perhaps, yet simple quite,
That no one knew except by day
This winsome boy, for when at night
He wended home the weary way,
It was with fast and puzzling pace
He sped, as if he ran a race
With any who might watch to know
The winding alley, wretched street
To which he always had to go
To gain his home, his poor retreat.
The dreary spot which only he
Could bravely guard from misery.

Within the low and crumbling walls
To which he nightly went to sleep
His garret, lightest, sweetest cells,
Which told of love, devotion deep.
Were: "Mother, sister, how we are,
How jolly that it isn't far
To come!" And, bless his loving heart,
He'd run above a mile. Then they
Who'd listened for his lively dart
Along the path would quickly say
How glad they were to have him there,
And none betrayed an aching care.

No wonder Little Jim was brave
With two such dear, unselfish souls
To wait for him and always save
Some dainty morsel on the coals.

To greet him with a hug and kiss—
The only things abundant. This
Darkened place, made clean and bright
And fortified by love and cheer,
Vouchsafed by Jimmie's "sally night,"
Was rest and peace, sweet home and
dear.

They three never mentioned wretchedness
Nor would admit the plain distress.
The mother's face was thin and sad
In spite of patient smiles and sweet,
But otherwise much like the lad
She looked. His honest ways, his neat
And curling hair so prone to stray
He had from her. Her hair, now gray
And thinning, waved in curves above
A whitened brow, whereon, engraved
By patience, which is born of love,
Were records of her trials braved.
The goodness, in Jim's face assured,
Hers had, refined by things endured.

Jim's sister was a little maid
Of summers ten and brave as he,
And though you saw her dresses frayed
You noticed in her face that she
Was lovelier than princess fair,
And anything which she might wear
Was neat and clean, though worn and old.
And she it was who made their life
Less bitter. She it was who told
The fairy tales of hope. The strife
To keep their home quite fresh and bright
She half performed each morn and night.

Five years before the father, strong,
Had shouldered gayly all the work
And made their lives a simple song
Of peace. But ever dangers lurk
To drag protectors down, and so
He, big and hearty, had to go.
'Twas where they dig the glistening coal
He daily labored, and at last,
With many another gen'rous soul,
He fell, a victim to a blast,
And from the little home so bright
The tender three came, worlds to fight.

So long as she could stand the strain
The mother tried support to find.
But, far too weak, the daily pain
Was more than she could bear. Her
mind,
So cheerful once, had filled at length
With clouds, and all her little strength
Exhausted in the struggle soon.
Had left them hopeless. Then the boy,
Our Little Jim, a lively bon
To clear ones precious, leapt with joy
To fight the battle hard and great
Against the grinding world and fate.

At first the lad had found it hard
To earn a penny, but the way
Is rarely 'gainst persistence barred,
And Jim was at it every day.
His creed was everlasting cheer
And honesty and never fear.
When, after struggling here and there
To keep them all alive, the place
As carrier came, the world seemed fair,
And just to see the radiant face
Which Jim took home would make a saint
Declare that heavenly joys were faint.

So there they were. This home which
seemed
So very lowly, black and small
Knew happiness. No one had dreamed
How little's needful, after all,
When cheerfulness and peace and love
Arrayed o'er misery stand above.
They at the office never knew
That Jim was brother, father, son,
Nor of the things he had to do,
Nor of the many he had done,
But all the time he found some way
Of adding to his scanty pay.

And thus the spring and summer sped
Quite happily, and thus the three,
Contented with their little, said
That all was well, and thankfully
They lived, though hard it was to know
How far to make each penny go.
That sweet denial formed a part
Of each one's life. They could endure
The daily hardships, for the heart
Of each, by growing love sustained,
Could not by trials small be pained.

The autumn winds, which, strong and
cold,
Laid bare the twigs upon the trees,
Proclaimed the year was growing old.
And many times a chilling breeze
Through gaping chinks along the wall
Made cold the little home, and all
Were made to shiver and to dread
The wintry days of ice and snow,
And Jimmie puzzled in his head
The way to keep them warm to know
And doubled all his efforts brave
Their hearts from misery to save.

December, dreary, cold and bleak,
Found Jimmie much too poorly clad,
And though he dauntless seemed his cheek
Grew thin and purple. Gen'rous lad,
He bore too much, nor ever told
How like a knife he felt the cold.
He overtaxed himself at last
With extra work, but still denied
His sickness till it came so fast
He barely reached his home. He sighed
In anguish then and fell at length,
Prostrated in his mind and strength.

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Set up the type would always turn
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Of course another youngster smart
They had to have without delay,
And got one, but in every heart
The thought, "This new one cannot stay
A minute after Jim comes back."
Was shared by all. No subtle knack
Of learning fast, no effort great
To please displayed by carrier new,
Could change affection sealed by fate
Or ever Jimmie's place undo.
'Twas plain that now his blithesome call
Was sadly missed by one and all.



When two or three long days had gone
And Little Jim had not returned,
The men were plainly all forlorn.
Nor tried to hide how much they yearned
To see his smile, and all agreed
He must be ill. They didn't need
To have one say no fault or blame
Could fall on Jim, no scheme or trick
Explain his absence, and they came
To saying: "He was looking sick
A week ago. Has any word
About the little lad been heard?"

And then subscribers going by
Commenced to stop, look in and ask:
'Where is that boy whose merry eye
Made children glad?' And so the task
Of saying sadly: "Wish we knew.
We don't know what we're going to do
Without him," was a burden dear.
The editor had grumbled long
For several days, and then "See here,"
Said he to all, "I want to know
Why no one in the shop here gives
Me notice where our Jimmie lives."

The men looked stupidly around
And scanned each other's faces blank,
But no one made an answering sound.
While each one's heart within him sank:
'Twas plain that anxious, willing, they
Had never known and could not say
Where home for Little Jim might be.
And when they found the breath to
speak,
They wondered how it was that he
Had never let them know. "We'll seek
Him out at once," the chief then said,
And wondering how he scratched his head.

The best reporter with "a nose
For news"—sagacious, too, was he—
The editor then quickly chose
To hunt the lad up speedily.
"Just drop your other work today,"
Said he, "and do this right away."
The scribbler issued forth, and glad
Of this assignment did he feel.
For in his heart he liked the lad
And wished he might promote his weal.
But though he searched with patient skill
The home was undiscovered still.

Ashamed he felt. He'd "fallen down"
With all his splendid effort made.
Too well he knew the threat'ning frown
Which no excuse had e'er delayed.
But, strange enough, the chief well knew
He'd failed despite what skill could do,
And only said, "I'll try again.
And keep on trying till we're beat."
Next day another of his men
With patient tramp through muddy
street
And ally searched and then came back
To say they still were off the track.

And then began about the place
A contest strange, a witness queer:
A mystery was in each face.
For all were hunting far and near,
And all were waiting on the way
To be the first to get an eye
On Little Jim. The foreman gray,
Reporters, and the pressman, too,
Were searching every nook and cranny,
To try and find the boy they knew,
But not a word would they admit
He daily made a "fall" of it.

The editor, just like the rest,
Was not at heart an Jim, and so
At length upon this hopeless quest
He felt a strange desire to go.
Reporter instinct, long forgot,
But latent in his brain, grew hot.
To best his men was one desire,
To find his boy a stronger one,
And thus with all his youthful fire
He searched, although 'twas little fun
To walk around through snow or rain
And always find his labor vain.

Now, every one the house had passed
Where Jimmie lay, but no one thought
The place inhabited nor cared
A look within this hovel fraught
With dismal things and always quite
As dark and silent as the night.
The day before bright Christmas came
The people were to look on snow.
The editor that morn the same
As ever plucked forth to go
In search of Jim. "Great Scott," thought
he,
'What will his Christmas supper be?"

And thinking sadly as he went
He heaved a sigh and then he went
He sought, and as his head he bent
He saw within the entry, which not
Before distracted had been, the track
Of one who'd come, but not gone back,
And what was odd was that ten feet
Had been directed to the door
Of that wretched shanty on the street,
Which he had never thought before
Contained a living soul. He stood,
And something in those tracks seemed
good.

A moment later opened wide
The weather beaten door, and there
A little woman stood inside
With sad, sweet face and marked with
care.
A man, who seemed a doctor kind,
Was leaning, and his worried mind
Was ebbing. "He's safe at last,"
He smiling said and came away.
The editor, whose heart beat fast,
Just muttered, "Heaven bless the day!"
He knew, though short the glimpse of joy,
He'd found the mother and the boy.

Half wondering he stood, then stole
With guilty tread around until
He found a little crack, a hole
Which, near the sagging window sill,
Permitted just a narrow view,
And there he caught his eye like glow.
"A little sister, I declare,"
He whispered, and adown his cheek
A tear was flowing. "I had that there
Was any chance to know," and weak
From very happiness, he leaped
Himself and toward the office raced.

Within the little house that morn
Was tumult before unknown,
And hushed just had been reborn,
And dark despair at length had flown.
The fever's fatal source had turned,
And Jimmie's home no longer burned.
As peaceful as a babe he lay
And softly slept. His face, though white
And thin, now smiled the lovely way
It had before, and gay and bright
A sunbeam fell across the floor
And seemed to whisper, "Weep no more."



One moment Little Jim awoke,
Looked up and saw two faces near.
His weary smile, but cheerful, broke
Like light from heaven on those dear
And faithful ones. His back crossed
Them; then he sighed and turned to rest.
A sleep so gentle as the dew
Which kisses all the upturned flowers

Stole on the lad. He never knew
The flight of sweet and restful hours.
And then at length he had a dream
Which made the place enchanted seem.
He thought that in a banquet hall
Were loaded tables bright and gay;
That mother, sister, he and all
The office force were there to stay.
And that a private crowd they made,
The honored of all there arrayed.
And then such things to see and eat,
Such glorious heaps, brought steaming
in,
Of turkeys plump and pudding sweet!
And such a hearty noise and din
Of rattling cups and forks and knives
They'd never heard in all their lives.

And later on it seemed that each
Of those who from the office came
Got up to make a brilliant speech,
And all began then just the same.
They started, "My dear madam, you!"—
And so until they all were through
Turned always, plainly to address
Themselves to Jimmie's mother, and
Upon their words they laid stress
That he could hardly understand
The meaning of it all, but still
He felt his loving heartstrings thrill.

The first to speak, the foreman gray,
Said, "Well—ahem—I feel that this—
That this—I don't know what to say
Except that in this hour of bliss
I'm happy for the trifling part
That I can take." He gave a start.
"You see—what was that sentence?"
Yes. Don't you see on such a day
We old ones don't know where to go,
And feel so—well—well, anyway
There's no such spot as this in town."
And thereupon he sat him down.

Then that reporter, oldest, best
Of all the staff, arose. Said he:
"We feel today that we are blessed;
That you—that is to say, that we
Are here, and, on the other hand"—
And here he tried to firmly stand—
"The fact is, madam, every one
Of us is wrapped up in the lad
And feels ashamed that we have done
No better in the time we've had.
We know—we—well, I'll have to quit.
I can't make speeches worth a bit."

"I don't see what he means by that,"
Thought Little Jim, but then arose
The pressman, and he held his hat
And rubbed with nervous hand his nose.
"There's nothing much to say," he said,
And swallowed air and scratched his head,
"And you—you know, of course you do,
Just how we feel—just how—of course—
And that's the way we feel toward you.
Excuse me; I'm a little hoarse."
And so he was, and on his chair
He sat and wisely lingered there.

"Well, this is getting funny," thought
Our Little Jim, "and every man
Who's tried to speak has tripped and
caught.
I never saw a queerer plan.
I wish the editor would show
Them how a banquet speech should go."
And then, as if his wish to fill,
The editor arose, but now
He looked as if he might be ill.
No sternness sat upon his brow.
His manner gruff was gone, and quaint
He stood, as gentle as a saint.



"Our hearts are full," he said at last,
'And I have heard in every voice
The willing words that came so fast
That none could speak. But we rejoice
To find you all, and God be praised,
To find the clouds of darkness raised.
These friends, who now for many years
Have been companion—yes, and more—
Have told me brokenly the fears
That made our onetime hearts so sore.
I'll have to cease. My eyes are dim.
God bless you both and Little Jim!"

His voice indeed was choked. His face
No longer hid his feelings strong,
And when he finished gone the place,
And gone the tables and the throng,
And Jimmie's eyes now pierced the gloom
Within his own dark, lowly room.
He knew that he had dreamed, but now
He saw with waking eyes that they
Who spoke were in his home, and how
They found the house he could not say.
But there they were, and bundles big
Were piled around on every rug.

Yes, bundles, boxes, baskets, bags,
For all these men were big in soul,
And theirs were hearts to bleed when rage
Were clothes and people froze for coal.
That foreman gray had known a year
When want and misery were near.
A newsboy once, barefooted, he
With brother younger strove to make
A living, and, though tenderly
He tried to watch, death came to take
The little fellow. Thus he had
A heart to love this Jimmie lad.

That old and sharp reporter, too,
Was tender hearted, though he tried
To stolid be; his eyes of blue
Now all indifference belied.
He called a wretched time to mind
When all the world had been unkind;
When, as an office "devil," he
Had helped support a mother, and
He thought of all the misery
That came. And so when Jimmie's
"and"
He saw he felt 'twas good to live,
That he might aid and comfort give.

The editor—whose melting heart
Proclaimed him now for what he was
And showed that gruffness had no part
To live in—did not weep because
Of times remembered—though indeed
He'd been a carrier once in need
Of help—it was because his life
Had been so full of longing just
To have a son, and when his wife
Had died he felt his faith and trust
Had waked; then this Little Jim
Had waked mysterious chords in him.

But, oh, that sullen pressman there—
No longer sullen, only sad—
Who, looking now with blinded stare,
Saw only in the past a lad;
His son he was, and just about
Like Jim, except he wasn't stout

Of arm and limb. And every day,
When Jim's true eyes had met his
He felt the tears and turned away;
It seemed that backward years had
And once again his darling boy
Was filling all his soul with joy.

Thus these and all the other men,
So used to business ways and hard,
Felt all their pulses beat again,
Affection's gates again unbarred,
And when of Jimmie's life they knew
They felt that all that they could do
Was not enough. The mother stood
With face made holy in the light
Which these rough angels cast, nor
She speak. Her little girl so bright
Clung happy at her side—the pair
A picture made surpassing fair.



And seeing all with wonderment
The weakened boy raised up in bed,
And one, whose eyes were on him bent,
That editor, came quick and said,
'Why, Jimmie, boy, awake at last?
Thank God you're well—the danger
past.
You rogue, why did you never tell
Us where you were and let us know
You were not feeling strong and well?
I don't know when we've worried so
Thus gently chiding, he caressed
The head upon the pillow pressed.

Jim's mother and his sister then
Came quickly forward, and the crowd
Of awkward, kind and tender men
Could not resist, and feeling proud
To see again the winsome look
On Jimmie's face came up and took
Their places near. The lad, abashed,
Blushed faintly thus to have them stare
Around his cot. His eyes then flashed
With merry fun; he raised his hand
To feebly shake with all and said,
"I'm sorry to receive in bed."

They loudly laughed, but it was queer
To see their brimming eyes and see
Them all confused because a tear
Would come, provoked by gaiety,
But talking lively every one
They made the place resound with fun.
They spoke of Christmas, Jim the while
In wonder lost—he'd been so ill
He didn't know 'twas come. His smile
Was lovely then, and with a will
He rose up straight, that he could call
"A Merry Christmas to you all!"

They almost shouted forth in glee
Their answers back, and then at length
They said goodbye to all the three.
They came to tax their laddie's strength
By staying longer, but before
They went they wanted one thing more:
A promise—which they got—that they
Could come to spend the afternoon
And bring the dinner Christmas day.
And as they went it seemed too soon
To leave that hallowed, dear retreat
Which looked so shabby from the street.

The mother in amazement sat
And thought and blessed, when all the
gone.
The little maid, with soothing chat,
Made Jimmie sleep. His face, though
wan,
Was happy, and the fever's flush
Had gone and left a lovely blush
Of health upon his wasted cheek.
She then, with silent, lively feet,
Approached the mother—not to speak,
But just to join the blessings sweet
Which there ascended—and the men
Who gave were all rewarded then.

Within the bags and boxes brought
By all those friends, unknown before,
They found that all that careful thought
Could e'er suggest was there, and more
Of dresses, garments, shawls and wraps
And shoes and all the other traps
That people need there was a sight,
Besides a wondrous large supply
Of things to eat and presents bright
For every one—they had to cry
In happiness again that they
Were thus remembered Christmas day.

And such a day it was, and, oh,
Such a fulness on every face!
For all the "office" had to go,
And thus they filled the little place
Quite brimming full, and merriment
Just overflowed and bubbling went
To every heart, and every hour
Was gay—aye, and far more bright
Than Jim had dreamed—but, oh, the flow
Of all the goodness of the sight
Was that compassion, aid and love,
Fixed deep in man by him above.

There's nothing more to tell. The reign
Of sorrow ceased, and dread despair
And hunger, with their thrice of pain,
Were banished, and a joy was there
To take their place. All the men
Became protectors, and again
The three were cared for tenderly.
And Jim this blessing gave: "I pray
That every one's New Year may be
As sweet as you've made ours today."
God bless him—more he could not do,
For that included me and you.

PHILIP MIGHELS.