

TALES OF NEWSPAPER MEN.

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Christmas eve. The night was old
And dim without, and fell the snow
To wrap the sleeping world in cold
And spangles of light. Warm the glow
That came from windows where the light
Was streaming forth upon the night
As if to drive the gloom away.
A hush of life by night and day
Was this, for, lo! by night and day
This office spread its news bequest
And education far and wide
In city, town and countryside.



A printing shop it was, and men
Were telling endlessly within
With type and paper, ink and pen,
Mid whirl of press and roar and din
Of getting out the "extra" made
By all the forces there arrayed.
'Twas not a very charming place
For unaccustomed eyes to see,
For dark were walls, and o'er the face
Of all, portly by industry,
Was evidence that toil was there
Inhabiting the very air.

Old papers carpeted the floor
From "case" to press. In this debris
The editor was deep, while o'er
His desk was copy piled. But he
Was cheerful, for he thought the time
And place delightful. Low the chime
Of distant bells came on his ear,
Proclaiming Christmas cheer, and
through

The noise of printing he could hear
How sweet and cheerful, clear and true
The strokes were ringing through the din
Old night to every one and him.

The "force" was all on hand, for none
Would leave until the whole of this
The big edition well was done,
For something might have gone amiss
With press or rollers, type or power
Within this last eleventh hour.
But when at length the press was still
And labor done and all were free
Up spoke the chief: "How many will
Remain awhile and sit with me
Beside the stove and stories tell
Of yuletide days? What, all? 'Tis well."

Farther from out his desk he drew
A lot of apples, crackers, cheese,
Enough for all and over, too,
And munching happily at these
The foreman, pressman, every one,
Sat down to join the feast and fun,
And each was ready to relate
Of other Christmas times, when they
Were younger far and myotic fate
Rode pencil what they were today,
And chuckled low the stove at all
And cast its glow against the wall.



The foreman first they chose to hear.
A tallish man was he and spare.
His face was pale, his eyes were blue
And gentle, and his voice was low,
Though just a trifle and in tone,
As if too many things he'd known
That out a shadow where he'd walked
In years ago. His speech was slow,
But good to hear where'er he talked.
His hair was gray and seemed to grow
Old clinging, as if 'twould now
Conceal the year marks on his brow.

"Then lights and shadows, where they fall
Behind us on the dingy wall,
Remind me of a time," he said,
"When neither roof nor room nor bed
I had to call my own. I guess
I must have just turned seven—yes,
'Twas two years after mother died,
I'm sure, and just a year that I'd
Been blacking boots with Cobble Jim
In big New York. I slept with him
Beneath the dock that burned when he
And Crutches perished frightfully."

"I'll never more forget that night.
We three were sleeping sound and tight
When suddenly about us fell
The blazing timbers. With a yell
Jim bounded up and looked to see
If any chance was left to flee.
For on the top the dock had caught,
And underneath we dreamed of naught
Come wrong till all was down, and then
Jim packed me out and went again
For Crutches. Oh, 'twas wondrous brave!
He died with him he tried to save."

"Poor Crutches! Poor old Jim! Those two
Had always tried their best to do
For me. I looked so thin
Weak, and so they took me in
A mother's love until that day—
To father's house. And let me state
That never said I've seen more great
Than Crutches was. His leg was lame
And dragging scaly. All the same
His heart was sound and big, but, oh,
Jim's only God alone could know!"

"To dusky night from misty morn
I wandered all alone, forlorn
And wretched, hungry, cold and sore
From sleeping in a stray door
Or sidewalk box. I need to eat
The crusts from barrels on the street,
Those days, and wear the hats and shoes
That people thought unfit to use
And three away. A blacking kit
Had burned, and so I hadn't it,
And had on penance left to buy
The papers with, my luck to try."

"I well remember how at last
One night I slily slipped apart
The guard, and on a ferry boat
I found my ragged self afloat.
It touched the other shore, and glad
Was I. No place could be so bad
As big New York, I thought. I ran,
Or started to, but struck a man
And fell headforemost, stunned, and he
Bent down my wasted form to see
And kindly spoke. Then up I stood
And saw his face and knew 'twas good."

"I thought that he was rather poor
Himself, but then I wasn't sure.
For though his clothes were old and frayed
He took me in a place and paid
For milk and doughnuts right away,
And when I'd look at him he'd say:
'Go on, you little rat, and eat.
I guess you've lived along the street
Some time.' And then, when all was gone
And out we went, he said, 'Come on,
And maybe if you'll silence keep
We'll find a place for you to sleep.'"

"At last we found a door that he
All softly opened. I could see
A heap of papers in a den
To which he took me. Quickly then
He whispered: 'You can come in here
On any night. The coast is clear
Most always after dark; but, mind,
No single spark of fire I find
You fetching in, because they throw
The wasted paper here. You know
Out front's the printing shop. Good night,
My lad. I hope you'll sleep all right.'"

"And so he left me. Through a hole,
To which all silently I stole,
A light was streaming. From the shop
It came, and sitting there on top
Of stools I saw the men that set
The type and saw the press that yet
Had not begun to work, and there
A man was seated in a chair
And writing very fast. The door
In front was opened then, and more
Of comfort did I feel, for he
Came in to work who'd sheltered me."

"The paper there was warm and soft
To rest in as I thought, and oft
I sighed in pleasure, so I fell
Asleep and dreamed. I couldn't tell
How long I lay, but finally
The noise of printing awakened me.
The press was roaring, and I knew
The engine's puffing. They were through,
And all departing after that,
Full soon, and lying still and flat
I saw upon the walls the glow
Cast by the coals still burning low."

"Oh, those were nights so good and sweet
Compared with those upon the street!
'Tis those I am reminded of
By all the shadows up above
Us on the wall tonight. I did
What things I could by day and slid
Within my little home at dark.
At last I used to nightly mark
The time when all were gone, then slip
Out front and often found a nip
To eat that, dry and thrown away,
Was left of some one's lunch that day."

"Then sometimes I would get the broom
And sweep and clean the littered room
To pay my lodging bill. When all
Were gone one night, upon the wall
I saw a round and brilliant light
That didn't seem exactly right.
I watched from out my snug retreat
And saw the door that reached the street
All softly opened. Then there came
Two burglars in, whose desperate game
Was plain to see—it was to force
And rob the office safe, of course."

"No sooner did I know their plan
Than, slipping out, I quickly ran
To hunt for help. I almost bowled
A big policeman down, but told
Him all about it. Low he blew
His whistle then and summoned two
Just like him. Then another pair
Came suddenly, as if the air
Were full of them. We hasting went
And gained the spot, and two were sent
To enter at the rear with me,
And then in ran the other three."

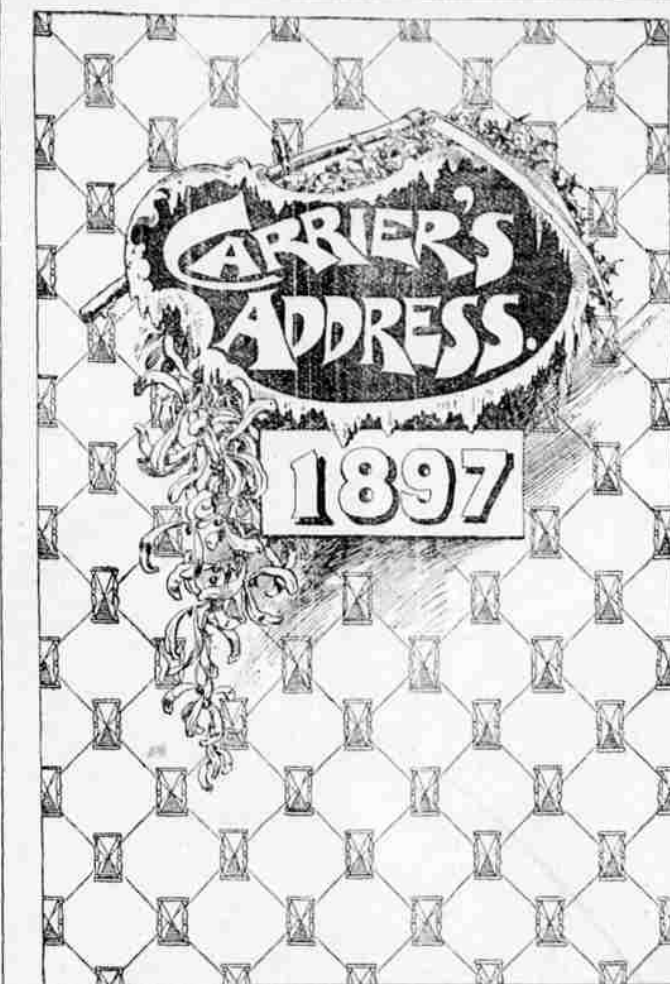
"The thieves were taken by surprise,
For hardly could they wink their eyes
Before their hands were cuffed, and I
Was taken, too, which made me cry.
Because I didn't understand
That only kindnesses were planned.
Well, that's about the story's all.
It took a minute to install
My beaming self as office boy
And fill me more than full of joy
When all the facts were out. That day
My friend was raised to extra pay."

"'Twas Christmas week these things be-
fell,
And so I love the season well.
No need to tell you how they let
Me work ahead and learn to set
The type, nor how I rose until
Fate's chances brought me here to fill
A place among you. I have had
My times of being gay and sad
The same as all must have; but, oh,
This season brings a wondrous fond
Of memories! But, there—'twill do.
Let's hear the pressman's story through."



A moment all were silent when
The tale was done, and in the heart
Of all was tenderness, and then
The pressman gave a sudden start,
As if he thought his yarn would sound
Much better if 'twere swiftly ground
Out by the big machine. A round,
Contented looking man was he,
Who always seemed to like to pound
His fist upon his fleshy knee
And laugh aloud if but a joke
His head from out its shell would poke."

"My tale," said he, "is tame. I'll say
Before beginning—just the way
I made my mother smile when she
Had nearly lost her faith in me.
Poor mother! She—hal hal hal!—
Once thought I really ought to go
To congress some fine day. Oh, dear,
It's funny, really—me—but, here,
I've slipped a pulley. Well, it's true
That we were poor, and what to do



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I couldn't quite decide upon,
But felt inclined toward—having fun.

"One day I read an 'ad.' that told
Of all the silver and the gold
A boy could make if he would get
Their printing press—'twas called the
'Pet.'—
Selfinking, standard, iron, steel,
Complete! Superb! It made me feel
Like jumping ten feet high. I read
The lines to pieces, and in bed
I took the pictured thing at night,
And then I strove with all my might
To get the needed cash to buy
The thing—three dollars—rather high!"



"Old bottles, sacks or anything
That I could rustle up to bring
The necessary sum I sold,
And mother soon began to scold
About my 'silly schemes.' At last,
When all her patience long had passed,
I had the three and sent in haste
To get the 'Pet.' I feared the waste
Of time might fatal be and thought
That all the presses might be bought
Before my order came; but, say,
That advertisement runs today."

"It came, of course, all right, and I
Was living somewhere in the sky.
I studied well its every part,
And soon I had it all by heart.
But, oh, the impatient and the pained,
The pitying, glances mother rained
When I its merits glibly decried,
And 'platten,' 'lever,' 'roller,' chanted,
But all the same I bounded in,
Determined that I'd make it win."

"Oh, what a trail of ink and grease
I left about the place, but peace
Was in my heart—that is, until
I tried my level best to fill
An order. For about a week,
I think, I hardly dared to speak
Of printing. But there came a day
At last when I had learned the way
To grapple with the thing and had
A lot of type, old, good and bad,
And started in, to my delight,
To print a paper. 'Twas a sight!"

"Oh, youthful papers built upon
The hopes that 'luminate the dawn'
Could all of you together be
Within a potter's field, ah, me!
That field were crumpled, and there among
The rest and labeled, 'Died so young,'
Would mine be resting—yes, hal hal!
It makes me laugh today, although
It cost me then a pang to find
I had no editorial mind.
But out of that I won a friend
Full glad to kind assistance lend."

"With all due modesty, I'll state
He saw my—well, at any rate,
He got me in where I could learn
The things for which I used to yearn
Concerning presses. Then the way
Was just too easy. On a day
That always makes me happy when
I think of it my path again
Was made as smooth as oil, for I
Was taken in and placed on high—
As third assistant pressman—yes,
And washed the rollers every day."

"Hal hal! you mustn't mind my smile.
I'm thinking of the long, long while
I served before they one day said
I'd advance up toward the lead.
With the first promotion came,
They handed me a double sum
As weekly wages. Not a word
I told to mother, though, but heard
Her sighing still to think her son
So little real success had won.
But when it came to Christmas day
She nearly fainted dead away—"

"Yes, nearly fainted, bless you, though,
'Twas joy that did it. Through the snow
I'd tramped the night before and brought
A heap of things that I had bought

And handed her besides a pile
Of well earned money. Then the smile
And kiss she gave me and the way
She'd scoffed at presses—well, 'twas good
As if for congress I had stood
And won. Thank God, she's with me yet,
And still we treasure up the 'Pet.'"

Broad grins were on the faces there
About the store. Not one but knew
The pressman's really modest air
Concerning all that he could do,
And what success he'd made, and how
He'd share his every cent. But now
They turned around to hear the tale
The old reporter had to tell,
For well they knew it could not fall
Of interest. Awhile he felt
To musing ere he spoke and then
Addressed the all expectant men.

"The first that I remember I
Was sent upon the street to try
To peddle papers," he began,
"Unlike our foreman friend, who ran
Away from big New York, I staid,
I guess because I felt afraid
To leave the place or didn't know
Where else on earth that I could go.
I had a brother then. Poor lad!
His weakened form was pinched and sad,
And rare it was for him to see
Beyond our street of poverty."

"The 'home' from which I daily went—
A basement in a tenement—
Was not so happy, gay nor clean
As some that since that time I've seen,
And she—my father's second wife—
When he was gone, made city life
Not wonderfully dear and bright.
I know when I'd return at night
With pockets all but empty she
Would say some forceful things to me
With either hand; but, bless your soul,
I mustn't weave a tale of dole."

"But then it's hardly more than fair
To say my brother died. The air
And food were none too good, you know,
And maybe he was glad to go.
You'd think it might have meant one less
To feed, but greater was the stress
Of labor put on me, for then
He'd soon have been of use, and I
Would have to earn his share. A sigh
Used oft escape me then, but day
Was dawning in another way."

"You see, the scramble made me strong
And active. All the summer long,
And part of winter, too, my feet
And legs were bare as on the street
I ran and scampered round to sell
The 'extra evening papers.' Well,
My calves got very plump and round
And most delightfully were browned,
While on my saucy face the glow
Of health made quite a gleaming show.
You see, I don't conceal today
That once I had a comely way."



"At last an artist clapped his eyes
Upon me, saying, 'Just the size,
And picturesque.' He then approached
Me shyly, and his scheme was hatched.
I felt suspicious at the start,
But later felt uncommon smart
To think of earning in a day
About the whole of one week's pay
At peddling papers; so I went
To pose for him, for he was bent
On making me a model. I
Was pleased enough to let him try."

"We got along first rate, and he
Was often very kind to me,
And maybe had I then been clean
He really might some time have seen
My tender self. At last he thought

My likeness well enough was caught
And so we'd rest awhile. I knew
It couldn't always last, but do
What'er I would I felt the loss
When I no more could step across
The threshold of his studio
And watch his fine creations grow."

"To papers back I went, nor saw
The artist more. The days grew raw
As fall came on and passed and low
Hung wintry clouds. December's snow
Came much too soon that year and made
Me cold and blue. But Christmas trade
Was lively, though, and you can guess
What crowds were on the streets. I bless
That time for doing more for me
Than holiday festivity
Of long years since has done. The day
'Fore Christmas 'twas, and this the way:

"Upon a corner where the crowd
Was surging thick I called aloud
My 'last edition.' Suddenly
Around the corner, running free
Of reins or driver, came a pair
Of tearing horses, and the air
Was full of screams, and from the street,
In wildst panic of retreat,
The fleeing people rushed, nor cared
A single one how others fared
If only they were safely out
Of danger's way. A fearful shout

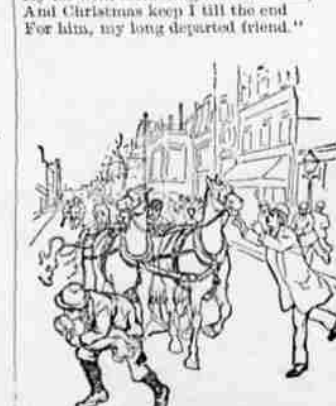
"Rang loud above the screams, for there
A tiny child, as soft and fair
As down, had fallen, and she lay,
All helpless, fairly in the way.
The fright blind horses had to go.
A man whose every struggling throo
Grew wilder sought in vain, alack,
To make the frightened crowd keep back
That he might save the little child.
But while he raged in accents wild
I snatched her forth and felt the brush
Of horse against me in the rush."

"This but an instant hardly took,
And then, with flushed and frightened
look,

The eager crowd around me closed
With gasps, as may be supposed.
But soon there came quick rushing through
The throng a man, and just as true
As I'm alive it proved to be
My artist friend. His child was she
I held, and, oh, how pale his face
Until he hugged her safe! The place
We left at once, for I had won
His heart, with just a little done."

"I'll ne'er forget the scene nor place,
The look upon the father's face,
While tears welled from his eyes. 'Bless
You, boy,' he said. 'I'll ne'er repay
You half for what you've done today,
But as a proof of gratitude
I'll give you clothes and room and food,
That you may have a chance, with pluck,
To make a useful man.' Thus luck
Came unexpected like the light
That follows daily the dark night."

"I'll have to close my story. Well,
There's little left of it to tell.
I went to school and studied, too,
And life took on a meaning now.
One day the chance came that I sought.
When I was fitted, as I thought,
The artist got me on The News,
And there I had a chance to use
My boyhood training, and at last
My lot with scribbling men was cast,
And Christmas keep I till the end
For him, my long departed friend."



The old reporter wistfully
Looked out upon the night. It seemed
As if his mellow eyes could see
The past again, as if he dreamed
Of boyhood days. The men around
The stove were still. Not any sound
They made, nor for a moment spoke.
But not for long this silent mood
Continued, for a merry joke
The pressman cracked at last and wooed
The laughter back, then said, 'Prepare
To hear the editorial share.'"

"Good friends," then said the editor,
"We cannot stay much longer, for
The hour is late. But, looking out
Upon the snow that flies about
Tonight, I thought of long ago,
When such a storm of wind and snow
As this was on one night and here
Within this city. Well, I fear
The tale's not new of how I grew
Up here and worked my progress through
The office till I came to hold
My present place, when I was old."

"But none of you, I think, has heard
The chapter one, for not a word
Of it I've told for years. 'Twas fall
We came to town, my father tall—
A carpenter—and sister Kate
And I. But soon the hand of fate
Upon us heavily was laid,
For at his work my father made
A false step on a scaffold high
And had a fall. We thought he'd die.
It kept him long from work, and we
Were plunged in sudden poverty."

"I feel again the fearful dread
We felt with winter come, for bread
Nor meat nor fire we had. At last,
When hope, it seemed, was nearly past,
This office took me in and made
Me carrier, and then, arrayed
In scarfs and mittens, 'gainst the cold,
My life took on a sterner mold,
Nor did the wind or snow appall.
For prompt I served my papers all.
The pay, though very small indeed,
Supplied our home with many a need."

"Oh, bitter cold those mornings were!
And mighty hard it was to stir.
Long, long before the morning light,
From bed, the frost air to fight,
Hounding beneath a struggling load
Of papers dropped along the road.
'Twas thus I served my daily route,
Dispensing cheer and 'food for thought.'
Oh, what a change old time has wrought!
The press of forty years ago,
Compare it with the papers now,
And looking back the years now fled
Who can but burn to look ahead!"

"Now, what possessed my sister Kate
I know not, but it may be fate
That she, bright, active, cheerful, smart,
One morning gave me quite a start

Till I in admiration stood
Amazed at all her hardihood,
For with me she had risen, too,
And said, 'I'll go along with you,
Because the route I ought to know
In case of accident, and so
She followed me; but, bless you, she
Came home a little wearily."

"It came along to Christmas week,
But none of us would scarcely speak
A word of it, for we were poor,
As poor could be, and rarely sure
Of bare necessities. I guess
I caught a cold—as if distress
Were not enough—but on I went
With working, silently intent
On keeping up. But Christmas eve
I felt determination leave,
For weak and sick I fell in bed,
A little 'off' within my head."



"Oh, such a storm arose that night!
With wind and snow, a sorry plight
The streets were in. The drifts were high
And piling higher, and the sky
Was fierce with specks as fine as wheat
And sharp as ice and nearly fleet
As bullets as they drove before
The blizzard. Beneath our rattling door
The searching bits came drifting in,
And all our clothes were far too thin
To keep the cold without or keep
Us warm enough to let us sleep."

"It seems my plucky sister Kate
Next morn resolved at any rate
To take my paper route alone
In air that chilled one to the bone.
But this she bravely minded naught,
And out into the morning, fraught
With blizzard terrors, lonely set,
Nor minded what was to be met.
Let him who will try to do it
The pluck, the courage, bona fide,
Of women, but in case of need
Where men would fail they oft succeed."

"She struggled on until at length
Her girlish form lost all its strength—
Although 'twould conquer sterner mold—
And, pained by the bitter cold,
Into the snow she prostrate sank,
With scarce a moan, her mind a blank,
While from her frock went scurrying
The papers. But this was the thing
That saved her life, for at the foot
Of one then battling up the street
A rending sheet was spread, and he
Came then upon her suddenly."

"And, lo! the editor it was,
And not at home abroad because
He'd gone to try to catch me at
The office, just to tell me that
I'd better not attempt to go
Upon the route until the snow
And storm abated. But he'd found
The papers gone and turned around
For home again when accident
Threw rescue in his way. He bent
Down over little Kate, and then
He was the most surprised of men."

"Near by he lived. Oh, fortunate
The circumstance, for nearly fate
Had ended all with Kate. But soon
He had her housed, and from the swoon
Of cutting wind and chilling snow
Kind hands soon brought the ruddy glow
Of coursing blood in cheek and vein,
And soon she was herself again.
Right grateful for the timely aid
And for the new found friends she'd made,
How often in life's crooked course
Help comes from unexpected source!"

"To them it was a joy to think
They'd snatched her from the very brink
Of death, and, oh, the things they did
For all of us until, amid
New comforts we were placed. The day
Was marvellously sweet and gay,
A Christmas worth the having, though
A fellow was too ill to know
Quite all the goodness of it. Yes,
And that was not quite all, for, bless
Their hearts, they never let us see
Again the ghosts of poverty."

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"'Twas long ago, yet ever will
The carrier's corner fill
Within my heart. Today, of course,
Our lad's provided with a horse,
But doubtless he is poor, and you
And I tonight on something do
To make his Christmas bright. Upon
The papers here let every one
Leave what he can. The little lad
Deserves it, and 'twill make us glad
To do it. Then we'll write for him,
'A merry Christmas, little Tim!'"

They all arose, and willingly
They emptied pockets till a pile
Of money, lying loose and free,
Was there, and such a happy smile
Was on the face of each, and then
Out fled the big, soft hearted men
And left the place in darkness—no,
Not quite in darkness, for the coals
Still reddened, and the cheerful glow
Yet played, as if the wholesome souls
Had left within the place a ray
Of love to greet the Christmas day.
PHILIP VERMILL MICKLE.