

OUR BOYS.

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hung four small stockings as empty as the open air. Ernest drew near the window and listened. He heard the father say:

"It's no use mother; I can't get a cent anywhere. I went to Mr. Mean for a little money till the mill started up, but he said he could not spare it. The stores won't trust any of us. I got a chance this afternoon to cut some wood and a man gave me fifty cents and a dozen big red apples. So we can fill those dear little stockings with love and apples, this year, dear wife, and the fifty cents will get us some meat and bread for the morrow, and the poor little ones up stairs won't lose their faith in Santa Claus."

Ernest's eyes were running tears so fast that he said afterward "that he thought he would melt all the snow around where he stood." Approaching the door quietly, he opened it wide and in a gruff voice said:

"Kind folks, Old Santa Claus is out here in the street and he sent me here to wish you a Merry Christmas, so look out, and with a quick motion Ernest hit the father with a turkey, and nearly knocked the mother down with a package of toys, nuts, etc., and then ran away like a reindeer before they could say a word.

Lawrence in the meantime had been making up more parcels and when the boys returned in high spirits, he bade them be quiet and quickly dispatched them away.

This time the boys went all together. As they came to a house one of them would run up, throw the door open and yell "Merry Christmas," slam the turkey at the table, leave a bundle of toys and go pell mell into the darkness.

What fun they had. When they had delivered about half of their stock they noticed many lights appearing, and fearing that they would be discovered, they would drive up to a house, (they had put all the sleigh bells on) making a merry jingle, jingle, knock at the door, and when some one appeared they would throw a package at him, and before the attacked party could pick themselves up, these boys were off and away to the next house. The last house was quite away out on the road home. As they approached this place, Lawrence said:

"Boys, you have had all the fun. It's my turn now, and taking the last basket of packages, he departed.

He was absent but a few moments, when the boys in the sleigh heard music, and then singing. Their curiosity was instantly aroused and driving the horses into an empty shed that stood near by, they quickly started for the house where the music was in progress. As Charley Mason, who was in advance, was within a few feet of the house he turned, as a flood of melody came pouring forth from the dwelling, and beckoning his companions to him said:

"Well I never! Who do you think that is that's singing. Well it's just Maud Chamberlain and no one else. But what in the world is she doing here. I'm going to find out."

As Charley started toward the house the door swung open, and the boys

could see that there was quite a gathering. Approaching nearer, they heard laughing, and Maud Chamberlain was saying:

"What in the world possessed these boys to do such a thing, Mr. Mason?"

"Now Miss Maud, you have me cornered. Charley has had many queer freaks but this is the queerest of all. I am of the opinion that Lawrence Sherman and Ernest Ingewood put it into their heads. At any rate it is deserving of much praise, as the boys had saved up their money to enjoy the holidays, and now it's all gone."

"Yes, indeed," said Mrs. Mason, who with a party of ladies and gentlemen had entered joyously into a plan to help the boys, and they had gathered a number of children at this house and were having a Christmas tree. "I am proud of all the boys. If we could only catch them; but I am afraid the girls will not be able to get the sleigh without the boys hearing them."

"What in thunder does she mean," said Charley in a stage whisper.

"Looks as though they had sent a party of girls out to capture us. I believe Lawrence knew all about this and has given us away. Let's make a rush for the sleigh before the girls get there, and go a skating home and leave Lawrence." They all cried together.

"All right," whispered Charley. The boys stole quietly back to the shed and as Charley jumped into the sleigh, he fell plump into a pair of soft little arms that flew around his neck and held him a prisoner while a pair of rosy lips let out a peal of laughter.

"Let go," cried Charley, violently struggling. Who are you; help, boys."

But the boys were in the same fix and could lend no aid.

"Isn't this jolly," cried Mamie Mason, who had her brother a prisoner. "Ha! ha! ha! Only think a party of timid girls capturing five brave young men. Oh, my," and the merry girl laughed and clapped her small hands in great glee.

The girls took the boys back to the house, and presented them to the company. They received kind words for their praiseworthy act, and were rewarded by being taken into Mr. Mason's large sleigh with the girls and given a splendid sleigh ride, also an elegant supper at Mr. Mason's residence, which none of them ever forgot.

And this is how six young men many years ago, acted upon the impulse of a generous moment, when the angels in Heaven were singing into their hearts, "Glory to God in the highest, peace on earth, good will toward man."

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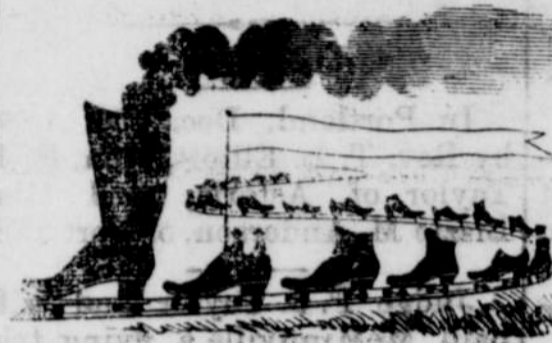
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