

CHRISTMAS BELLS.

IN THE CHRISTMAS MORN.

In the rush of early morning,
When the red burns through the gray,
And the wintry world lies waiting
For the glory of the day;
Then we hear a fitful rustling
Just without upon the stair,
See two small white phantoms coming,
Catch the gleam of sunny hair,
Are they Christmas fairies stealing
Bows of little socks to fill?
Are they angels floating hither
With their message of good-will?
What great spells are these elves weaving,
As like larks they chirp and sing?
Are these palms of peace from heaven
That the lovely spirits bring?
Hozy feet upon the threshold,
Eager faces peeping through,
With the first red rays of sunshine,
Chanting cherubs come in view:
Mistletoe and glistening holly,
Symbols of a blessed day,
In their chubby hands they carry,
Streaming all along the way,
Well we know them, never weary
Of their innocent surprise;
Waiting, watching, listening aways
With full hearts and tender eyes,
While our little household angels,
White and pure as the snow,
Greet us with the sweet old welcome—
"Merry Christmas, every one!"

A TALK WITH SANTA CLAUS.

One Christmas eve Joel Baker was in a most unhappy mood. He was lonesome and miserable; the chimes making merry Christmas music outside disturbed rather than soothed him, the jingle of the sleigh bells fretted him, and the shrill whistling of the wind around the corners of the house and up and down the chimney seemed to grate harshly on his ears.

"Humph," said Joel, wearily, "Christmas is nothin' to me; there was a time when it meant a great deal, but that was long ago—fifty years is a long stretch to look back over. There is nothin' in Christmas now, nothin' for me at least; it is so long since Santa Claus remembered me that I venture to say he has forgotten that there ever was such a person as Joel Baker in all the world. It used to be different; Santa Claus used to think a great deal of me when I was a boy. Ah! Christmas nowadays ain't what it was in the good old time—no, not what it used to be."

As Joel was absorbed in his distressing thoughts he became aware very suddenly that somebody was entering or trying to enter the room. First came a draft of cold air, then a scraping, grating sound, then a strange shuffling, and then—yes, then, all at once, Joel saw a pair of fat legs and a still fatter body dangle down the chimney, followed presently by a long white beard, above which appeared a jolly red nose and two bright twinkling eyes, while over the head and forehead was drawn a fur cap, white with snowflakes.

"Ha, ha," chuckled the fat, jolly stranger, emerging from the chimney and standing well to one side of the hearthstone; "ha, ha, they don't have the big, wide chimneys they used to build, but they can't keep Santa Claus out—no, they can't keep Santa Claus out—! Ha, ha, ha. Though the chimney were no bigger than a gas pipe Santa Claus would slide down it!"

It didn't require a second glance to assure Joel that the new-comer was indeed Santa Claus. Joel knew the good old saint—oh, yes—and he had seen him once before, although that was when Joel was a little boy, he had never forgotten how Santa Claus looked.

Nor had Santa Claus forgotten Joel, although Joel thought he had; for now Santa Claus looked kindly at Joel and smiled and said: "Merry Christmas to you, Joel!"

"Thank you, old Santa Claus," replied Joel, "but I don't believe it's goin' to be a very merry Christmas. It's been so long since I've had a merry Christmas that I don't believe I'd know how to act if I had one."

"Let's see," said Santa Claus, "it must be going on fifty years since I saw you last—yes, you were 8 years old the last time I slipped down the chimney of the old homestead and filled your stocking. Do you remember it?"

"I remember it well," said Joel. "I had made up my mind to lie awake and see Santa Claus; I'd heard tell of you, but I'd never seen you, and Brother Otis and I concluded we'd lie awake and watch for you to come."

Santa Claus shook his head reproachfully.

"That was very wrong," said he, "for I'm so scary that if I'd known you boys were awake I'd never have come down the chimney at all, and then you'd have had no presents."

"But Otis couldn't keep awake," explained Joel. "We talked about everything we could think of, till father called out to us that if we didn't stop talkin' he'd have to send one of us up into the attic to sleep with the hired man. So in less than five minutes Otis was sound asleep and no pinching could wake him up. But I was bound to see Santa Claus and I don't believe anything would have put me to sleep. I heard the big clock in the sitting room strike 11, and I had begun wonderin' if you never were going to come, when all of a sudden I heard the tinkle of the bells around your reindeers' necks. Then I heard the reindeers prancin' on the roof and the sound of your sleigh runners cuttin' through the crust and slippin' over the shingles. I was kind o' scared and I covered my head up with the sheet and quilts—only I left a little hole so I could peek out and see what was going on. As soon as I saw you I got over bein' scared—for you were jolly and smilin' like, and you chuckled as you went around to each stockin' and led it up."

"Yes, I can remember the night," said Santa Claus. "I brought you a sled, didn't I?"

"Yes, and you brought Otis one, too," replied Joel. "Mine was red and had 'Yankee Doodle' painted in black letters on the

side; Otis's was black and had 'Snow Queen' in gilt letters."

"I remember those sleds distinctly," said Santa Claus, "for I made them specially for you boys."

"You set the sleds up against the wall," continued Joel, "and then you filled the stockin's."

"There were six of 'em, as I recollect?" said Santa Claus.

"Let me see," queried Joel. "There was mine, and Otis's, and Elvira's, and Thankful's, and Susan Prickett's—Susan was our help, you know. No, there were only five, and, as I remember, they were the biggest we could beg or borrow of Aunt Poreas, who weighed nigh onto 200 pounds. Otis and I didn't like Susan Prickett and we were hopin' you'd put a cold potato into her stockin'."

"But Susan was a good girl," remonstrated Santa Claus. "You know I put cold potatoes in the stockin's of boys and girls only who are bad and don't believe in Santa Claus."

"At any rate," said Joel, "you filled all the stockin's with candy and pop corn and nuts and raisins, and I can remember you said you were afraid you'd run out of pop corn balls before you got around. Then you left each of us a book. Elvira got the best one, which was 'The Garland of Friendship,' and had poems in it about the bleeding of

there wasn't buckwheat cakes enough in the township to keep us indoors that mornin'; buckwheat cakes don't size up much 'long-side of a red sled with 'Yankee Doodle' painted on it in red, and a black sled, named 'Snow Bird,' an' I didn't care how cold it was, it was all the better for slidin' down the hill. We all had new sleds—Lafe Pike, Will Westbrook, Gum Adams, Rube Playford, Lea der Merriek, Ezra Purple—all on 'em had new sleds except Martin Beavey, and he said he calculated Santa Claus had skipped him this year 'cause his father had broken his leg haulin' logs from the Pelham woods and had been kept indoors six weeks. But Martin had his old sled, and he didn't hev to ask any odds of any of us, neither."

"I brought Martin a new sled the next Christmas," said Santa Claus.

"Like a not—but did you ever slide down hill, Santa Claus? I don't mean such hills as they hev out here in this new country, but one of them old-fashioned New England hills that was made specially for boys to slide down, full of bumpers an' thank-yemas, and about ten times longer comin' up than it is goin' down! The wind blew in our faces an' almost took our breath away. 'Merry Christmas to ye, little boys!' it seemed to say, and it untied our mufflers an' whirled the snow in our faces, just as if it was a boy, too, an' wanted to play with us. An' ol' crow came flappin' over us from the cor-

Oh, how we hated him! and we'd've snow-balled him, too, if we hadn't been afraid of the constable that lived next door. But the ashes didn't bother us much, and every time we slid side saddle we'd give the ashes a kick, and that sort o' scattered 'em."

The bare thought of this made Santa Claus laugh.

"Goin' on 'bout 9 o'clock," said Joel, "the girls come along—Sister Elvira and Thankful, Prudence Tucker, Belle Yocum, Sophronie Holbrook, Sis Hubbard an' Marthy Sawyer. Marthy's brother, Increase, wanted her to ride on his sled, but Marthy allowed that a red sled was her choice every time. I don't see how I'm goin' to hold on," said Marthy. "Seems as if I would hev my han's full keepin' my things from blowin' away. 'Don't worry about yourself, Marthy,' sez I, 'for if you look after your things, I kind o' calc'late I'll manage not to lose you on the way.' Dear Marthy—seems as if I could see you now, with your tangled hair blowin' in the wind, your eyes all bright an' sparklin' an' your cheeks as red as apples. Seems, too, as if I could hear you laughin' an' callin' just as you did as I toiled up the old New England hill that Christmas mornin'—a callin': 'Joel, Joel—ain't you ever comin', Joel.' But the hills is long and steep, Marthy, an' Joel ain't the boy he used to be; he's old, an' gray, an' feeble, but there's love an' faith in his heart an' they kind o' keep him tot-

side in the buryin' ground these thirty years. "That's why I'm so sad-like whenever Chris'mas comes," said Joel after a pause. "The thinkin' of long ago makes me bitter almost. It's so different now from what it used to be."

"No, Joel, oh, no," said Santa Claus. "'Tis the same world, and human nature is the same and always will be. But Christmas is for the little folks, and you, who are old and grizzled now, must know it and love it only through the gladness it brings the little ones."

"True," groaned Joel; "but how may I know and feel this gladness when I have no little stocking hanging in my chimney corner—no child to please me with his prattle? See, I am alone."

"No, you're not alone, Joel," said Santa Claus. "There are children in this great city who would love and bless you for your goodness if you but touched their hearts. Make them happy, Joel; send by me this night some gift to the little boy in the old house yonder—he is poor and sick; a simple toy will fill his Christmas with gladness."

"His little sister, too—take her some present," said Joel; "make them happy for me, Santa Claus—you are right—make them happy for me."

How sweetly Joel slept! When he awoke the sunlight streamed in through the window and seemed to bid him a merry Christmas.

How contented and happy Joel felt! It must have been that talk with Santa Claus that did it all; he had never known a sweeter sense of peace. A little girl came out of the house over the way. She had a new doll in her arms, and she sang a merry little song and she laughed with joy as she skipped along the street. Ay, and at the window sat the little sick boy, and the toy Santa Claus left him seemed to have brought him strength and health, for his eyes sparkled and his cheeks glowed, and it was plain to see his heart was full of happiness.

And, oh! how the chimes did ring out, and how joyfully they sang their Christmas carol that morning! They sang of Bethlehem and the manger and the Babe, they sang of love and charity, till all the Christmas air seemed full of angel voices.

Carol of the Christmas morn—
Carol of the Christ-child born—
Carol to the list'n'ng sky
"Till it echoes back again
"Glory be to God on high,
Peace on earth, good will to w'rd men."

So all this music—the carol of the chimes, the sound of children's voices, the smile of the poor little boy over the way—all this sweet music crept into Joel's heart that Christmas morning; yes, and with these sweet, holy influences came others so subtle and divine that, in its silent communion with them, Joel's heart cried out amen and amen to the glory of the Christmas time.—[Eugene Field, in Chicago News.

A Sad Christmas.

"Papa," said a fashionable young lady as she wound her arms around the old man's neck, "you needn't give me a new-skinsack for Christmas as you promised. I can make the old one do for another winter. I realize that times are hard."

It will be a sad, sad Christmas in that household, for the fashionable young woman will spend it in an asylum, hopelessly insane.

Ante-Christmas Advice to Young Men.

Don't measure the slippers that your best girl wears for you; don't grow because they have no bay windows built in them for your favorite corners; don't swear because they are three sizes too small for you. Don't do any of these things, but have them mounted as watch pockets and hung up in your bed-room where you can see and admire them as you lie awake wondering whether she did not put too much putty in that delicious cake which she had baked for you when you last had tea with her.

The Christmas Spirit Everywhere.

Clerk (to Mr. Isaacstein in the back room)—"Dot shentleman says he will gif four dollars for dot seventeen-dollar and a ca-vorter overcoat."

Mr. Isaacstein—"Dot was a habby and joyous Christmas dime, Shacob, and ve don'd vant to make no profit on dose goods. Shacob, make dot shentleman a Christmas present of dot peaceful coad vor twelve dollars and a helfuf."

Nothing makes a man feel the value of an economical wife so much as when he finds that the hundred dollars he had given her to buy Christmas presents with has been invested in paying her dressmaker's bill and buying him a corn-cob pipe.

HAPPY NEW YEAR.

This peaceful, pleasant New Year's day I wish it a happy one away.
And would with every intention twine
A tender thought, a loving line,
A fragrant flower to blossom, dear,
Across the threshold of the year.

If only Love were strong as Fate
To make the crooked pieces straight,
How should the days be bright and run,
The goal be reached—the laurel won,
And fortune prosper, friendship cheer,
And gladness each recurring year!

It blighted hopes have shadows cast
Along the miles that intervene,
From barren wastes, from desert sand,
Love reaches out announcing hands,
And breathes with many a tender tear,
A blessing and a "Happy Year."



BRINGING HOME THE CHRISTMAS TREE.

hearts, and so forth. Father wasn't expectin' anything, but you left him a new pair of mittens, and mother got a new fur boa to wear to meetin'."

"Of course," said Santa Claus, "I never forgot father and mother."

"Well, it was as much as I could do to lay still," continued Joel, "for I'd been longin' for a sled an' the sight of that red sled with 'Yankee Doodle' painted on it just made me wild. But, somehow or other, I began to get powerful sleepy all at once and I couldn't keep my eyes open. The next thing I knew Otis was nigh me in the ribs. 'Git up, Joel,' says he; 'it's Christmas an' Santa Claus has been here.' 'Merry Christmas! Merry Christmas!' we cried as we tumbled out of bed. Then Elvira and Thankful came in, not more than half dressed, and Susan came in, too, an' we just made Rome howl with 'Merry Christmas! Merry Christmas!' to each other. 'Et you children don't make less noise in there,' cried father, 'I'll hev to send you all back to bed!' The idea of askin' boys an' girls to keep quiet on Chris'mas mornin' when they've got new sleds an' 'Garlands of Friendship'!"

Santa Claus chuckled; his rosy cheeks fairly beamed joy.

"Otis an' I didn't want any breakfast," said Joel. "We made up our minds that a stockin' full of candy an' pop corn an' raisins would stay us for awhile. I do believe

field beyond the meadow. He said: 'Caw, caw,' when he saw my new sled—I's 'pose he'd never seen a red one before. Otis had a hard time with his sled—the black one—an' he wondered why it wouldn't go as fast as mine would. 'Hev you scraped the paint off'n the runners?' asked Wraley Goodnow. 'Course I hev,' said Otis; 'broke my own knife an' Lute Ingraham's a-do-in' it, but it don't seem to make any difference—the darned ol' thing won't go!' Then, what did Simon Buzzell say but that, like's not, it was because Otis's sled's name was 'Snow Queen.' 'Never did see a girl sled that was worth a cent, anyway, sez Simon. Well, now, that jest about broke Otis up in business. 'It ain't a girl sled, 'sez he, 'an' its name ain't Snow Queen! I'm a-goin to call it Dan! Webster, or Ol' ver Optic, or Sheriff Robbins, or after some other big man!' An' the boys plagued him so much about that pesky girl sled that he scratched off the name, an' as I remember, it did go better after that!"

"About the only thing," continued Joel, "that marred the harmony of the occasion, as the editor of the Hampshire County Phoenix used to say, was the ashes that Deacon Morris Frisbie sprinkled out in front of his house. He said he wasn't going to have folks breakin' their necks jest on account of a lot of frivolous boys that was goin' to the gallows as fast as they could!

terin' to'rds the voice he hears a callin' 'Joel! Joel! Joel!'"

"I know it—I see it all," murmured Santa Claus, very softly.

"Oh, that was so long ago," sighed Joel; "so very long ago. And I've had no Christmas since—only once, when our little one—Marthy's an' mine—you remember him, Santa Claus?"

"Yes," said Santa Claus, "a toddling little boy with blue eyes—"

"Like his mother," interrupted Joel, "an' he was like her, too—so gentle an' lovin', only we called him Joel, for that was my father's name an' it kind o' run in the family. He wan't more'n 3 years old when you came with your Christmas presents for him, Santa Claus. We had told him about you, and he used to go to the chimney corner every night and make a little prayer about what he wanted you to bring him. And you brought 'em, too—a stick-horse an' a picture-book, an' some blocks, an' a drum—they're on the shelf in the closet there, an' his little Christmas stockin' with 'em—I've saved 'em all, an' I've taken 'em down an' held 'em in my hands, oh, so many times."

"But when I came again," said Santa Claus—

"His little bed was empty, an' I was alone. It killed his mother—Marthy was so tender-hearted; she kind o' drooped an' pined after that. So now they've been asleep side by