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CHRISTMAS, 1893

THE SHEPHERDS WENT THEIR WAY.

The shepherds went their way
And found the lowly stable abed
When the Virgin Mother lay,
And now they checked their eager tread,
For to the Babe that at her bosom clung
A mother's song the Virgin Mother sung.

They told her how a glorious light,
Streaming from a heavenly throne,
Around them shone, suspending night,
While sweeter than a mother's song
Blest angels heralded the Saviour's birth,
Glory to God on high and peace on earth!

Thou mother of the Prince of Peace,
Fool, simple and of low estate,
That strife should vanish, battle cease,
Oh, why should this thy soul elate?
Sweet music's loudest note, the post-joy
Didst thou ne'er love to hear of fame and glory?

"Then wisely in my soul elate,
That strife should vanish, battle cease,
I'm poor and of a low estate,
The mother of the Prince of Peace,
For rise in me like a summer's morn,
Peace, peace on earth! the Prince of Peace
is born!"
—Samuel T. Coleridge.

A CHRISTMAS DREAM.

In a dream I was transported into the world that lies beyond—the beautiful heaven opened to all mankind by the blessed Christ child.

That hell lies underneath heaven you have doubtless heard. Naturally the holy dead see and hear nothing of the pains of the lost, for that would entirely spoil the joy of paradise for them; but now—and then—I believe once a year—it is given to the blessed to look down into hell. There is, however, one condition in particular attached to this privilege. When the dome which conceals hell from the sight of the angels is opened, it is for the relief of the condemned.

God in his mercy has decreed that the saints shall look down into the abyss in order to tell St. Peter if they see among the damned any one from whom they have received any benefit or of whom they have seen good. It is with the generous and kind which the lost soul performed while on earth, he has the power of shortening the time of punishment or even pardon it altogether and bid it enter into paradise.

As for me, I arrived in paradise on a day when hell was open to view and came to know thereby many strange things.

It was granted to me to look into the place of torment, and the things I saw there were awful. Picture it to yourself as you will. When I recovered from the horror that fell upon me, I recognized many men and women whom I had known on earth.

Among the latter I noticed a woman whom I had known well on earth, and who deserved to be among the lost, I thought. I had never anticipated any other sentence for her. Although she had possessed more than was needed to gratify her own wants, she could never be moved by the most touching appeals of the poorest to relieve their distress.

"There is no chance of a voice being raised in her favor," I said to myself. But I was wrong, for at that moment a lovely angel child flew past me on its little white wings. Without any sign of fear it flew direct to St. Peter, who looked formidable enough with his long beard and great keys, and pointing with its little forefinger to the hard-hearted woman cried, "She once gave me a handful of nuts."

"Really," answered the keeper of heaven, "that was not much, and yet I am surprised, for that woman would not part with so much as a pin during her life. But you, little one, who were you on earth?"

"Little Hannele was my name," answered the angel. "I'll give you a narration, and only one did any one give me anything in my life to make me happy, and that was that woman's nut."

"Marvelous," answered Peter, stroking his white beard. "No doubt the nuts were given as a miserly payment of some service you did her."

"No, no!" the angel answered decidedly. "Well, tell us how it happened, then," the apostle commanded, and the dear little soul obeyed.

"My sick mother and I lived in the city all alone, for father was dead. Just before Christmas we had nothing more to eat, so mother, though she lay in bed and her head and hands were burning, made some little soup of bits of wood and cotton, and I carried them to the Christmas market. There I sat on some steps and offered them for sale to the passers-by, but nobody wanted them. Hours passed, and it was very cold. The open wound in my knee, which no one saw, pained me so, and the frost in my fingers and toes burned dreadfully.

"Evening came, the lamps were lighted, but I dared not go home, for only one person had thrown a copper into my lap, and I needed more to buy a bit of bread for a few coals. My father's pangs hurt me, but that mother lay at home alone with no one to hand her anything or support her when her breathing became difficult hurt me still more. I could hardly bear to sit on the cold steps any longer, and my eyes were blind with tears.

"A barrel was set down in front of the house, and while a clerk was rolling it over the sidewalk into the shop the stream of passers-by stopped. That woman there—I remember her well—stood still in front of me. I offered her one of my sheep and looked at her through my tears. She seemed so hard and stern that I thought, 'The won't give me anything.' But she did. It seemed suddenly as if her face grew softer and her eyes kinder. She glanced at me, and before I knew it she had put her hand in the bag which she carried on her arm and thrown the nuts into my lap.

"The oak had been rolled into the shop by this time, and the throng of people carried her along. She tried to stop. It was not easy, and she only did it to come near a second, third and fourth handful of the most beautiful walnuts. I can still see it all, as if it were today! Then she felt in her pocket, probably to get some money for me, but the press of people was too strong for her to stand against it longer. I doubt if she heard that I thanked her."

Here the angel broke off and threw a kiss to the condemned woman, and St. Peter asked her how it happened that she, who had been so dead to all appeals from the

poor, had been so generous to the child. The tormented woman answered amid her loud sobs: "The tearful eyes of the little one reminded me of my small sister, who died a painful death before I had grown hard and wicked, and a strange sensation—I know not how it happened myself—overpowered me. It seemed as if my heart warmed within me, and something seemed to say to me that I should never forgive myself as long as I lived and should be ever unhappier than I was if I did not give the child something to rejoice over at Christmas time. I longed to draw her toward me and kiss her. After I had tossed her half of the nuts which I had just bought, I felt happier than I had for many a day, and I would certainly have given her some money, though only a little."

But Peter interrupted her. He had heard enough, and as he knew that it was impossible for any one in heaven or hell to tell an untruth, he nodded to her, saying: "That was, beyond dispute, a good deed, but it is too small to counterbalance the great weight of your bad deeds. Perhaps it may lighten your punishment. Still, great riches were meted out to you on earth, and what were a few nuts to you! The motive that urged you to bestow them is pleasing in the sight of the Lord, I acknowledge, but, as I said before, your charity was too paltry for you to be released from your pains because of it."

He turned to go, but a clear voice of wonderful sweetness held him back. It was that of the Saviour, who advanced with majestic dignity toward the apostle and spoke: "Let us first hear if the almsgiving of which we have just learned was really too small to plead for leniency toward this sinning soul. Let us hear"—turning to the angel—"what became of the nuts."

"Oh, dear Saviour," answered the angel, "I ate half of them, and I was grateful to you, for I felt that I owed them to your bounty, as they were my 'little Christ child,' as the people in the city where we lived called a Christmas present."

"You see, Peter," the Saviour interrupted the angel. "Do we not owe it to the nuts of that woman that a pure child's soul was led to us? That in itself is no small thing. Tell what further happened to you."

"I ate most of them," the little girl answered, "but I had still more to eat by Christmas eve, for the people who had looked at me when the woman threw something into my lap were interested in my suffering, and soon I had sold all six sheep, and besides many pennies and groshen one big thaler had fallen into my lap. With these I was able to buy mother many things that she stood in sore need of, and though she died on New Year's morning she had many little comforts during her last days."

The Anointed cast another look full of meaning at Peter, when a large and beautiful angel, the spirit of the mother of the church began. "If you will permit me, O Holy Jesus, I too would like to say a word in favor of the condemned. Before Hannele came home with the nuts, I lay in bed, without hope or help in my great suffering. I had lost all faith, for my prayers had not been heard, and in the bitterness of my heart it seemed that you, who were said to be the friend of the poor on earth, and God the Father, had forgotten us in our misery in order to overwhelm the rich with greater gifts."

"But when Hannele came home and lighted the little lamp, and I saw her tiny face, where for a long time I had seen no smile, but only pain and grief, now beaming with joy; when I saw the nuts and the other good things which she had brought and saw her pleasure in them, my belief in thee, O Lord, and in the kind Father returned, and I ceased not to be grateful to the end. If now, in the glory of thy magnificence, I know bliss unutterable. I owe it to that woman and to the fact that she was good enough to throw the nuts into Hannele's apron."

"Peter nodded affirmatively. Then he bowed before the Saviour and said: "The little gift of the condemned soul has indeed borne better fruit than I imagined. Yet when I tell you that a great sinner was won on earth!"

"No one," the Son of God interrupted. "Before we decide upon the fate of this woman, let us hear what the child did with the rest of the nuts, for we know that she did not eat them all. Now, my little angel, what became of the last of them? Speak on. Gladly will I listen to you."

Hannele began anew: "After they had buried mother, they sent me into the country among the mountains, for they said it was not the duty of the city to care for me, but that of the village pariah where my parents were born. So I was taken there. The six nuts that I had saved I took with me to play with. This I most enjoyed doing in the spring, alone on the little strip of grass behind the poorhouse, in which I was the only child. Besides me there were but three old women, 'being fed to death,' as the peasants used to say.

"Not one of them noticed anything that happened around them, but my heart used to glow with light when everything about me budded and sprouted and burst into bloom. My body was always aching, but my pains could not lessen my enjoyment of the spring. Whenever I looked upon the waving and planting—it was the first time that I had ever seen it, and the first time

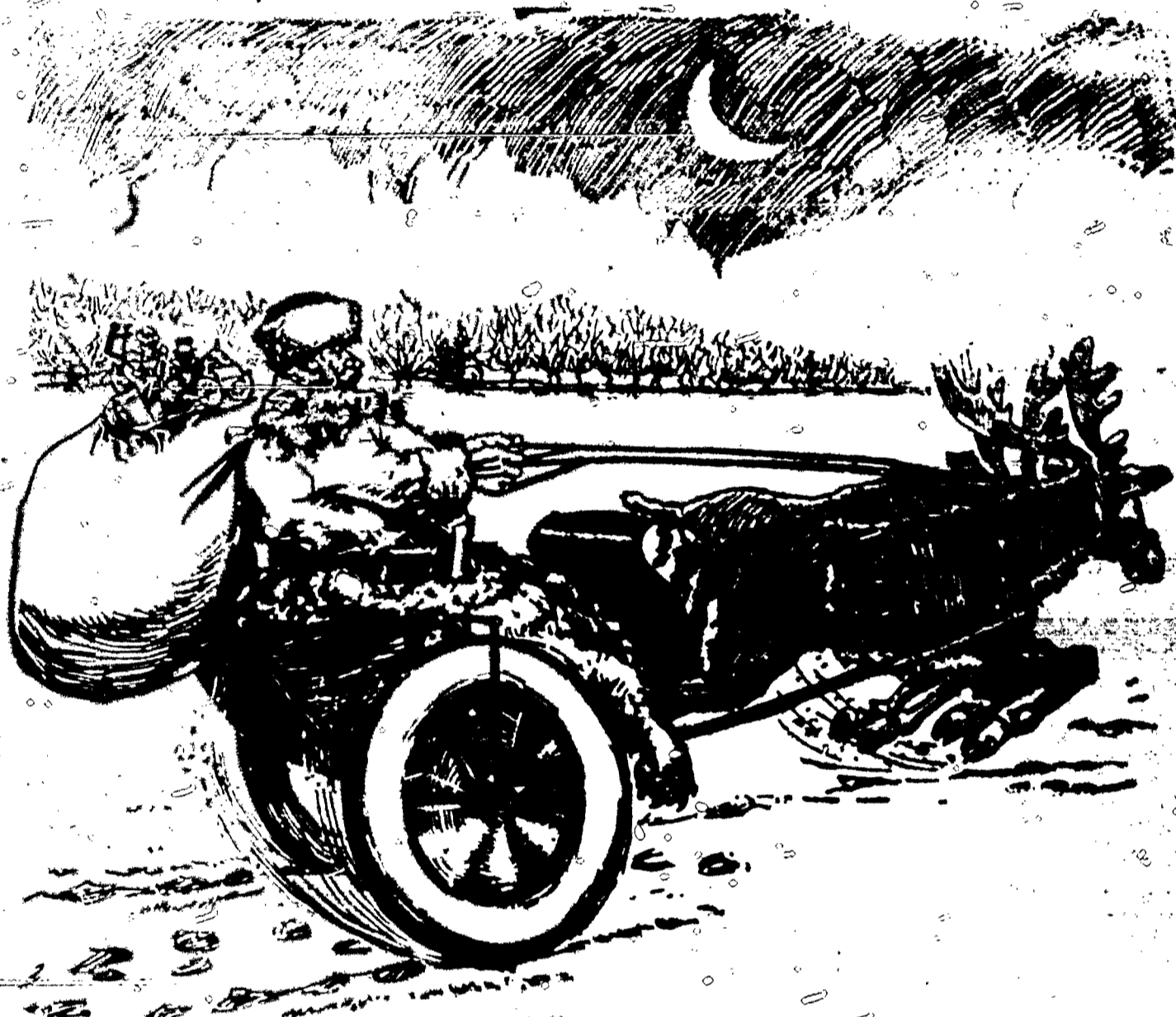
over me to baffle something to the good earth that would take root and sprout and grow green and high for me.

"So I stuck four of my nuts into the ground, I put them as far apart in the small spaces as I could, so that if big trees came from my seeds they might not stand in one another's way, but might all enjoy the air and the sunshine that I was so thankful for. I saw my need sprout, but what became of them, I do not know. I did not live to see. Two years after I saw them a famine fell upon us. The poor weavers, who lived in the mountain village, had all they could do to nourish wife and child. There was little left for the poorhouse. I was already ill, I could not stand the misery, and I was the first to die of the dreadful fever caused by hunger.

"Only one of the blind women and the dull witted one followed the sack in which I was buried—for who would have paid for a coffin? The last two nuts I divided with the old women. Each one of us had a half, and how gladly we ate the little morsel, for even a taste of any dainty seemed good to us after we had lived on nothing but bread and potatoes. From here I watched the other nuts grow to be trees. All four had straight stems and thick crowns. Under one of them that stood near a spring, which is now called the Fresh spring, an old carpenter who came to the poorhouse built a bench."

Here another angel interrupted the little narrator with the question: "Do you mean the nut tree in Dorbstadt?" and receiving an answer in the affirmative he cried: "I, Master, I am that old carpenter, and during my last summers I had no greater pleasure than to sit by the Fresh spring under the nut tree, and while I smoked my pipe to think of my old wife, whom I was soon to find again with you. In the autumn, too, many a dry brown leaf found its way among the more expensive tobacco ones. But the nut trees were out down many years ago."

"I was it," cried the spirit of little Hannele, and one felt from her tone how she deplored it. "They were felled when the poorhouse was given up. But the great Son of God has now heard what he wished to know."



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"No, no," the Saviour answered, "I should still like to know what became of the wood of these trees."

The voices of several angels were heard at the same moment, for many of the poor weavers of Dorbstadt were to be found in the heavenly kingdom. St. Peter, however, bade them to be quiet, and permitted only the one who had last entered the abode of the blessed to speak.

"I was the village doctor," this one began, "and I questioned the earth because I, too, fell a victim to the pestilence of which many of the poor people were dying, and

against which I fought with all my small power, but with small success. I can tell you all that you wish to know. My master, for during 45 years I devoted my humble services to the sick poor there. When Hannele died in our poorhouse—it happened before my time—the misery was even greater than at present. The weavers were ground down by the large manufacturers until an energetic man built a factory in our village and paid them better wages.

"As the population then increased, and consequently the number of patients, my power was wanting in which to house them, for the dilapidated poorhouse—whether they were carried—was no longer large enough to accommodate them all. Therefore the parish, aided by the owner of the factory, built a hospital for the whole district, and the site of the old poorhouse was chosen for it. The beautiful nut trees which Hannele had planted had to be destroyed. I was sorry to be obliged to give the order, but we needed the ground where they stood. As we had to be economical in everything, big and little, we had planks sawed out of the stems for our use."

"I was in a state of gratitude," said a beautiful angel as it bowed its crowned head reverently before the Son of God. "My left below was a very hard one. I was early left a widow, and I supported my children entirely by the work of my hands. By dint of great effort I brought them up well, and my three sons grew to be respectable men. They took care of themselves and helped their mother. But all these, my husband, went lost to me, I was carried by the pestilence. However—it was the anniversary of the death of my two dear sons, who had just their lives, fighting bravely side by side for their fatherland—on that morning the sun fell upon your and face and bleeding hands plowed by the nails, and then I reflected how bitterly you had suffered, though innocent, that you might release us, and how your mother must have felt so lone such a child."

"Then a voice asked me if I had any right to complain when the Son of God himself had willingly endured such torments for us, and I felt that I had no right to

whichever might be laid upon me a poor wretched woman. Therefore, my Lord, use your image my consolation, and since the wood of which it was made came from the trees planted by Hannele near the Fresh spring I owe beyond doubt the better peace that followed and the joy of being with you in paradise, my Saviour, to the nuts which that condemned woman gave to the child of God. Namely she loved her last gift to the child of God, and she loved to see it planted."

"Well, Peter?"

The latter called to the good angel: "Let her go free, the path of heaven is open to her. Now rich she may be. Let it be the fruit that springs from the smallest gift offered in love!"

"You are right," answered the Saviour gently and turned away.—George Elmer in Romance.

The Hermit continued that only those whose consciences are clean can hear the animals talk, and they tell this story in confirmation of the narrative. One Christmas eve a fierce storm went to destruction by way of preparation for the appearance of the Christ child. The storm was never stronger than at that time when he revealed himself to the world, and to avoid disturbing his mother he was hidden in a hay loft over the barn. Hannele was a small girl in which was a pair of sheep. The man fell asleep, but was wakened off by the noise of the storm.

"But he has heard to see with what what we have said."

"No matter. He will see for us. The time will come he will see for us. We have the power to do so."

Collecting courage, the next night he hid in the hay, and looking down saw the child and his knees making the way of heaven, and their right foreheads touching.

Yuletide in Romance.

My mother has told me that she had seen the child and his knees making the way of heaven, and their right foreheads touching.

Yuletide in Romance.

CHRISTMAS IN THE ARCTIC.

Henry Stephens, the first of the Arctic explorers, has written a book on the subject of Christmas in the Arctic.

"I think Christmas, the most memorable day of our lives, is the best of all days. It is the day when we are reminded of the love of God, and the love of our fellow-men. It is the day when we are reminded of the love of our fellow-men, and the love of our fellow-men."

Under these circumstances, it is not surprising that the Arctic explorers should have celebrated Christmas in the Arctic. It is not surprising that they should have celebrated Christmas in the Arctic, for it is the day when we are reminded of the love of God, and the love of our fellow-men.

The Arctic explorers have written a book on the subject of Christmas in the Arctic. It is a book that is well worth reading, for it tells us of the love of God, and the love of our fellow-men, in the Arctic.

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