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Annie and Willie's Prayer.

'Twas the eve before Christmas; 'Good night' had been said. And Annie and Willie had crept into bed; There were tears on their pillow, and tears in their eyes. And each little bosom was heavy with sighs— For to-night their stern father's command had been given, That they should retire precisely at seven, Instead of eight; for they troubled him more. With questions unheard of than ever before. He had told them he thought this delusion a sin, No such thing as Santa Claus ever had been, And he hoped after this he should never more hear. How he scrambled down chimneys with presents each year. And this was the reason that two little heads So restlessly tossed on their soft, downy beds, Eight, nine, and the clock in the steeple tolled ten. Not a word had been spoken by either till then. When Willie's sad face from the blanket did peep. And whispered, "Dear Annie, is you fast asleep?" "Why, no, brother Willie," a sweet voice replied. "I've tried it in vain, but I can't shut my eyes, For, somehow, it makes me so sorry because Dear papa has said there is no Santa Claus. Now, we know that there is, and it can't be denied. For he came every year before mamma died, But then, I've been thinking that she used to pray, And God would hear everything mamma would say, And perhaps she asked him to send Santa Claus here, With the sack full of presents he brought every year. "Well, what want we pray for as mamma did then, And ask him to send him with presents again?" "I've been thinking so, too," and without a word more Four little bare feet bounded out on the floor. And four little hands were raised in prayer. And two tiny hands were clasped close to each breast. "Now, Willie, you know we must firmly believe That the presents we ask for are sure to receive— You must wait just as still till I say amen, And by that you will know that your turn has come then." "Dear Jesus, look down on my brother and me, And grant us the favor we are asking of Thee. I want a wax dolly, a tea-set and ring, And an ebony work-box, that shuts with a spring. Bless papa, dear Jesus, and cause him to see That Santa Claus loves us better than he— Don't let him get fustled and angry again. At dear brother Willie and Annie, Amen!" "Please, Jesus, let Santa Claus tam down to-night, And bring us some presents before it is light; I want he should give me a nice little sled, With bright, shiny runners, and all painted red. A box full of tandy, a book and a toy, Amen, and then, Jesus, I'll be a good boy. Their prayers being ended, they raised up their heads, And with hearts light and cheerful again sought their beds— They were soon lost in slumber, both peaceful and deep. And with ladies in dreamland were roaming in sleep. Eight, nine, and the little French clock had struck ten— Ere the father had thought of his children again— He seemed now to hear Annie's half-suppressed sigh, And to see the big tears stand in Willie's blue eyes. "I was harsh to my darlings," he mentally said, "And should not have sent them so early to bed. But then I was troubled—my feelings found vent, For bank stock to-day has gone down ten per cent. But of course they've forgot their trouble ere this, And that I denied them the thrice-asked-for kite. But just to make sure I'll stoal up to their door, For I never spoke harsh to my children before." So saying, he softly ascended the stairs, And arrived at the door to bear both of their prayers. His Annie's "bless papa" draws forth the big tears, And Willie's grave promise falls sweet on his ears. "Strange, strange, I'd forgotten," said he with a sigh. "How long, when a child, to have Christmas morn'g draw nigh. I'll atone for my harshness," he inwardly said, "By answering their prayers ere I sleep in my bed." Then he turned to the stairs and softly went down. Threw off velvet slippers and silk dressing-gown. Donned hat, coat and boots, and was out in the street, A millionaire feeling the cold, driving sled, Nor stopped he until he had bought everything. From the box full of candy, to the tiny gold ring— Indeed, he kept adding so much to his store, That the various presents outnumbered a score. Then homeward he turned with his holiday load, And with Aunt Mary's aid in the nursery 'twas stowed. Miss Dolly was seated beneath a pine tree, By the side of a table spread out for tea— A work-box, well filled in the center was laid, And on it a ring, for which Anne had prayed. A soldier's uniform stood by a side, "With bright, shining runners, and all painted red." There were bells, dogs and horses, books pleasing to see, And birds of all colors were perched in the tree. While Santa Claus, laughing, stood up in the top. As if getting ready more presents to drop— And as the fond father the picture surveyed, He thought for his trouble he'd been amply paid. And he said to himself, as he brushed off a tear, "I've enjoyed more true pleasure than ever before, I'm happier to-night than I've been for a year, What care I if bank stock fall ten per cent. more? Hereafter I'll make it a rule, I believe, To have Santa Claus visit us each Christmas Eve." So thinking, he gently extinguished the light, And tripped down the stairs to retire for the night. As soon as the beams of the bright morning "ness to light, and the stars, one by one, the eyes out of sleep opened wide, the moment the presents espied— their beds they sprang with a "Prayers for were all of their own, and they cried in their inu—" to drink quick and see "Claus sought in the wanted), and left voice, soft and "papa, I



WILL HAYMAN'S CHRISTMAS.

BY FRANK DOUGLAS.

"A wild night this, master; there'll be a good many of the woman-folk anxious-like until we can see you point a light." "Yes," I replied, "we can only hope that their anxiety may not deepen into despair. God help those at sea to-night."

The scene was truly a grand and solemn one, and a weird, silence prevailed over the small knot of anxious watchers who had braved the storm on that wild night, endeavoring to catch a glimpse of the fishing boats which had left in the morning, and should have returned long since.

Just a word to explain my presence at such an out-of-the-way place as Pleasance, on the Cornish coast, in the unpropitious month of December, 1879.

I had a week before been summoned on urgent business to Bodmin, and in search of the information I required had to make frequent journeys to the out-lying villages. One of these was Pleasance, where I arrived on the afternoon of the 23d; I soon transacted my business, and returned to my inn, where I was welcomed by the savory odor of certain culinary preparations that were being made for my especial benefit.

After discussing very energetically the tempting meal that had been placed before me, I settled myself down to a comfortable chat with my worthy host, John Hayman. And a right good host he was, too—a thoroughly straightforward, true index of the man; a sturdy, well-knit frame; hands that bore evidence of many a hard day's toil; and above all, a genial, Saxon laugh, which made the rafters echo again and again.

Well, we got to talking about the approaching of Christmas, and I expressed my intention to endeavor to hunt up some friends of mine, who I believed lived a few miles inland, when my host brought down his hand upon the table so emphatically, that the cups and saucers seemed inclined to take violent exercise.

"Why, Mister Douglas," said he, "if I may be so bold, I don't think you could do better than stay here. We always have a bit of a party on Christmas day, and this year we expect a lot of folk. My Benny, who's just married, will be here with her husband, and my good woman's niece (I suppose she's mine as well though, and a bonny girl she is too) shall be here; she's been staying lately with some friends of hers up the coast, but my Will, who's as stout as a lead as any in the village, is going to marry her soon, and he insisted that she should spend the Christmas with us. Then there's some of the wife's relations, and one or two of my own, besides a few of the village folk, who always look us up about this time; and, to cap all, I think our parson will most likely come in—and he's a regular jolly comfortable sort of a man, you know—so I don't think you'll be bad off for company, and if you don't mind putting up with the likes of us, I am sure we shall be very proud for you to join us."

The Night Before Christmas.

BY GLENN C. MOORE.

'Twas the night before Christmas, when all through the house was stirring, not even a mouse. The stockings were hung by the chimney with care, in hopes that St. Nicholas soon would be there. The children were nestled all snug in their beds, while visions of sugar-plums danced in their heads. And mamma in her kerchief, and I in my cap, had just settled our brains for a long winter's nap— When out on the lawn there arose such a clatter, I sprang from my bed to see what was the matter. Away to the window I flew like a flash, Tore open the shutters and threw up the sash. The moon on the breast of the new-fallen snow, Gave a lustre of mid-day to objects below; When, what to my wondering eyes should appear, But a miniature sleigh, and eight tiny reindeer, With a little old driver, so lively and quick, I knew in a moment it must be St. Nick. More rapid than eagles his courses they came, And he whistled, and shouted, and called them by name— "Now, Dasher! now, Dancer! now, Prancer and Vixen! On, Comet! on, Cupid! on, Dunder and Blitzen! To the top of the porch, to the top of the wall! Now, dash away, dash away, dash away all!" As if leaves that before the wild hurricane fly, When they meet with an obstacle, mount to the sky, So, up to the house-top the couriers they flew, With the sleigh full of toys—and St. Nicholas too. And then in a twinkling I heard on the roof The prancing and pawing of each little hoof. As I drew in my head, and was turning around, Down the chimney St. Nicholas came with a bound. He was dressed all in fur from his head to his foot, And his clothes were all tarnished with ashes and soot. A bundle of toys he had flung on his back, And he looked like a peddler just opening his pack. His eyes how they twinkled! his dimples how merry! His cheeks were like roses, his nose like a cherry— His droll little mouth was drawn up like a bow, And the beard on his chin was as white as the snow. The stump of a pipe he held tight in his teeth, And the smoke, it encircled his head like a wreath. He had a broad face and a little round belly, That shook, when he laughed, like a bowl full of jelly. He was chubby and plump—a right jolly old elf— And I laughed when I saw him in spite of myself. A wink of his eye, and a twist of his head, Soon gave me to know I had nothing to dread. He spoke not a word, but went straight to his work, And filled all the stockings—that turned with a jerk, And laying his finger aside of his nose, He sprang to my sleigh, to my team gave a whistle. And away they all flew like the down of a white— But I heard him exclaim, ere he drove out of sight— "Happy Christmas to all, and to all a good-night!"

CHRISTMAS FACTS AND FANCIES.

Heap on more wood—the wind is chill. Let it whistle as it will, We'll keep our Christmas merry still. It suits children to have Kris come down the chimney, and it ought to suit Kris, too. The first song ever composed in England was a Christmas carol in Anglo-Norman French. Country clergymen have made arrangements to deliver sermons by the thousand to wholesale shoe dealers in the city. All glory to God, Who laid by his rod, To smite on the world through his Son, And for all we on earth, For this wonderful birth Most wonderful conquests has won. Happy, happy Christmas that can win us back to the delusions of our childish days; that can recall to the old man the pleasures of his youth; that can transport the sailor and the traveler, thousands of miles away, back to his own fireside and his quiet home. Carol, carol Christians, Carol joyfully! Carol for the coming Of Christ's nativity And pray a glorious Christmas For all good Christian men, Carol, carol Christians, For Christmas comes again. About this time the young ladies of the country learn through a series of deep, dark plottings that her young man wears number four boots. The same man will be sorry that he prevailed when he tries to thrust his number seven feet into a beautifully worked pair of number four Christmas slippers. A loud and laughing welcome to the merry Christmas bells. All hail with happy gladness the well-known "chime that swells. We hear the pealing anthem chord, we hear the merrily chime, And love the tidings that proclaim a Christmas tide again. But there must be a melody, of purer, deeper sound, A rich key-note, whose echo runs through all the music round; Let kindly voices ring beneath low-roofed or palace dome, For these alone are Christmas hymns that bless a Christmas home. In former times the Christmas festivities lasted until Twelfth Day. One day more—St. Dismas'—was allowed before resuming the daily toil— "Early woken, and pale as the day— 'Tis must on St. Dismas' day." At Candlemas, all the garden's were taken down in the churches and dwellings, although they are now hanging until Lent. The custom goes by, some quaintly, "The garden drops away, and is lost in the night." Many a splendid ceremony, many a royal feast, many an innocent sport, and many a wider revel, which once entered in the merry Christmas has passed in oblivion. But never, we may venture to say, will Christmas itself, the birthday of Christ, cease to be remembered and joyfully celebrated. And as time rolls on, who can help wishing in his heart that each succeeding Christmas may be still merrier than the last?

THE NIGHT BEFORE CHRISTMAS.

father, told him what had happened. The folks were soon astir, and one of the boys was sent to rouse the fishermen, while I endeavored to find some trace of Will. But none could be found; my first impression was that in his desperation he had attempted to rig and launch the lifeboat, but there it lay, untouched. My next thought was that he had gone to some of the fishermen to enlist their help, but by this time nearly the whole of the village was on the shore, and nobody had seen him. Each one looked at the other, and then at Will's father, an awful silence fell upon all. The lightning had ceased, and one of the fishermen proposed to light a beacon to guide the boat, if it could possibly have lived through such a sea, and hastily raising a rude table, a heap of wood was piled upon it, saturated with oil, and lighted. As the flames shot out against the sky one of the women shrieked out: "Look there, there's a man swimming!" Every eye was instantly turned toward the speaker, but though fresh fagots were quickly piled on, none could see any object on the boiling ocean. Even the ill-fated vessel, which I had seen from the window, was nowhere in sight. The woman persisted in her statement, but every one agreed that her heated imagination must have suggested what she seemed to see. Besides, how could a man, or anything animated, live in such a sea, much less swim? Suddenly, as if by enchantment, the clouds opened, and the pale, eerie light of the moon shone on the water, and at the same moment the little vessel appeared on the top of a huge wave, only to disappear beyond our view. But that glimpse, brief though it was, showed that our worst fears were about to be consummated, for a man's figure, clasping a woman tightly with one hand, and holding to the mast with the other was plainly seen. Then, as if one horror were not enough, the increasing light of the moon revealed the form of a man swimming with vigorous strokes toward the vessel. Every eye was strained toward the figure, and a sudden dip of the wave brought the swimmer on his back, and we saw with unmistakable clearness the face of Will Hayman! For a moment all seemed speechless, but the next with one spontaneous effort, the men raised such a ringing cheer that the very roar of the elements was for a moment silenced. I never heard before or since such a cheer; it seemed to put new life into us, and the women with tears in their eyes gathered round Will's mother to soothe her fears. Will could be seen struggling manfully on, and the boat seemed drifting nearer and nearer, but the distance between it and his was a terrible one. The brave fishermen could endure it no longer. One hardy giant sprang forward to the boat, and in a voice hoarse with emotion, said: "Look here, mates, we ain't going to let Will die like a dog. I'm going out to help him. Who'll come?" Instantly a dozen volunteers sprang forward, and though their weeping wives and sweet hearts well knew the tremendous peril incurred, not a word of dissuasion was uttered, so great was the effect of Will's heroic devotion. The boat was soon launched and ploving through the breakers, which threatened every moment to swamp it. I stood watching its slow and painful progress for a time, almost forgetting the swimmers, when all at once a tremendous shout arose: "Hurrah! he's got it, he's got it!" By an almost superhuman effort Will had reached the wreck, and a blue light shot from the vessel, which had driven within gunshot of the shore. A second light followed, and another, and another, and we could see Will fastening a rope round the two figures to the mast, and then, waving his hand in the air, he leaped again into the sea. We held our breath and directed our gaze to the boat, which, to our glad surprise, seemed only a few lengths from the swimmer, who could now be clearly seen by the light of the fast opening day. After a period of lingering suspense we saw one of the crew stoop over the

THE NIGHT BEFORE CHRISTMAS.

boat's side and drag in the exhausted man. In a moment a hawser was fastened to the rope which Will had brought with him, and one of the men quickly swung himself with it to the vessel. The interval seemed to us ages, but at last the fishing-boat was reached, the man and woman placed in the cradle, while the fisherman, with heroic daring, swung himself along, pushing his inanimate burden before him. The boat was reached, the rope cut, and the hardy seaman once more turned to endeavor to reach the shore. Fortunately, the storm was abating, or with the increased weight and the exhausted condition of the crew, Will's noble devotion would have been for naught. I will not prolong my story by recounting our alternate feelings of fear and hope as each wave bore up the little boat apparently only to overwhelm it. Suffice it to say, that before the Christmas morning was fully begun the boat was being dragged up the beach by scores of willing hands, and in a few moments the boys had made hammocks of some blankets, and were carrying the apparently lifeless forms of Fred and Nelly Howard to the Two Fishermen. All the women and girls followed them, but the men gathered round Will, grasping his hand, and expressing in the heartiest manner their appreciation of his noble deed. And, strange to say, save a lameness caused by his long exposure, Will seemed to show but little trace of his unparalleled exertion. His face was flushed with triumph, and a ringing cheer was given by the men as they hoisted him, much against his will, on their shoulders, and bore him toward the house. His first act was to ask to see Nelly, but Mrs. Hayman stopped him, saying, with big tears in her eyes: "You mustn't see her, Will. She still lives, but the slightest excitement might kill her. I thank God I've got such a son. I shall never forget this night." Her feelings overcame her, and clasping Will tightly round the neck, she sobbed like a child. Never have I witnessed such a scene. His sisters clung to him, kissing him as though they never would be done; and his father came out of the little room where Fred was lying, and grasping Will's hand as if he would wring it off, said: "God bless you, my lad. We all thought you a bit foolhardy at first, but you've done a deed this night that a king might be proud of." Then, turning to the villagers who filled the room, he said: "That's you all, friends, for what you have done. I can't forget this is Christmas day. I thought a few hours ago it would be a bitter day for me, but, thanks to our Father in heaven, and to this brave lad, whom I'm proud to call my son, we've got our darling back. Now, I must ask you all to go home and get rested, and then I shall only be too glad to see as many as care to come in this room after tea. Maybe we can make ourselves comfortable after all."

The crowd dispersed, and the doctor had pronounced Fred and Nelly free from danger, we all retired to rest in broad daylight.

My story is done. But before we part I should like my readers to glance with me at a letter which I received yesterday. (It read thus:—

"DEAR SIR—I hope you will not think me bold in asking, but we should be very glad if you could come and spend Christmas day with us this year. You know that you will be right welcome, and Nelly, who's the dearest wife on earth, joins me in asking you to come. So, if you can manage to get away, please don't fail.

"Yours, very truly,
"WILL HAYMAN."

Of course I consented; but before we part, an invitation like this was not to be despised, and I am looking forward to my visit with great pleasure.

Christmas is a golden milestone in the path of youth.

The Night Before Christmas.



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