

A MISGUIDED SANTA CLAUS.

By Ellen Hassel.

"But, my dear sister," demurred Percival, looking hopelessly at his sister through his monocle. "No 'buts' about it," snapped his sister. "The very idea of a man twenty years old refusing to play Santa Claus to his own little nephews and nieces! You'll do as I say or my name is not Jane Van Smythers!"

"If my set should find it out I would certainly be considered the laughing stock," he continued, as he hastily polished the pear handle of his spindly, little cane with a silk, perfumed handkerchief.

Nevertheless he followed his sister to the other side of the room and gingerly accepted the red Santa Claus suit she thrust into his arms.

"Fudge!" from Jane was the only answer to his last remark. Then she proceeded to relate just how she wished him to carry out her plans for surprising the children.

"Remember!" she finished. "I want you to forget you are in Percival Dancliffe and don't forget all the stories I have read you about St. Nicholas, for I want you to act a natural part. We shall expect you at nine o'clock."

Percival looked at his sister again in despair, daintily pulled up his coat sleeve an inch or two, squinted at his wrist watch, and hastily departed.

As soon as the door closed behind him, Mrs. Van Smythers threw herself on the nearest chair and clasped her hands desperately.

"That brother of mine!" she exclaimed to herself. "He's the worst dandy I ever heard of, saw, or thought of! But I'll put some life in him!" And at that moment she certainly looked as if she could do it.

Suddenly Mr. Van Smythers entered, laughing.

"What is so amusing?" asked his wife looking at him in surprise.

"I almost made an awful blunder this evening," he answered. "If I had it to do again Jane, I would not have rented this house."

"I don't see anything so funny about that," said Mrs. Van Smythers.

"Why?"

"These double houses I never could bear," he replied. "I almost went in to the wrong side of the house, this evening. Imagine the terror of those two old maids if they saw a man entering!"

This time Jane laughed with her husband, for those two maiden ladies furnished a lasting source of amusement to her. They had rented one side of the house many years before the Van Smythers family had rented the other side. There they had lived in comparative solitude for they were not sociable and never encouraged callers.

"Dear me! You must be more careful," said Jane. Then as she and her husband walked to the dining room to their waiting supper, Jane confided to him her plan for "killing two birds with one stone"—supplying a Santa Claus for her children and forcing her brother to be real boyishly lively for one night in his life.

In the meantime, Percival sauntered into a lunch room, and while he sipped hot chocolate and nibbled sweet wafers, he thought of the role he had to play that night.

"Was there ever such an unfortunate mortal as myself to have such a sister as Jane?" he moaned. "And, if I remember rightly from these stories of St. Nicholas—Good—gracious!" he exclaimed, forgetting his luncheon, he started up in extreme agitation—"according to those tales this horrid fellow comes down the chimney!"

This thought took away Percival's appetite and he hurried out of the restaurant. After pacing the street for some time he finally decided. His sister had ordered him to act a natural part, and, well—Percival had had experience with Jane's temper. He would do almost anything rather than cause that to be aroused. After making this decision, he turned his steps to his apartments with a great deal of reluctance.

An hour later found Percival before a long mirror fully arrayed in the Santa Claus outfit. He was looking at himself very mournfully and was trying to adjust his wig and beard in a more becoming way. No one would have taken him for a full assortment of splints, bandages and court plaster in case he should slip while on his journey down the chimney and the medical supplies might be needed.

After he had surveyed himself all he cared to, Percival took a chair opposite the fireplace and kept his eyes fastened on the clock. He waited and watched in trepidation which increased considerably as it drew nearer nine o'clock. Fifteen minutes before the appointed time he stole out of his apartments and, by various dark streets and alleys, finally reached his sister's home. He shuddered as he stealthily approached the trellis at the side of the house over which his sister had trained roses. After fastening the bag securely to his shoulders and putting on a pair of rubber gloves, Percival began climbing the trellis. He made slow progress ascending for the thorns of the rose-bush did all they could to hinder him. They scratched his face and caught in his false beard. After several frantic pulls and lurches between Percival, the beard, and the thorns, Percival was the first to give up and decided to continue his journey as a shaved St. Nicholas.

At last he reached the top of the trellis and sat down to rest. How he wished himself safe in his den smoking a cigarette and reading his favorite volume of poems! But he seemed to see the scornful face of his sister Jane impelling him onward, so, on his

hands and knees he crawled along the roof toward the place where he thought the chimney ought to be.

Where was that chimney, anyhow? It seemed to him that he had been over every inch of that big roof, but he had felt no chimney. Finally he gathered up courage enough to stand up and look around. In the darkness he could just distinguish two black objects in the shape of chimneys. Now which chimney was the right one? Jane had neglected to mention the plan of the roof. Well, he decided the one nearest him was the right one, for he was beginning to feel dizzy.

He staggered towards it and grasped it in desperation. In his imagination he could picture his mangled remains lying in his sister's fireplace far below him. Then he felt of the opening. It was not very big—not big enough to admit the proverbial Santa Claus—but just big enough, at a squeeze, that this exceptional Santa Claus might edge himself down.

But the sack—no—the sack simply could not be forced down. Then Percival had a bright idea—(which was a very rare occurrence to him)—why not throw the toys and then go down himself and distribute them among his nieces and nephews? He quickly untied the sack and pulled out the first toy, a stuffed mouse, very life-like, that would squeak when pressed on the sides. This he dropped down the chimney.

Here we will leave Percival for the time being and enter the side of the house inhabited by the two maiden ladies, the Misses Sally and Anne Hicks. Both were tall and spare, both wore checked gingham dresses, stiffly starched and carefully mended, both liked mush and milk for breakfast, and both were lonely, poor, and hungry for a real Christmas but both were too proud to say so.

This Christmas eve they were sitting before the fireplace, knitting, but the thoughts of both were far from the fire was out and no heat went out from the black cinders to warm the two silent figures sitting there. Suddenly there was a rustle, and something fell on the hearthstone in front of them, emitting a tiny squeak.

The thoughts of both were shattered in a triffing; both took one look and both had the same impulse. The next second found Miss Sally on top of the table, her skirts tucked tightly around her while Miss Anne jumped up on her chair and shrieked wildly for help.

The cause for all the excitement was lying on the hearthstone just where it had fallen. Just then there was a rattle, a scraping, and a crash as a tin horn in company with a miniature train of cars flew down the chimney and landed beside the mouse. Miss Sally looked down from her perch, at the toys on the floor and Miss Anne did the same. They continued to stare as a jointed doll with head wrapped in a towel took its place on top of the train. Then Miss Sally, who was the boldest of the two cowered, stepped from the table on a chair and from the chair to the floor and began to investigate. Presently she was joined by Miss Anne.

Miss Anne, who was of a decidedly religious turn of mind, knelt down just where she was and asked Providence if the blessings had not been sent to the wrong place. A box packed with paper dolls next fluttered down, paused a moment on Miss Anne's bent head, and proceeded on down. Miss Anne arose with a look of supreme content on her face.

"I am blessed," she announced to Miss Sally. "I felt it upon my head."

Miss Sally gave her a look of unutterable scorn but merely said, "Humph! I'm blessed too if I know where all this foolery comes from!"

More toys fell down until there was a considerable pile at the feet of the astounded ladies.

"I shall see about this," declared Miss Sally, picking up a pair of fire tongs and advancing towards the chimney.

"Do be careful, sister," warned Miss Anne fearfully. "It seems like a miracle."

"Miracle or not, I'm going to look up the chimney," answered Sally.

This she proceeded to do and was just in time to receive a large Teddy bear on her head. She jumped back screaming with the bear still retaining its balance.

"A catymount!" shrieked Miss Anne, jumping up on her chair again.

"Well, take it off!" cried Sally, but she didn't wait for her timid sister to act. She shook her head violently and Teddy fell to the floor. "Just wait until I catch—"

She didn't finish the sentence for just then there was a much greater noise and a more prolonged scraping and then to the maids' extreme horror first two feet appeared and then the rest of a certain Percival Dancliffe landed on top of the toy pile. There was a moment of tense silence. Miss Anne had retreated behind the window curtains but Miss Sally stood at bay her fire tongs in her hand. Slowly Percival extricated himself from the pile and rose to his feet. His look of amazement can better be imagined than described.

The first notion was made by Miss Sally who advanced toward the cowering visitor brandishing her fire tongs in a threatening manner. Percival showed immediate signs of retreating up the chimney again, but, failing this, he cleared his throat and began, "Er—um—beg pardon, Madam—but I fear a slight mistake—"

"Yeasser!" interrupted Miss Sally abruptly, "a very slight mistake, sir! Who are you, a regular house-breaker or just a common chimney sweep?"

It would have been hard to tell just then what Percival was for he could have been taken for either. Torn and scratched by the rose bushes, his beard lost, and his monocle broken, he looked "tough" enough to be anything. Besides that, during his trip down the chimney, all the soot that had accumulated there during all the past years was deposited on Percival. He certainly would never have been taken for a misguiding Santa Claus.

Percival didn't know exactly how that question should be answered but he hastily assured her that he intended no harm but had made a mistake in the chimneys.

"I'm supposed to act Santa Claus to my sister's children at nine o'clock tonight," he finished, desperately. "And it's after that time now."

Still it was not until after he had unwound the towel from the doll's

head and used it vigorously on his face that the two ladies were willing to believe that he was indeed Percival Dancliffe, brother of their nearest neighbor, Mrs. Van Smythers. Then he began to pick up the toys hastily and Miss Anne, forgetting her fear, emerged from behind the curtains and helped him.

When Percival was at last ready to go, he suddenly thought how lonely Miss Sally and Miss Anne looked and then he showed that underneath those coxcomb manners of his, he possessed a kind heart and if this was once awakened, he would act more like a natural boy. At last he had come to himself but not the way his sister had planned.

"Won't you come over and see the presents given to the children?" he asked, addressing both the maids standing near him. They hesitated but he insisted, and he finally won their consent.

Mr. and Mrs. Van Smythers met the party at the door, and, after the first surprise Miss Anne gave them, Miss Hicks gave a hearty welcome. Percival cleaned himself up and joined in the sports so heartily and made their two unexpected visitors so happy that Jane remarked to her husband late that evening, "I declare! Percival has at last become what I always wanted him to be. I am very proud of him. And those dear old maids—they're coming for dinner tomorrow, my dear—I will never make fun of again!"

POE'S PLACE IN LITERATURE

America Has Not Accorded Due Honor to Her Gifted Son, is Opinion of Hamilton W. Mable.

A national literature must have many notes, and Poe struck some which in pure melodic quality had not been heard before. As literary interests broaden, and the provincial point of view gives place, the American estimate of Poe will approach more nearly the foreign estimate. That estimate was based mainly on a recognition of Poe's artistic quality and of the marked individuality of his work. Lowell and Longfellow continued the old literary traditions; Poe seemed to make a new tradition. . . . The artist always pushes back the boundaries a little, and opens a window here and there through which the imagination looks out upon the world of which it dreams, but which it sees so rarely; and we are not prone to mete out praise of those who set us free. If we lose our heads for a time when Kipling comes with his vital touch, his passionate interest in living, the harm is not great. Poe may have been over-valued by some of his eager French and German disciples, but, after all deductions are made, their judgment was nearer the mark than ours has been; and it was nearer the mark because their conception of literature was more inclusive and adequate.—Hamilton W. Mable.

FELT PITY FOR VAIN MAN

"So Full of Himself That He Has No Room for Anything Else," Wrote William Penn.

A vain man is a nauseous creation; he is so full of himself that he has no room for anything else, be it never so good and deserving.

'Tis I at every turn that do this, or can do that. And as he abounds in comparison, so he is sure to give himself the better of everybody else; according to the proverb, all the geese and swans.

They are certainly to be pitted that can be so much mistaken at home. And yet I have sometimes thought that such people are in a sort happy, that nothing can put out of countenance with themselves, though they never have nor merit other peoples'.

But at the same time one would wonder they should not feel the blows they give themselves or get from others, for this intolerable and ridiculous temper; nor show any concern for that which makes others blush for, as well as at them, viz., their unreasonable assurance. . . .

Whereas the greatest understandings doubt most, are readiest to learn, and least pleased with themselves; this, with nobody else.

For though they stand on higher ground, and so see further than their neighbors, they are yet humbled by their prospect, since it shows them something so much higher and above their reach.

And truly then it is, that sense shines with the greatest beauty, when it is set in humility.—William Penn, in "Fruits of Solitude."

Finding Fault.

Addison says, "What an absurd thing it is to pass all over the valuable parts of a man and fix our attention on his infirmities!" But that seems to be the habit. About the first thing we try to find in a man is his faults. They are apt to transcend his virtues, even if the virtues are mountain high. It is a deplorable habit, for it not only does great injustice to the person criticized, but it hurts the critic himself.

It lowers his views of life and confirms the habit of seeing the worst side of human experience and losing sight of the bright side. No man can be a moral man, or a religious man of any faith, who is constantly searching for the faults of people. The first duty a man owes to his neighbor is to look for the bright side and he will then find, in most cases, that the dark side is much smaller than he suspected. The thing to attack is the sin, for we will discover that that is greater than the man who is guilty of it.—Ohio State Journal.

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