

# A Letter to Santa Claus.



EAR MISTER SANTA Claus: "We're two little boys in blue. An' we thought we'd write a letter, fore Christmas comes, to you;

We live here with our parents, in a house 'at's painted green. An' of all the boys 'at ask fer toys we're the best you ever seen!

"An' so, we thought we'd tell you jus' what to bring, 'cos we know 'at you have a heap to do, an' busy as kin be!

We know you're hitchin' up your team, an' purty soon you'll leave.

An' those things is the all we want—these all—on Chris'mus Eve:

"Two little drums, An' sugar plums;

An' a slate 'at won't do any sums; An' a Hobby Hoss

You kin ride across, An' bicycles, an' balls to toss;

An' a steamer-boat (Like the ones 'at float).

An' a wagon hitched to a Billy Goat; An' tops to spin

(What they's music in), An' a climbin' monkey, dressed in tin;

An' two toy-guns (Like the Jones's ones).

An' a railroad train 'at winds an' runs; An' a sledin' sled

'At's painted red, An' a bran'-new little trundle bed;

Horns, whistles, drums, An' sugar-plums—

Bring all you've got when Chris'mus comes!

"We these thought 'at we'd tell you, 'cos you got so much to do.

An' all the little boys an' girls is writin' notes to you;

We was 'fraid you might forget us, while you're hitchin' up to leave;

But them things is the all we want—these all—on Chris'mus Eve!"

—Frank L. Stanton, in Atlanta Constitution.

# MOTHER'S CHRISTMAS



IT WAS very silly of me to faint," Mrs. Merrie said, tremulously, "and quite as silly for you all to send for a doctor! I never did such a

thing in my life before! It just seemed like everything went, all on a sudden! I hain't been rale strong, some way, for a long time."

"No," Dr. Temple answered, quietly. "But it don't do to give up! What with the fruit season and harvestin', thrashin' and the like, there's a sight to do. I don't see why I have this give down now—just at Christmas! It's too bad!"

"And may be worse," the physician replied, his keen glance resting on the sewing machine piled high with unfinished work. "Mrs. Merrie, if your friend over there fell to squeaking, grinding and snapping thread, should you go on working at full speed?"

"Why, that wouldn't be very smart in me, sir, to wear it out! I should stop and oil!"

"That says the thing I mean! Your old worn-out body bids you beware. I'm not going to give you any medicine. You need rest—absolute rest. I advise you to accept the good cheer of the season; leave home, and take a vacation."

Four solemn young faces turned blankly to the stern one of the man of science. Mother leave home! Jack and Joe, Jim and Jerry (diminutives of Jacqueline, Josephine, Jemima and Jerusha, the "Merry Jays") grasped the situation at once, and realized its hopelessness. It is all very well for a rich man to prescribe rest and change, but another matter to follow his advice when the purse is flabby and family cares crying with a voice which will not be comforted. A piteous little smile drew down the corners of Mrs. Merrie's mouth.

"Oh, fix me out a little quinine, doctor, or calome! You know I can't leave home! Christmas is here, and the poor children have been slaving away at their books and must have their good time. I'm all right."

Dr. Temple snapped the straps of his case and arose. "When you collapse again," he said, coldly, "you had better call another doctor—one who will give calome!"

Jerry, youngest of the Jays, had been standing remorsefully by her mother's chair. "I know what Dr. Temple thinks," she said, valiantly. "He thinks if you cannot rest—with grown-up daughters—your case is hopeless, and he gives it up. You can follow the advice; she shall have her vacation, sir!"

"Spoken like a man!" the doctor answered, heartily. (Jerry wore her hair cut close, and walked and talked with a slight swagger.) "Take care of her; mothers are not a drug in the market. I will go now—good day, friends! I hope to see roses on those cheeks before spring comes."

"What a very absurd man!" the mother exclaimed, dropping weakly back against the pillow. "Why did you send for him, girls?"

"Because," Jerry answered, rising to the height of self-accusation, "because we needed some one to tell us how selfish we are! In school, every one of us—not a soul to give you a hand's turn. And in vacation—oh, with a remorseful groan—"last vacation I made crazy quilts!"

"And very pretty they were, too, I'm sure. What's the matter with you all? I ain't complainin'!"

"Of course not. But we're guilty all the same. She shall have her vacation—what do you say, girls?"

"Christmas or no Christmas!" was the verdict.

"Last summer," Jim remarked, gravely, "I went off to Cousin Vic's, and kept my hands white. It's ma's turn now."

"But ma ain't agoin' to your Cousin Vic's," Mrs. Merrie announced, resolutely. "Ma's agoin' to stay right here. I see me a-askin' your poor pa for money!"

The word "money" brought a frown to four faces. "Well, we'll get supper and talk it over," Joe said, soberly. "You lie still and rest."

"Ma" was nothing loath. It was very pleasant lying there in the twilight, watching the shadows clasp hands and dance along the rafters. Even the odor of camphor, suggestive of illness, did not trouble her. The room grew very quiet. She was a little girl again, out in her father's boat hunting pond lilies, when Jim patted her hand.

"Here's your toast and tea, mother," she said, shaking her a little. "Take it now while it's hot. We've talked it all over with pa, and have decided about your vacation. You are to have one. We will take you off to-morrow." Luxurious idleness prevented argument.

"Well," she said, fumbling with the cup. "How white the lilies are! Well—yes."

Mrs. Merrie found herself helpless in the hands of husband and children. They would not let her prepare the morning meal, and it was a novel sensation to lie and listen to the cheerful sounds from the kitchen. Joe sang as she bustled about, and came in presently, an open valise in her hand.

"I'm packing your things, mother," she announced. "It's just awful to discover how few things you have to pack! Why didn't you remind us you need clothes sometimes? But Jim and I are cast in your mold; we've hunted you out some of our things. I'm going to give you my red merino wrapper to lounge in."

"Land sakes! I think you-all's gone stark starin' mad!" Mrs. Merrie protested petulantly. "You can't send me off against my will, I reckon! And where is there to go—and money to pay for a trip, anyhow?"

Joe nodded brightly. "Never you

was driven off at a rattling pace, and saw the old house dissolve into the general gray. Nature had turned Quaker this day, and gray was the only color she wore. The fog hung low, dropping tears. Not a pleasant day, yet a sense of exhilaration came to her. It was a novel sensation to be driving thus, without so much as a chicken or a basket of eggs as an excuse. There was almost the spice of wickedness to make her ride memorable.

"There's old Markle's mill," John observed, checking the horse. "Old Markle he don't keep her up like he used to. She's a-gittin' crazy lookin', the old mill is. If that was my place—"

He rambled on cheerfully. Mrs. Merrie scarcely heard. The dim landscape was like a picture seen in childhood—soft-shrouded, unreal, yet delicately beautiful. She drew a short, sharp breath. "Why do we live so hard?" she faltered. "Look out! God has crowded His world with pleasant things!"

"Well, I dunno!" he answered. "Git 'long, Poke-easy! D'ye reckon we're in such a rush to git we can't stop, and run on past?"

The ride was a long one. "We're goin' to meet Christmas," John remarked, with a wink. "If she don't hump herself we'll be at headquarters afore she gets started!" But by and by visions of dinner and a fire-side appealed to him coaxingly, and he decided Christmas might find its way unattended. He put the horse into a trot, and after awhile the road grew familiar. Mrs. Merrie held her peace till they were fairly in the lane leading home.

"Have you forgotten anything?" she asked, dryly, suspecting a practical joke, and ready to resent it. John helped her down carefully and set her grip on the horse-block. "Not a bit of it!" he answered, heartily. "I started with the best little woman in the world, and have fetched back ever' bit of her! Here's yer boardin' house, missus, board paid in advance!"

The noise of their arrival brought four rosy young faces to the door. Jack (the oldest Jay) ran laughing to the gate, and kissed her mother on the cheek. "Our new boarder!" she said, taking the valise. "Come

hung up for her delight. The lump in her throat had climbed so high she hadn't voice left to thank Joe for the cup of coffee which was to "drive out the cold."

Dinner was substantially a failure, artistically a success. The big male-Jay made a wry mouth over the sallow bread and soggy potatoes, but his mate had no criticism to offer. To her it was a glorified feast, for she ate and drank the fruits of her labor—her children's love, poured back into the emptied measure of her life.

Back before her cozy fire (which Jerry religiously kept burning) she accepted the blessedness of rest. Dreams overtook her—

"Climbed over the window sill," escaping into the fair, lost land of childhood. Through the whole afternoon she slept, and the little house hushed itself as though life or death were at issue. Even Jesse never once hallooed, or stamped his boots, or whistled, for which unprecedented good behavior Jack gave him a penny, and drew a long chalk mark on the smoke-house door.

Early next morning tantalizing little odors began to sneak into the apartments of the new boarder. Now she was sure it was turkey, now it seemed to be mince pie and hot cake. Then she remembered it was Christmas eve, and rolled up her knitting decisively.

"The dear girls!" she thought. "They'll burn up and spoil everything they undertake! They'll not be sorry to have mammy back in the kitchen!"

But she had reckoned without her host. The door between her and the kitchen was locked, and when she attempted the dining-room entry Jack stopped her decidedly at the threshold. "I beg your pardon," she said, with polite severity. "You rented the parlor and bedroom only, I think. Indeed we don't mean any incivility, but we just can't have our boarders cluttering up the kitchen on busy days, and will take it as a favor if you'll go back to your own quarters and get ready for a little outing. You haven't seen your old erony, Mary Ann Griggs, since she moved away, have you? Jerry wants to drive you down there in the cart to spend the day."

Mrs. Merrie's eyes lighted with pleasure. "Well, really," she admitted, "if you won't let me help you—all I should like to see Mary Ann—powerful well! I really should enjoy to go!"

Jerry brought her back in the early twilight and hustled her off to bed, and again sleep brought its healing.

Christmas morning came in with soft unsanded feet. All the earth was wrapped in the whiteness of snow. The Christ-child was born anew, and the great Mother, tenderly, in the hours of darkness, had spread her softest coverlet about His feet.

Four bright-eyed faces, with Jesse below and the big male-Jay above, peeped in, and the simultaneous shout of "Christmas Gift!" brought Mrs. Merrie up from among her blankets. "Well, I never!" she ejaculated. "I reckon this is the first Christmas you-all ever caught ma a-nappin'! I ain't got no Christmas for you neither—think of that!"

"Never mind," Jesse soothed. "We've got"—but Joe had him by the shoulders, and shook his mouth shut. There would have been instant war then, but—well, Jesse knew what he knew, and the balance of power remained unmistakably with the girls.

The dining-room door remained obstinately locked all day. Breakfast was eaten in the snug little kitchen, dinner served in state in the parlor. There were no guests at all save old Granny Woods, a half blind pauper, who always presented herself on recognized holidays, and was served with the best.

During the progress of the meal the tempting, secretive odors unveiled themselves. King Gobbler had yielded to the inevitable, and, more lovely in death than in life, adorned the center of a generous feast. "A reglar blow-out," as Jesse expressed it, and there were no failures this time. The energy and talent of the whole family of Jays (minus its head) went to the making of a success so brilliant as to mark an epoch. "Just see what you-all can do!" Mrs. Merrie said over and over, her eyes bright with pride. "Why, I can't hold a candle to such cookin' as this!"

But the day was to be crowned itself with greater laurels. Each year since their infancy she had planned surprises for them; now had come the hour to reverse the story. When the lamps were lit they took her into the dining-room, where a handsome tree gleamed with light and color. The fact that there were more candles, tinsel paper and popcorn balls than presents did not detract from its beauty. Behind it on the wall was the legend: "Mother's Christmas," wrought in evergreen. Mother sat down in the big new rocker, cushioned with one of Jerry's conscience-stricken crazy quilts, and yielded to tears.

"Mother," Jack said, tenderly, kneeling beside her, "our selfishness was unintentional; we didn't know we were driving you to death! In our hurry to get an education we—forgot. You know my poor little pay as country school-teacher barely dresses us, but I can see my way plain to hire help for you while we are at school. You believe we love you, don't you, mother?"

"Yes," she answered, huskily. "Yes, yes! Whoever doubted it? And I—oh, what does anything matter, so we love each other?"

So this sweet Christmas passed into memory, and shone there, a rainbow promise that the flood should no more engulf one mother's soul.—M. Howard Sheppard, in Ladies' World, New York.

**A Suggestion.** Just to round out your full complement of Christmas happiness, contribute a bit of Christmas for the poor.—St. Louis Republic.

## Fashion's Decrees of the Winter in GOTHAM

Some New Elaborations Are Being Shown on the Season's Visiting Gowns

### THE possibilities of the new ombre taffeta

VISITING gowns show some new effects in the way of elaboration produced by the use of the new ombre taffeta. This is shaded in the length of the silk from a very dark to light, and is used for applications or incrustations, either on fine net or the much used moire panne. The shading of this silk makes it very handsome and effective. The colors are pure white, shaded to greens, blues or reds, or the deep orange and royal blues. The shaded browns lead in popularity.

One of the new visiting gowns trimmed with this is made of black cloth, with applique of black panne outlined with a golden ombre taffeta. The graceful hanging skirt has trails



OF GOLDEN BROWN SATIN FACED CLOTH.

of leaves fashioned of the applique. On the bolero the leaves are in clusters so closely that they almost cover the sleeves. The design covers the short back, and the longer fronts, with an edging of mink tail coming against the ivory white satin of old lace veiling. The vest is of shining golden tissue, while at the throat there is a hint of turquoise blue velvet.

A second gown for visiting purposes is of golden brown satin cloth, trimmed with panne in a lighter shade, with brown ombre taffeta in a paisly design. The skirt has a front panel of the velvet, with the ombre taffeta in paisly design. The cloth is plaited on each side. A pointed bolero of the cloth, with vest of velvet trimmed the same as the skirt.

A more simple gown, yet one that is decidedly more striking, is of heliotrope zebeline cloth, with rosettes of ombre taffeta in a light blue. The skirt is fastened at one side with three large rosettes of the taffeta, each having a gold button in the center. It has a natty box coat, with a large turn-over collar and revers of velvet, edged with mink tail fur. Three rosettes of the taffeta to finish the front.

### MILLINERY styles the New Year will bring

JANUARY and the new century will bring us some slight changes in fashions. Among these will be a little variety in the way of hats, and the prevailing millinery will be Henry IV. and other cavalier styles.

Not alone in black, but in colors as well, trimmed with black and white



TRIMMED WITH BLACK PANNE AND GOLDEN OMBRE TAFFETA.

plumes, velvet hats are to be the strong point. Smooth covered, draped or made of velvet braid—that is to say, folds of velvet used as braid, sometimes with chenille. For instance, a fold of velvet edged with chenille is twisted into hat shape. These combinations are used either of black or pastel tints of velvet edged with black chenille, trimmed with white or black feathers and relieved with gold. Pearls and turquoise are ornaments which are very much seen in the velvet hats.

In color the new century will be ushered in amid a burst of red. Red velvet for millinery purposes is even now assuming such proportions that it may be safe to class it as a fad. The shade

is a rich garnet, with a slight cardinal tinge, giving it life rather than dullness. Hats of this are made in all shapes and are preferable trimmed in roses and foliage. Many of the green leaves of velvet or other textures are used on such affairs and are a relief from the fancy feather ideas of the early season.

Another of the fads of the hour in the way of millinery is gold roses. It is but an outcome of the craze for gold that has not yet reached an end. These roses are made of beautiful, thin gold cloth and are exquisite in their richness and artistic effect. They are tasteful and novel, and when properly combined and worn by the right person are very effective. These gold roses are combined with empire green velvet leaves, and are especially liked upon black, garnet and green velvet hats.

### WHAT we lack in the production of fashions

HAS the burst of patriotism that caused the women of the fashionable set in New York and other cities in this country to patronize home industry in the purchase of their gowns had its full run?

For many years the ultra-fashionable set in America have been patrons of the fashionable costuming establishments of London, Paris, Vienna and Berlin, but with the breaking out of the war with Spain the ladies displayed their patriotism by purchasing their gowns at home. Now the trend seems Parisward again, and I put the above question to one of the leading dry goods trade journal writers—a member of the staff of the Dry Goods Economist—a few days ago, and received this reply:

"America cannot produce the novelties of design either in materials or completed costume that the American woman demands. Our American women lead the world with their costumes; they set the styles for Europe as well as America, but their ideas to secure the best results must be carried out in Paris, for we lack both the men and



OF ZEBELINE CLOTH IN HELIOTROPE.

the facilities for doing so in this country.

"Our facilities for manufacture are not yet high enough in many interests to produce materials that will suit the critical taste of this class of society. But in addition to a lack of manufacturing facilities we lack also the artistic class who have turned their artistic faculties to mercantile art. We have the artists, but they would rather put their ideas on unsaleable canvas than upon saleable dress goods. Yet the reproduction of artistic designs in fabric was really the origin of the majority of European art centers.

"When we can supply the designs and have the facilities for manufacture the American woman will buy her gowns at home rather than go to Paris for them. And, as American ideas are now valued in Paris, New York may become the fashion center of the world when we produce the needed men and methods."

SARAH DAVIDSON.

**Caste Among Turkish Women.** It is not generally known that there exists among Turkish ladies of high class a kind of caste feeling similar to that prevailing among Hindoos. It takes the form of a fear of contamination from the outer world and is only observed by those who cannot afford to keep servants in sufficient numbers. Before meals ladies always wash their hands at a tap from which the water runs into a marble basin. They will turn on the tap when they are just going to wash, but when they have finished they let the water run till somebody shuts it off, as to do it themselves would make them unclean. They cannot open or shut a door, as the handle would be unclean, so a slave is generally kept handy for the purpose.—N. Y. Sun.

Edison's Motto.

Thomas A. Edison's motto is: "Never watch the clock." So devoted to his work is he that he frequently works 16 hours at a stretch without noting the passage of time.



BEFORE HER COZY FIRE.

mind, Mrs. Merrie; this is our little affair. We've arranged for the nicest boarding-place, where you can enjoy the first quiet Christmas of your married life. As to the money—well, your board is paid. Pa says you may stay as long as you want to."

"I reckon you-all will have your own way," the mother grumbled. "The money must come out of poor Jack's hard earnings, or your pa make a sacrifice. You might tell me where I'm going, anyhow! And I wonder if your royal highness and his majesty, Dr. Temple, and his grace, John Merrie, will let me take my knittin' along? 'Cause if you-all don't I shan't know what to do with my hands in your fine company."

Joe smiled as she tucked Jesse's half-finished sock into the grip. "Oh, yes! you can take it. There won't be company, though; we want you to rest."

"And whatever is to become of the work—and the sewing—and my blessed baby—"

"Jesse is no baby—a great six-year-old boy! It's a pity, ma, if we can't take care of things! This is your medicine, and you shall take it, if we have to hold your nose! There, now; I want to get you ready. Pa is bringing up the cart."

Mrs. Merrie submitted herself in resigned silence. There was a taint of affectation in her resistance, for under all was a lurking sense of pleasure. Well, why not accept the rest and change? There come times in our lives when it is profitable to hide from our dearest.

Joe's soft touches on her head smoothed out the worry-wrinkles from a prematurely aged brow. By the time Mr. Merrie came in she could answer the twinkle in his eye. He was a good-humored giant, who, in sublime unconsciousness and with the best intentions in the world, had trodden on her heart for 20 years.

"Come on, old lady!" he said, shrugging into his overcoat. "We'll be rid of you and yer faintin' spells in a jiffy! Wrap her up warm, girls; it ain't none too pleasant abroad. Not that mother's one o' yer deliky carry-me-easy kind! Here's her thing-umbob. Now git through the kissin'!"

There were no tears, save those Mrs. Merrie softly let fall in weak self-pity. Was it really so easy to let her go? She looked back wistfully as she

right in! I hope you will like us, and enjoy your vacation. These are my sisters, Josephine, Jemima and Jerusha. I'm Jack! Come in here and lay off your wraps. This is ma's room—when she's home. Over there is your sitting-room. Are you much tired or cold?"

Mrs. Merrie was a Jay herself, as capable of enjoying a bit of delicate humor as the rest of them. So this was the solving of the problem, the vacation which was to cost nothing! She turned away her face after the first laugh, that they might not witness the passing of the swift storm which shocked through the gentle habit of patience.

"No, I am neither cold nor tired," she said, after that pause. "I am sure I shall like my boarding house if you think—if you truly believe—my board is paid—"

"In advance," four voices chorused. "You have been saving up and paying for 20 years!" Jack whispered, tenderly, looking into her eyes. "Oh, we feel—we understand—what you have always been to us!"

Here Jerry pushed determinedly to the front. "I am to attend you, ma'am," she said. "Your board bill includes service. If the young ladies and the big male-Jay will please to clear out I'll take off your damp clothes and make you comfortable."

The red wrapper came into play, likewise Joe's dainty ribbed knit slippers. The new boarder sank luxuriously into the big rocker (commonly occupied by one of the girls) and stretched her feet to the warmth. Opposite her hung a mirror, and from time to time she glanced wonderingly at the face reflected there. It was not, after all, the face of an old woman, although it had exchanged the crude pink of youth for the indefinable delicacy of maturity. The eyes met hers, full of light, and about the mouth were those wistful lines which tell of dreams not yet relinquished.

From one new thought to another, she realized all at once that the room had been prepared for her reception. There were the "company shams" on the bed, Jim's geraniums in the window, little loving touches everywhere. Sitting there so quietly she grew conscious of Jesse's black eye applied to the crack of the door, and further survey revealed his little butterfly kite