

**THE OLD MAN'S CHRISTMAS.**

It is past, like a beautiful dream; but sweet was the dream to me; For the children came, as in the days of old, and cuddled around my knee; And I told them the tales I used to tell— ere my locks were thin and gray— To the other children of my love: The children that went away!

I forget the vacant places—the fall of the wintry snow; In the light of their rosy faces I lived in the long ago; I lived in the long ago; but the Present was perfect then— For all of the bitter snow that falls on the lives of men.

I only knew they were near me, in a world made new again; And the Winter violets of Life were rimmed with the Springtime rain; I felt their kisses sweet on my withered cheeks and cold; And saw, over threads of silver, the gleam of their curls of gold.

It is past, like a beautiful dream; with all the songs that were sung; And I feel, in the after Silence, that the world is for the young; And thanks be to God that the world is so, with all its sunny years— That at least, one time in our lives we know kisses, and love, and—tears!

—F. L. Stanton, in Atlanta Constitution.

**Singing River's Christmas**

Being Ma'am Hickey's Story of a Celebration That Still Lives

By J. L. HARBOUR

(From a Story by that author published in St. Nicholas.)

Ma'am Hickey's account of the Christmas tree at Singing River is so much more interesting than any account I could give of it, that I think it best to let her tell about it in her own way:

"You see, Big Dan an' Joe Burke got back all right the middle of the afternoon the day before Christmas. They looked like a pair o' pack peddlers, an' they were about fagged out, for they had had a hard time of it pullin' up over the mountain trails in a snowstorm. Joe said he didn't think he could have dragged himself another mile for love nor money. He had two big turkeys on his back besides a great lot of other things.

"Well, the men in the camp had been busy, too. They had cut a big pine an' set it up in the hall over the post office, an' the way they had decorated the hall with evergreen was beautiful. You couldn't see an inch of the ugly bare logs nor of the bare rafters. They set to an' scrubbed the floor an' washed the winders, an' strung up a lot o' red, white and blue bunting! I happened to have in the house, an' I tell you the little old hall did look scrumptious. I kep' the children in the kitchen with me, where I was makin' pies an' cake an' doughnuts most o' the time. I give 'em dough to muss with, an' let 'em



THE DOOR OPENED AND A STRONG MAN STEPPED IN.

scrape the cake dishes, an' tried to keep 'em interested all the time, so they wouldn't ask about their pa.

"When Big Dan an' Joe got back, the other men had a great time riggin' up the tree. We was afeard they wouldn't be able to buy Christmas tree candles in Crystal City; but, my land! they got about ten dozen of 'em, an' no end o' tinsel an' shiny balls an' things to hang on the tree, an' lot o' little flags to stick in among the evergreen decorations. We had no end o' common taller candles on hand, an' the men were perfectly reckless with 'em. I reckon they put as many as 200 of 'em up around the room. An' what did they do but go an' rig Big Dan up as Santy Claus! They wrapped him up in a big bearskin one o' the boys had, an' put about a quart o' flour on his long, bushy whiskers to whiten 'em, an' they put a big fur cap on his head, an' he did look for all the world like Santy his own self. Yes; an' he had a string o' sleigh bells they got at the stage office stable; an' them boys askshully cut a hole in the roof so Santy Claus could come down through it! La, if you want things carried through regardless, you let a lot of Rocky Mountain boys take it in hand. They won't stop at nothin'. I reckon they'd h'isted off the hull roof if it had been necessary to make the appearance of Santy true to life. Such fun as the boys had over it all! An' of all the capers they cut up! Seemed like they were all boys once more! Me an' Ann Dickey an' Mary Ann Morris were the only women in the camp, an' we had our hands full gettin' up the Christmas supper we intended havin' after the tree. Mind you, there wasn't a child in camp but just them two pore little orphans, an' all that fuss was on their account. If you think rough miner boys can't have the kindest o' hearts, you just remember that. Every man seemed to be tryin' to

outdo the others in doin' somethin' for them little folks.

"Well, I jest wish you could have seen them children when the time come for 'em to go up to the hall an' see their tree! Little Freddy he give a yell o' joy that most split our ears, an' he jest stood an' clapped his hands, while his sister kep' sayin': 'How lovely it is! Oh, is n't it beautiful?' Then Freddy he schreeches out: 'Oh, there's my choo-choo engine! Goody!' An' how little Elsie's eyes did shine when she saw no less than three dolls on the tree for herself! There was enough stuff on that tree for a hull Sunday school, for the men had been that reckless in sendin' to Crystal City for things.

"Then I wish you could have seen those children when Big Dan come in all rigged up as Santy Claus! That was the capshew of the hull proceedin's! First we heard his bells outside, an' him callin' out, 'Whoa, there!' like as if he was talkin' to his reindeers. Then he climb up the ladder the boys had set outside, an' presently down he came through the hole in the roof. I jest thought little Freddy's eyes would pop clean out o' his head when that part o' the show come off! An' what fun there was when old Santy went around givin' the boys all kinds of ridiculous presents! He give old Tim Thorpe a tiny chiny doll, an' big Jack Ross a jumpin'-jack, an' Ben Anderson a set o' little pewter dishes; an' he fetched me a great big old pipe, when they knowed I hated the very sight o' one. I tell you, it was real fun!

"Well, the things had all been distributed, an' the children were loaded down with presents, an' me an' the other two women were about to go downstairs to take up the supper, when the door of the hall opened, and a strange man stepped in. When he saw the children he give a kind of a little outcry, an' the next minute he was down on his knees before 'em, with an arm around each child, an' he was kissin' first one an' then the other. We all jest stared at each other when little Elsie clapped her hands together and said:

"'Why, papa!'"

"An' that's jest who it was! The man named Miller, who had died a few days before, was a cousin o' the children's pa. It seemed that this cousin o' the name of Miller had been sent to meet the children because their pa had been sick an' wasn't hardly strong enough to come away over to Singin' River for them. He lived in a little camp only about 20 miles away, but it was a hard road to travel for a well man, even. So this cousin he come, an' from all we could make out, he had lost his way in a storm, an' had laid out a night an' got so chilled it had brought on pneumonia. When he didn't come back with the children after two or three days, their pa got uneasy, an' he set out himself to see what was the matter. He wasn't hardly fit to travel, but he come anyhow, an' he was all tuckered out when he got to Singin' River. Then he was so nervous an' kind o' wrought up that no one thought it to his shame that he jest broke clean down an' laughed an' cried by turns, kind o' hystericky like, over the children.

"We did have the best time at the supper! A storm had come up, an' the wind was roarin' an' howlin' in the canyon an' up an' down the Singin' River, an' the sleet was dashin' ag'in the winder lights; but that jest made it seem more cheery an' comfortable in the cabin, with a roarin' fire o' pine knots in the big fireplace at one end o' the cabin, an' the teakettle singin' on my big shinin' stove at the other end. Mr. Miller he set between the two children, an' he'd hug and kiss 'em between times. We made him stay two whole weeks in Singin' River to rest up an' get real well, an' then a hull passel o' the boys went with him to get the children home. The boys rigged up a sled, an' tuk turns drawin' Elsie an' Freddy over the trails an' away up over Red Bird mountain. I reckon it was a ride they won't ever forget; an' none of us that were there will ever in this world forget that Christmas on the Singin' River."

Col. Battersly, not having seen his sister in ten years, decided to spend Christmas at her house. A desultory correspondence had made him vaguely aware of the fact that her husband, Calvin Murdock, had grown rich, and that she had two children, a boy and a girl. But he was not prepared for the luxuriant conditions which he found upon entering their splendid home. He was never estranged from his sister, but when she married Murdock the soldier brother had made up his mind that his sister's husband was not "his kind." In frontier barracks and foreign camps, Col. Battersly's life had been lonely. He was a silent, elemental, passionate man, whose rigid habits gave a cold and even hard exterior to a nature essentially tender.

But the Murdocks gave Uncle Battersly a grand welcome. His sister kissed him, the two children gave him their hands with trained graciousness, and the head of the house said: "Welcome to the warrior—see, the conquering hero comes!" This made the old campaigner ill at ease. He blushed like a girl, and thereafter found restraint in the, to him, artificial atmosphere of the grand house.

When the Christmas presents began to arrive, and his sister showed them to him, the colonel suddenly realized that he must buy something for the children. He said nothing about it, but spent half of the next day buying for his niece a French doll, with a complete wardrobe, and a fully equipped steam battleship for his nephew. It was a soldier's choice—love and a child for the little woman, power and war for the little man. "He was very careful about the address," Mrs. Murdock, 2441 Penrose street.

He wondered why his gifts did not soon appear in the grand array, but said nothing to his sister, showing each day an increasing interest in the accumulating presents in the locked room, and finally, on Christmas eve, late in the day, going back to the store where he had made his purchases to ask what had become of the doll and the warship. It took a long time to find out the right man, but at last a very polite clerk who had been answering questions as fast as a dozen people could ask them, turned to him and said:

"Murdock? What address? Penrose street or Penrose avenue?"

"Are there both?" asked the colonel, as the possible blunder dawned on him.

"Yes; one on the West side, one on the South side. Where did you wish your goods to go?"

Of course, Penrose avenue is on the South side and Penrose street is on the West side, and Col. Battersly had himself made the mistake. The goods had been received for, the clerk told him.

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**MISDIRECTED GENEROSITY**

BY JOHN H. RAFFERTY.

It was pretty late to attempt getting them back, but they would try. The clerk made some notes, rattled off a few words about the terrible rush, moved off and left the colonel standing dazed in the crowd. He went home, and as a precaution got out of his trunk a strangely carved bracelet, antique, oriental—a noble present, he thought, for his niece; and for his nephew an old, bejeweled war mask—it had been a mandarin's. And he took them to Mrs. Murdock, saying nothing of their great value, and said they were for her girl and her boy. But after dinner that night Mr. Murdock tapped at the colonel's door, saying:

"I hope you won't think of giving those rare curios to the children, colonel. They're worth their weight in money."

"Didn't cost me a cent, Murdock," blurted the soldier. "They're part of the



IT WAS A DIRTY, TUMBLE-DOWN COTTAGE.

—well, the loot—that is, I picked 'em up in China and—they—the children will appreciate them more as they grow older."

Murdock walked away without another word, but that night the woman told her brother, softly and with evident desire to be grateful, that "papa was so scrupulous, he didn't want the children to receive such presents."

So the brother, flushing red, took back his barbaric gifts and went to bed. In the morning, soon after breakfast, he went out of the house, called a cab, and bade the driver take him to 2441 Penrose street. The doll and the battleship had not arrived, and he was going after them. He got out of the cab in a squalid street, and went into the only house in the block. It was a dirty, tumble-down cottage, built below grade and with a sign "For Sale" nailed to the rickety fence. A thin woman, in an old, faded wrapper, came to the door.

"I came to see if—"

"Oh, I knew somebody ud come," she interrupted him. "I knew they wasn't for us, sir—won't you come in?"

He stepped into the dingy room and saw a big-eyed, frail girl of seven fondling the great French doll.

"You see, sir," said the woman, breathless to explain, "the things come while I was out—I work over at the shoe factory, and—my name is Murphy, sir—and when the things come nobody was home, sir, but Mamie and the boy. He's mine, and he's out there now playin' with 'th' steamboat, and when the wagon came, Mrs. Tracy, she lives in the next block, she seen it, and she ran over and signed a book, and the driver jumped on his wagon and went away, an', of course, the children seen the bundles an' nothin' would do but they must open 'em. That's all, sir; we didn't want to—I hope you don't think we'd steal 'em."

She was out of breath now, and the two children—the boy, a sturdy lad of ten, had come in—were staring, frightened, at the colonel. He looked at them a moment and then at the mother.

"I don't understand you, madam," he said. "I called to look at the house. It's for sale, you know."

He saw the look of anxiety pass from her homely face. The children, delighted with the reprieve, ran back to their splendid toys. He made a show of looking through the stuffy rooms, and when he was going gave each of the little ones a coin.

"Good-by, madam," he said to the mother. "You have two fine children."

And when he was in the cab again he stroked his gray mustache and chuckled:

"It was a lucky blunder, after all. I'll go down to the store in the morning and tell 'em it's all right."—Chicago Record-Herald.

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**FRANCES STOREY'S HAPPIEST CHRISTMAS**

By HILDA RICHMOND

"Papa says one of you girls must accept Aunt Caroline's invitation for the holidays," said Mrs. Storey, with a troubled look on her motherly face. "I am sorry to have you go to that dead-alive little village, but you know papa seldom says 'must,' so we will have to make the best of it. Now which will it be?"

"It's simply impossible for me to go, mamma," said Margaret, whirling lightly around on the piano stool. "I've practiced for weeks on this Christmas music and the entertainment could not go on without my playing. Frances or Kate will have to sacrifice this time, and it's only fair, for they have not so much on their minds as I have."

"Why, Margaret, my time is as precious as yours," said Kate, looking up from the new dress she was finishing, "and besides I am going to sing at the party next week."

"I might go if someone would finish dressing these dolls for the tree down at the mission. Poor Aunt Carrie must be lonesome since her only daughter went to Oregon to live and I'd like to see her again. She used to let us make little pies and muffs around in her clean kitchen, and at home Sarah never allowed us to spoil her domain," said Frances.

"I'll attend to the dolls," said Margaret, promptly, "and help you pack your trunk if you need help. I have no doubt you will have a good time at Cedar Hill, for Aunt always thought so much of you."

In spite of her 19 years the whole family considered Frances a mere child and no one but the mother thought it made any difference that she was to spend the holidays in a lonely house with Aunt Caroline, instead of having a share in the city celebrations, which she so much enjoyed. Mrs. Storey slipped a number of packages marked "open on Christmas eve" in the big trunk and provided a stylish travelling dress, but her heart welled as the trim figure disappeared amid a chorus of farewells and the noise of the busy station. Mr. Storey gave his daughter some bright gold pieces with the instructions to spend them as she liked, but Frances reflected that she was likely to bring them home gain for want of a chance to invest in anything except goods found in a country store at Cedar Hill.

It was late in the afternoon before the brakeman announced "Cedar Hill," and Frances was surprised to see a number of passengers get off. "Is this really Cedar Hill?" she asked of an old man near.

"It really is," he answered with a smile. "If I am not mistaken, you are Fanny Storey that used to play with my granddaughters. Don't you remember Grandfather Devon?"

"Of course I do. How are Nellie and Ruth? The reason I thought this was not Cedar Hill is because the town when I knew it, was only a little place, and this looks like a city."

"We've had a boom since those days. Here, Horace, help Miss Storey with her luggage. I can take care of myself. This is the young lady who used to play with the girls a dozen years ago, but I don't suppose she remembers the freckled boy who built playhouses for her."

"Yes I do," said Frances, shaking hands with the elegantly dressed young man. "You always built the very nicest houses of any boys we knew, Mr. Devon, and I still recollect them with pleasure."

All this time they were leaving the train and looking for Aunt Caroline, who evidently had not received the letter announcing Frances' visit, for she was not in sight. "We'll take you to Mrs. Howard's, for she lives close to us," said the young man, loading himself with "Sissy's" baggage. "You never would find the old house without a guide, for factories and stores and churches have sprung up in such profusion that it is entirely overshadowed."

"I wish mamma and the girls could see me now," said Frances, gazing at the latest styles in dresses in a store window. "Mamma cried to think of my coming to dolls out-of-the-way place and I very nearly started with only a few clothes, thinking I would only need a set of things. We write and get letters from Cedar Hill so seldom that I never dreamed of the change I see to-day."

"You'll be glad enough you brought your trunk, for things are lively during the holidays."

"What is that beautiful building we are coming to?" inquired Frances, as they neared a stone structure that might have graced a city.

"That is the public library," said Mr. Devon. "I suppose you have a supply of books in that big trunk for fear there would be nothing to read in our town. I won't mention it to the citizens though, for fear they might put you on the first train for home. There is Mrs. Howard on the porch. She knows you."

The days that followed were busy ones for Frances. She sent a telegram telling of her safe arrival and found only time for the briefest notes till after Christmas, on account of the many places to go and the delightful things to do. Aunt Caroline enjoyed the company and the frolics to the utmost and urged her niece to make the old house as lively as possible. The girls and boys she played with years before flocked to see her, bringing friends with them, till Frances declared this the nicest visit she ever had in her life.

"You and I are the committee on dolls for the poor children's Christmas

tree," said Horace, coming into the parlor where Frances was putting up holly for the great day. "Imagine waiting till three days before the twenty-fifth before looking after dolls! But it's not their fault, for Miss Gray would have attended to it if her mother had not taken sick. Come, get your sunbonnet and we'll make short work of the infants."

"I'm going to buy some candy and fruit for the people at the hospital," said Frances when the dolls were disposed of. "Papa gave me some gold pieces to spend and they are burning holes in my pockets."

"A good idea. I'll go halves, for I feel like celebrating, too."

Over and over again Frances wished the folks at home could see her during the happy holidays. Every letter assured them that she was having a fine time, but it is impossible to put the spirit of good times on paper. The Christmas tree for the Sunday school of Third street church was a complete success and then the young people trooped off to the mission to distribute gifts and candy to the factory people who could not attend "the big church up town."

"Are you homesick, Fanny?" asked Nellie Devon, with an arm around Frances as the gay crowd sat waiting for the clock to strike 12 on Christmas eve in Mrs. Howard's old-fashioned parlor. "I don't want to remind you of home or make you sad, but you must have so many pleasant things to do in the city that we never heard about."

"I don't know what they are," laughed Frances. "I think I could give the president information about 'The Strenuous Life' since I've been here."



HERE, HORACE, HELP MISS STOREY OFF WITH HER LUGGAGE.

This is the busiest and happiest holiday time I ever had, except that I want all the folks at home to enjoy it, too."

"You must all come to dinner tomorrow—no, to-day—"

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