

matter. From the young draughtsmen in his employ, who occupied the offices on the ground floor, he had nothing to fear. And, as for the old fellows with whom he was wont to spend the evening in the Casino, they had mutually as little cause as he for anticipating that holiday.

In spite of all this, however, the "nonsense" of Christmas made itself provokingly noticeable, not only on the day itself, but for weeks before hand. Every store in town forced it upon his notice. On the squares were whole forests of Christmas trees, and in neither street nor alley was he safe from some child with a rattle, or "wooden devil," as he termed it.

Chary of words and unapproachable by others he was at all times, so that he was believed to bear the world ill will, but never so gruff and churlish as at Christmastide.

A prominent contractor, busy during the summer with building operations and in winter with plans for the ensuing season, he had little time to devote to disagreeable reflections; but a Christmas he could not repress.

Up from the street suddenly came loud and clear voices. Curious to know the cause he stepped to the window, only to see in the toy shop opposite a gigantic transparency—a Christmas tree, decorated with lighted tapers and all the pretty things conceivable, to the infinite delight of a crowd of children.

"Where in the world could such a pack of youngsters come from in a moment's notice?" thought Stöger vexedly. The little cur's are undoubtedly making an awful lot of noise.

Children were to him unendurable. For years he had avoided all intercourse with them, and the very proximity of happy children distressed him. When he rented his apartments he stipulated that the remaining rooms should not be let to families with children.

Greatly depressed, he turned from looking upon the noisy street to the window across the room from which he had an unobstructed view of the park. The quietness and peace that was spread over the whole scene was very comforting to him.

Soft and white lay the snow upon shrub and tree, heaped in soft little mounds over the flower beds or carefully and warmly piled about the rose bushes tied up in straw. The wintry landscape harmonized with his feelings and he looked long and fixedly upon it.

Darkness had in the meantime been gradually deepening and