

in the clear evening sky one star after another began to peep forth, so that when Stöger glanced upward they gleamed down upon him with all their starry splendor.

The dark features of his countenance became intensified. He could endure the sight of the stars no more than he could the pleasures of childhood, and he hastened to draw the blind.

As he did so a window directly above him was opened and three little heads, pressed closely together, came to view.

"Christ-child, dear Christ-child," cried one of the children, "only fifteen days till Christmas. Shall we tell you what we want?" Then, after a short pause, the questioner began:

"I want a sword—not a wooden one—but one of really tin, add a helmet with a plume, and—"

"And I," piped a fine voice, "I want a dolly—a real, real pretty one, dear Christ-child, and a little bed—"

"I want a donkey," broke in a third; "and a horse—"

"And some soldiers—"

"I want some kitchenware—"

"And a railway—"

"And I, and I—"

At that moment a star fell and shot with a glittering trail across the sky.

"Oh! oh! oh!" shouted the children. "That was the Christ-child."

With a loud crash the old man closed his window and the children, frightened, withdrew. A reproving woman's voice was heard and then all was silent as before.

The contractor rang violently for his landlady. "What children are these in the house?" he shouted, as she entered. "Did I not forbid any such thing? An awful racket."

"'A racket?' Have the children been noisy?" asked the woman, somewhat surprised. "Why, they have been very quiet heretofore. I did not want to give them the rooms at first," she added, apologetically, when she saw how impatient Stöger was; "but they pleased the young woman because they were light and airy, and she, with her sister, begged so kindly not to be sent away that—"

"What do I care? Either they leave on New Year's or I shall. I'll have none of them in the house."

"It was only on account of the poor young lady," ventured the talkative landlady; "she looked so pale and so delicate, and her