A CHRISTMAS BALL.



'Way out in western Texas, where the Clear Forks waters flow;
Where the cattle are a-browsin an the Spanish ponies grow;
Where the northers come a-whistlin from beyond the "neutral strip,"
An the prairie dogs are sneezin ez if they had the grip;
Where the coyotes come a-howlin round the ranches after dark,
An the mocking birds are singin tu the lively medder lark;
Where the possum, an the badger, an rattlesnakes abound,
An the monstrous stars are winkin o'er a wilderness profound;
Where lonesome, tawny prairies melt into airy streams,
While the Double mountains slumber with heavenly kind in dreams;
Where the antelope is grazin an the lonely plovers call—
It was there that I attended the Cowboys' Christmas ball.

The town wuz Anson City, ole Jones' county seat,
Where they raise Polangus cattle an wavin, whiskered wheat;
Where the air is soft an bammy, an dry an full uv health,
An the prairies is explodin with agricultural wealth;
Where they print The Texas Western, that Alec McCann supplies
With news an yarns an stories uv most amazin size;
Where Frank Smith pulls the badger on knowin tenderfeet,
An Democracy's triumphant an powerful hard to beat;
Where lives that good old hunter, John Milsap, from Lamar,
Who "used ter be the sheriff back east in Paris, sah"—
'Twas there, I say, at Anson, with the lively Widder Wall,
That I went to that recepshun, the Cowboys' Christmas ball.

The boys had left the ranches an cum to town in piles;
The ladies, kinder scatterin, hed gethered in for miles,
An yet the place wuz crowded, ez I remember well—
'Twuz got fur the occashun at the Morning Star hotel.
The music wuz a fiddle an a lively tambourine,
An a viol "cum imported," by the stage from Abilene.
The room wuz togged out gorgeous with mistletoe an shawls,
An candles flickered frescoes around the airy walls.
The wimmin folks looked lovely. The boys looked kinder treed
'Till the leader commenced yellin: "Whoa, fellers! Let's stampede!"
An the music started, sighin an a-wailin through the hall,
Ez kind uv introduction to the Cowboys' Christmas ball.

This leader wuz a feller thet cum from Swenson's ranch—
They called him Windy Billy, from Little Dead Man's Branch.
His rig wuz kinder keerless—big spurs an high heeled boots.
He hed the reputation thet comes when fellers shoots.
His voice wuz like a bugle upon the mountain's height.
His feet were animated an a mighty movin sight.
Then he commenced to holler: "Neow, fellers, stake yer pen!
Lock horns tu all them heifers an russle 'em like men!
Salute yer luvly critters! Neow swing an let 'em go!
Climb the grapevine round 'em—all hands do-cedo!
Ye mavericks jine the round up—jest skip her waterfall!"
Huh, hit wuz gettin active—the Cowboys' Christmas ball.
—Larry Chittenden, Poet-Ranchman.

MRS. CHRISTMAS.

TRANSLATED BY JOSEPH SOHM.



[Copyright, 1896.]

It was in the afternoon. High up in the mountains on the line of the Black Forest railway, in one of those small cabins which at regular intervals line the side of all European railroads, housing those poorly paid men whose duty it is to inspect from time to time the roadbed for a certain distance and warn passing trains of eventual danger, a door opened and a woman's head appeared, breaking the monotony of the snowy landscape. The head was quickly withdrawn. Inside in the overheated room her husband, the flagman, lay on his bed in a fever. It had attacked him suddenly, he knew not how, and now he wanted neither to hear nor see anything; only to sleep.

His wife had brewed a hot tea for him and made him drink it. She was in hopes to rouse him by it, for little Jakob, their only son, had been at her all day, saying: "Mother, dear, won't you go down to the village and get me something for Christmas? See, the tree is already stuck in the pot, and all I need are apples and nuts and a big, big herzlebkuchen" [a large frosted cake in the shape of a heart].

But whenever she put a warm wrap around herself and allowed the boy to drag her to the door, a sudden fear for the loudly breathing husband would seize her, and she would return to his bedside.

Little Jakob finally broke out into bitter crying, that on this holy eve he was to have nothing but a bare tree, which seemed to him the greatest sorrow that this world could hold. The mother, with a sudden impulse, said to her husband: "In two hours I am back again. It is Christmas eve, and no child ought to be allowed to go empty handed. Don't you think I could get something for our little boy?"

"Yes, yes," he nodded in assent. "I am feeling a little dumpish yet. When I've had a sleep, I shall feel better."

"Listen, Jakob." The mother then turned to the boy. "Watch closely. When the hand of the clock shows 5 minutes of 5, you must wake up your father, get his flag for him, and not stop until he is out there when the train comes. Do you hear me? You must not let up until he does it. I charge you with it."

Jakob promised. "I will not rest, mother, but don't forget I need apples and nuts a-plenty, and a great big herzlebkuchen."

The woman was already battling outside with wind and snow, when the child's clear voice rang out after her:



"There must be almonds in it. Goodby, mother, and give my best regards to the Christ Kindl, if you meet him on the way!"

Then Jakob went to his tree, gazed on it rapturously, and from time to time clapped his hands, for in anticipation he already saw all the branches and twigs hung with apples and nuts. Though the mother could not return before 6 o'clock, and the clock was now striking only 4, Jacob nevertheless every little while went out doors to see whether



OFF FOR THE VILLAGE.

she was not coming, returning every time with his head full of snowflakes. Then he would plant himself with great conscientiousness in front of the old clock, watching the swinging of the pendulum.

At last. There was no mistake, the hands pointed to where the mother had shown him. Jakob went to the bedside of his sleeping father, shook him by the shoulders and cried into his ears, "Father, the train!"

The man lay in a deep sleep. After drinking the tea a sweat had broken out, and a heavy dream seemed to oppress him, for when the child bent over him he struck at him. But Jakob could not be deterred. He knew what was at stake if his father missed his duty. He got the flag and put it in his father's hand. He dragged the heavy overcoat to the bedside. He yelled, he tugged and pulled at the sleeping man—but in vain. The train signal could now be heard outside.

"Quick!" the boy cried. "The train, father! Get up! Listen, dear father! Do listen to me!"

"Yes, yes," the man murmured. "I am there already." And he turned to the wall again.

"There is nothing left but for me to go out," the boy said to himself, "for somebody must be out there."

With quick decision he slipped into his father's heavy overcoat, drew the cape over his head and seized the flag. He arrived just in the nick of time at his post, for a few moments later the train thundered past the grotesque little form. The snow had covered him from head to foot. With great seriousness he presented the flag, and the rosy child face beamed most sweetly from under the snow covered cape—a storm wafted Santa Claus on a solitary night.

As such he may have appeared to the youthful lady who stood in the open window of a compartment car, gazing out into the silent Christ night, for suddenly she beckoned with her hand, and the next instant a heavy object came flying from the passing train right before Jakob's feet.

He picked it up and hurried into the house with it. There, after dropping his father's heavy overcoat, he hastened to the window to examine his present in the bright moonlight. It was a small, fine purse. He opened it and found it almost filled with bright new silver coin. Jakob fairly screamed with de-



THE LITTLE FLAGMAN.

light. He never thought of a giver, for wasn't it Christmas? No wonder that presents fell from heaven.

He commenced to cover the twigs of his little Christmas tree with the coins, which was no small trouble, for they would continually drop off again, so that finally Jakob, quite exhausted, placed his head on his arms and fell asleep under his silver spangled tree. He did not hear when his mother returned, covered with snow and panting from exertion as she entered the room. She first set down her basket and then hurried to her husband's bedside. He was breathing evenly, and on the floor was his overcoat. He had been able to fulfill his duty. "God be praised," the woman murmured and turned to the window where the tree was and her little boy was sitting motionless. Softly, on tiptoes, with the basket full of apples and nuts, the herzlebkuchen in her hand, she stepped behind the child's chair. But what was that? Was the moon shining with extraordinary brightness tonight that a silvery shimmer seemed to proceed from the tree as well as from the curly hair of sleeping Jakob? The woman brushed with her outstretched hand over the head of the child and with a silvery tinkle little objects fell right and left to the floor. "Great heavens!" she exclaimed, causing Jakob suddenly to start up. First he looked around somewhat scared, but then, hopping from one leg to the other in exuberant joy, he exclaimed: "Yes, yes; everything belongs to me. Look, just look, mother!"

The woman first of all made a light. Her husband now woke up, too, leaping from his bed with both feet at once. "My God," he said, "the train has passed! Of course you have been out there, wife?"

His wife turned deathly pale. "I have just returned," she gasped.

"But I was out there," chimed in Jakob. "When father didn't want to wake up at all, I just took the flag and the overcoat and did everything all right. Nobody knew me, but the Santa Claus threw a heap of money from heaven down to me—all new money."

Feeling quite miserable yet from the spell of fear he had just passed through, the flagman, with trembling knees, al-



ASLEEP BY THE TREE.

lowed himself to drop into the nearest chair. "Have you really been out there?" he inquired.

"Of course. You can depend on it," Jakob assured him.

The flagman's wife examined the purse and found in it a card, with the inscription, "A Merry Christmas." It took a long time until they succeeded in spelling out the words. Finally she said: "Oh, I know! It means Frau Marey [provincial German for Mary] Christmas. God bless her! She must be a very kind hearted lady!"

"Very likely she is Santa Claus, mother," ventured Jakob as he sailed into his apples and nuts.

Nearly Nineteen Hundred Christmases.



Yet a few years, and the world will have seen 1900 Christmases — 1900 anniversaries of the birth of him whose personal influence is generally admitted, even by those who do not believe in him as a divinity, to have been for the good of mankind, for the betterment of the world. In those 1900 years a most remarkable change has taken place among the sons of men. Their ideals have been changed radically—have been raised from the low level of selfishness to the high level of generosity, of good will to all and of helpfulness. Year by year the circle of Christian influence has widened, and today it is felt in some degree in every part of the world, save in some few remote regions, like the densely darkened interior of China, or some as yet unvisited corners in Africa.

Even among many of those peoples who have not as yet accepted the religion founded on the first Christmas day Jesus is held in high esteem. He is canonized as a saint by the Mohammedans. He is known to the Buddhists as a great and good man, and when Japan made war upon China, although the mass of the Japanese are as yet non-Christian, their soldiers were cautioned not to conduct themselves with the cruelty of pagan times, but to remember that the eyes of Christendom were upon them and must not be scandalized by wanton slaughterings of the helpless and the innocent. It is true that these warnings were forgotten at Port Arthur, but the blood that was ruthlessly shed there was abjectly apologized for by the mikado, and in the main the war was conducted without the old time barbarisms.

It is also true that there was a war; that there are still occasional wars between Christian nations, and that all wars are violations of the teachings of Christ, but the fact remains that the world is now practically at peace.

ANIMALS' CHRISTMAS

THE PART THEY PLAY IN EUROPEAN CELEBRATIONS.

Curious Customs but Little Known In This Country—Superstitions About Beasts and Birds—Blessing the Flocks—A Rooster Mass In Spain.



Among the most pleasing features of the universal good will that prevails at Christmastide in the old world is the kindly disposition shown to extend the enjoyment of the festivity to the dumb animals, which just at this season of the year may be said to be brought into more friendly and intimate contact with their masters than at any other time of the year. Throughout Scandinavia, Germany and Austria the peasants are accustomed to erect in front of their cottages on Christmas day a pole to which is fastened a large sheaf of oats or corn for the benefit of the little birds, while in many districts grain is spread outside on the doorstep and window sills on the evening of Dec. 24. The Albanians, the Montenegrins and in fact nearly all the races of the southeast of Europe, irrespective of creed or nationality, make a point of distributing their first large Christmas meal cake among the cattle, after having broken it on the horn of an ox, while during the siege of Paris, when each soldier of the beleaguering German army managed to have his little Christmas tree, however scant or poor, set up on Christmas eve in remembrance of the loved ones at home, nearly every trooper made a point of leading up his horse to see his tree and to receive his master's ration of bread in honor of the occasion.

Only in certain districts of southern Italy and in the isle of Man are exceptions to be found to this rule. Thus in Calabria it is customary among the peasantry at Christmas time to place cake upon a table and to drive the oxen around it, those who attempt to taste the food being slaughtered on the spot. In the isle of Man the cruel pastime known as "hunting the wren," and which dates back to pagan times, is still practiced every Christmas morning, all the villagers turning out, every one armed with two sticks—one for beating the bushes and the other for throwing at the birds. The origin of the custom is to be found in the legend according to which "there formerly lived in the isle of Man a very beautiful fairy who exercised great influence over the male population by means of her voice, enticing them into the sea, where they were drowned. So long did this continue that fears were entertained that the island would be depopulated. Eventually, however, a knight errant of King Arthur's Round Table appeared upon the scene, and he, having discovered a means of overcoming the fairy's charm, pressed her so hard with a plot for her destruction that she could only save herself by taking the form of a wren. While she was in this form a spell was cast upon her which compelled her to assume the bird's form on each Christmas day and decreed that she should ultimately "die by human hands;" hence the cruel hunting of the wren is kept up, and after the birds have been killed the children place them on ivy bushes and carry them around in procession.

But it is in France, especially in the western and southern portions thereof, that the peasants made a point of introducing their domestic animals into the celebration of Christmas not only at home, but also at church, on the ground that the poor creatures having participated in the joy of mankind at the birth of Christ should participate in the annual commemoration of the event. Thus in Brittany cattle and sheep may be said to form part of the congregation that attends the quaint yet thoroughly reverent mass performed in most of the churches of the seacoast villages on Christmas eve. On the right side of the altar a bower is constructed of fragrant pine and fir branches, with great bunches of crimson berried hollies and mistletoe glistening among the verdure. Under this canopy there sits the most beautiful maiden of the village, her hair falling on her loose white garments, while in her arms there reposes a young infant. Beside her stands a young man wearing a gold embroidered robe and leaning on a staff, while an ox, a donkey and four sheep quietly munch corn from a couple of mangers. As soon as the gospel has been read a small chorister concealed in the cardboard figure of a rooster begins to chant the verses, "For to us a child is born," imitating cleverly at the close of each strophe the crow of a chanticleer. The deep bass voice of another grown up chorister hidden somewhere in the fir branch bower above described "lows" the response of "Ubi?" (where), which sounds as if it proceeds from the ox. A tenor chorister concealed near the sheep baas the word "Bethlehem," and then a baritone voice, apparently proceeding from the donkey, brays "Eamus" (let us go thither). Thereupon the rector, his acolytes and the entire congregation form a procession and march from the altar to the bower where the representation of the nativity is arranged. The priest, having sprinkled the mother and child as well as the animals with holy water, thereupon makes his way to the chief entrance to the church, the doors of which are wide open, looking usually out on to the sea. All the cattle and the flocks of the village have meanwhile been driven into the churchyard and stand crowded together in the silvery light of the moon around the portal. Taking up his position on the topmost step of the porch, the rector exclaims: "God in his mercy, my dear children, has sent me on this radiant night of the nativity to bless your cattle and your flocks, because it is only right that the animals which constitute your greatest help and source of prosperity should participate in the joy which fills all our hearts. Now lead your flocks past me."

The shepherd and cattle herders then begin to drive the animals past, while the priest, dipping the sprinkler into the silver ewer of holy water, showers the latter upon the horses, the asses, the oxen, the cows and the sheep. The clang of the bells around their necks, their lowing, their baaing, their braying and neighing, as well as the cries and words of command of their drivers, create a tremendous din, above which ever and anon rise the solemn words of the priest, "Benedicat vos omnipotens Deus, Pater et Filius et Spiritus Sanctus!" the choristers bringing the blessings to a close with a resounding "Amen!"

Every one who has wintered in Spain will recall to mind the "Missa del Gallo," or "cock's mass," celebrated in all the churches on Christmas eve, or rather Christmas morning. The chanticleer being the bird that is first to herald in the advent of the morning light, the Spaniards, by a happy and quaint conceit, like to imagine that he is anxious on this night of nights to call upon them even at midnight to be awake and to salute the happy morning. In the principal churches of Madrid and Seville this midnight mass in honor of the "Dios Nino" is rendered with exquisite pastoral music, castanets and tambourines playing an important part in the orchestra, while now and again, by means of a special instrument, pathetic and birdlike notes swell up with peculiar beauty, as if some midnight bird had lent its voice to mingle with the angelic psalms to herald in the mystic coming of the babe of Bethlehem. In the churches of the small provincial towns and villages the instrumental bird notes are replaced by those of an ordinary rooster, which by some device known to the peasants is made to crow at the appointed period during the celebration.

Not only on the continent of Europe, but also in the southwestern counties of England a superstition prevails to the effect that animals possess the power of speech at 12 o'clock on Christmas eve. Inasmuch, however, as only those persons who are entirely free from mortal sin are supposed to possess the privilege of understanding their utterances, there is no authentic record extant as to the character of their remarks on these occasions.

EX-ATTACHE.

Johnny's Christmas.



Johnny Blank is under very high pressure in an effort to be good, if his own statement is to be accepted. He met a friend yesterday and made his companion's eyes bulge with his story.

"I hain't had no fun lately, Jim," he said, glancing around to see that none of his relatives was in sight, "but I'm in it this time. Pop's promised me a new pair of skates if I get 85 on my December report, which'll be made out next week, you see. If I don't miss Sunday school and kin tell what the text is, Mam she sez she'll get me an air gun. Whoopee!"

And here John's exuberance was given vent in a series of whoops with gymnastic accompaniment.

"But that's not half of 'em, Jim," he continued. "You know, when sis's beau comes I hang around and work him for candy and sich, but she has promised me a dollar ef I keep off her territory on beau nights. Then my uncle and my aunt, seein I'm tryin to be good, are goin to chip in, and as I'm goin to two Sunday schools I'm strictly in it, and don't you fergit it."

After the Christmas Eve Ball.



Up the broad steps they tripped into her home. The gas burned low. Her slender fingers hung to his a moment. She stood directly under the gas jet, under which some one, in anticipation of the morrow, had hung a sprig of mistletoe.

He could not help it—he kissed her. She looked so pretty, so innocent, under that sprig of mistletoe.

Yes, it was an ungentlemanly and unmanly thing to do. Her frightened, startled look pained him. He stammered out a miserable excuse. Her great eyes filled with tears, and she gave a little choking sob when he apologized.

"Dear little innocent," he thought, "I would not have hurt her for the world."

And she—after he was gone—she dropped into a great chair and sobbed. "Like him? I love him. And to think that he should kiss me at last and then to say he didn't mean anything by it! What does he think I put the mistletoe there for?"

THE SKATING LESSON.

How Thornley Fulfilled His Rash Christmas Promise.



She was a beautiful girl, and Thornley was the happiest man along the Hudson river because she was paying his sister Emily a two weeks' visit. There was a stretch of glassy ice below the house, and when Thornley jokingly asked her what he should give her for Christmas she smiled sweetly and replied:

"Give me a few lessons in skating. I have never learned, and the ambition of my life is to glide over the smooth surface of the frozen river."

"I shall be delighted to instruct you, Miss Lakeside," Thornley said eagerly. And he meant what he said. He little dreamed then that she weighed 180 pounds—little cared, perhaps, for love is reckless and unreasoning. Thornley himself, when equipped with an overcoat, a pair of rubbers and his everyday clothing, tipped the scales at about 120 pounds.

"Do you think you can support me, Mr. Thornley?" she asked coyly.

"Support you?" repeated the gallant but rash Thornley as he rose from his knees and grasped her hands to begin the lesson. "Support you? Why, I could support you for—for life, Miss Lakeside."

"Oh, Mr. Thornley!" she cried, blushing like a rose. Her eyes fell, and a moment later she and Thornley followed them. Grasping her by the arms, Thornley tugged until the veins stood out like whipcords on his brow and finally raised her to her feet again. She made four desperate strokes with her wabbling skates, quite unintentionally kicked Thornley's feet out from under him, and then sat down again with a vehemence that called forth a crackling protest from the astonished ice. Thornley picked her up once more. They struck out a second time. History repeated itself, and the habit soon became chronic. Thornley's brow was beaded with perspiration. It began to dawn upon him that she must weigh at least 180 pounds. When he picked her up for the seventh time and attempted to guide her wandering and irresponsible feet, he changed his mind.

"If she weighs an ounce, she weighs 300!" he thought, with a gasp for breath. "This is positively dangerous. The ice is only about six inches thick, and there isn't a life preserver within a mile of us!"

He paused for a moment to rest the right arm that had been holding her up for half an hour and to get the numerous painful kinks out of his back.

"You are tired, Mr. Thornley?" she murmured.

"That's—that's right," he panted.

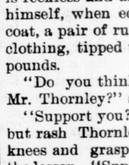
"Are—are you still sure you could support me for life?" she asked mischievously.

"Support you for life?" he gasped. "Of course I could if I only had a derrick!"

And that night 180 pounds of offended loveliness started for home.

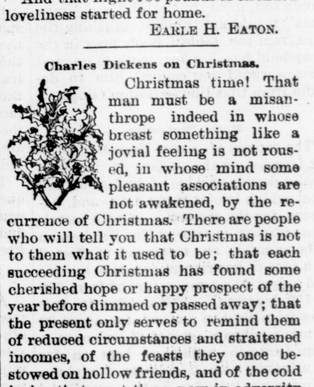
EARLE H. EATON.

Charles Dickens on Christmas.



Christmas time! That man must be a misanthrope indeed in whose breast something like a jovial feeling is not roused, in whose mind some pleasant associations are not awakened, by the recurrence of Christmas. There are people who will tell you that Christmas is not to them what it used to be; that each succeeding Christmas has found some cherished hope or happy prospect of the year before dimmed or passed away; that the present only serves to remind them of reduced circumstances and straitened incomes, of the feasts they once bestowed on hollow friends, and of the cold looks that meet them now in adversity and misfortune. Never heed such dismal reminiscences. Look on the merry faces of your children, if you have any, as they sit round the fire. One little seat may be empty. One slight form that gladdened the father's heart and roused the mother's pride to look upon may not be there. Dwell not upon the past. Think not that one short year ago the fair child now resolving into dust sat before you with the bloom of health upon its cheek and the gayety of infancy in its joyous eye. Reflect upon your present blessings, of which every man has many—not on your past misfortunes, of which all men have some. Fill your glass again, with a merry face and contented heart. Our life on it, but your Christmas shall be merry and your new year a happy one.

Tough on the Turkey.



Landlady—Are you ill, Mr. Middleage? You do not seem to be enjoying your Christmas turkey with Mr. Youngblood?

Mr. Middleage—No, not ill. But I'm not so muscular as I was once.

We love and bless the hands we press
When the Christmas log is burning.
—Cook.