VOICES OF THE BELLS.

Listen to the Christmas bells!
While all the world is praying,
They are pealing, swelling, telling,
And this is what the bells are saying:

We are the voices of vedas and sagas
We are the tongues of prophet and priest,
We are the lips of the sibilant sleepers
Who dreamed of a star in the purple east
Hard by the gates of the mystical morn
When the Christ was born.

We are the prayers of the wandering magi
On Syrian deserts all level and lone,
We are the chorus of Judæan shepherds,
We are the notes that from heaven were blown
From the golden throat of an angel's horn
When the Christ was born.

We are the teardrops of grief and of sorrow,
We are the echoes of yesterday's pain,
We are the jubilant voice of tomorrow—
Lo, peace on earth! Let thy good will reign!
So our lips break silence on Christmas morn
When the Christ was born.

—Chicago Times.

SANTA CLAUS CAME.

"If you please, sir"—

"Eh? What now?"

The crusty old gentleman turned suddenly and sharply and glared from beneath his shaggy eyebrows at the little figure beside him. The figure was that of a girl 8 years old perhaps, but small and frail. She wore an enormous sunbonnet that might have been made for the wife of the giant Blunderbore, so out of proportion was it to the diminutive wearer, and out of its depths peered a thin little face, with big, frightened brown eyes. Her clothing was so clean and neat that one scarcely noticed how very poor it was, and as she stared up into the terrible face above her one of the little feet wriggled uneasily in the depths of the costly rug.

"If you please, sir, mother said to tell you that she couldn't come up today because she's sick."

The childish treble was a little shaken this time, for the shaggy eyebrows were very close to her, and they gave the old gentleman a look that was terrible beyond belief.

He was in a dreadful temper, this crusty old gentleman, and nothing made him angrier than for poor people to get into his house. He hated the sight of poverty, and all his servants had special orders to guard the doors and the gates and to see that no moan of woe or want ever reached his ears. And yet, after all, this little beggar had slipped past the bolts and bar into his very study, where his own servants scarcely dared to enter.

I don't know what dreadful thing might have happened if it had not been for that one little word "mother" in the child's fluttering speech. Children so seldom speak the word nowadays that it gave a little shock of surprise. Instantly he found himself looking beyond the child, at an old, long forgotten scene—a little cabin, with a white country road winding past it and an awkward boy going down the road, stopping at the last curve to wave his hand to his mother, who stood in the door watching him go out into the world.

Then he remembered himself and asked sharply:

"And who is your mother, pray, and why should she come here?"

"Please, sir," said the quavering little voice, "mother's the dust woman."

"The what!" ejaculated the old gentleman, with another dreadful frown.

"She comes up once a week and dusts the bric-a-brac," explained the child. "The housekeeper hired her. She says she doesn't feel equal to it herself, and mother does it so nicely."

"Aha!" muttered the old gentleman with an angry gleam in the eyes under those fearful brows. "So Mrs. Murray brings outsiders into the house when my back is turned, does she? They're all alike, a pack of cheats and robbers! I'll teach her to violate my confidence and fill my house with irresponsible people! You may stay in this room till Mrs. Murray comes. Do you hear? And then I shall have a message to send to your mother."

He rang the bell violently and ordered that Mrs. Murray be sent to him as soon as she returned. Having made this satisfactory arrangement, he took up his paper again and ignored the little figure in the sunbonnet.

But before he had read a dozen lines there was a light touch on his arm, and the brown eyes were looking up into his.

"Please, sir, may I look out of the window while we're waiting?"

He was so astonished that he could not reply for a moment, but he did finally give a scornful grunt of assent.

There was silence in the room for a long time. Not a clock ticked, for old Mr. Roberts could not endure the ticking of clocks. Not a leaf stirred, not a cricket chirped. The stillness disturbed him at last, and he looked up. The child was out on the little balcony, leaning on the stone balustrade. Her bonnet had fallen off, and the sunlight, falling on the mass of brown hair, wove it full of gleams of gold.

Another touch on his arm—there she was again. Her hand—such a little morsel of a hand—trembled with some new emotion, and her eyes shone with a strange light.

"It must be nice to live on a hill!" was what she said.

The old gentleman in the armchair had never been more astounded in his life. He stared at her and forgot to say anything.

"I have always wanted to live on a hill," she went on. "Our house is away down yonder, and you can't see anything but the houses across the street. But up here you can look so far, and the sky's so close to you. Don't you think people can be better when they live on a hill?"

The newspaper fell to the floor unheeded, and the crusty old gentleman and the little girl looked at one another. After awhile the old gentleman went to the balcony and looked down to the roofs of the crowded houses in the narrow streets below and then away to the far horizon. This beautiful home of his crowned the summit of this purple hill and was uplifted so far above the noise and dust and wretchedness of the city that lay below. Truly, it was a pleasant thing to live on a hill. He had never thought of it before, but all at once he fancied himself down among those miserable tenements, looking up at this beautiful home and thinking how near to heaven it reached.

There was a hurried tap at the door, and Mrs. Murray presented herself. Her comfortable figure was attired still in the neat dress that she had worn in the street. Her round face was wreathed with smiles, but she was obviously fluttered and quaking with fear.

"Did you leave word that you wanted to see me, sir?" she asked and then waited for the blow to fall.

"Mrs. Murray," said the old gentleman in his stiffest and most formal manner, "am I to understand that you have employed a woman to come here once a week and dust the bric-a-brac?"

"Yes, sir. Mrs. Holmes her name is, and she's very careful, sir. I couldn't do better myself."

She glanced up anxiously at the wooden countenance before her. What terrible thing was he going to say next?

"Mrs. Murray, the woman has sent this child to say that she is too ill to come. That will do. You will excuse her until she recovers."

Mrs. Murray went back to her own room and fell into a chair. If it had been consistent with the dignity of Mr. Roberts' housekeeper to stagger, she certainly would have staggered. She kept repeating to herself: "Did you ever?" and "I can't believe it." She said afterward that you might have knocked her down with a straw, though that was figurative, of course.

This was the beginning of Marjorie's visits to the great house on the hill. Her mother did not come again, but every day the big sunbonnet went toiling up, and then the glint of the golden hair would be seen in the great rooms where no child had ever strayed before. Not that she was boisterous, or laughing, or childlike in any way. She would sit in Mrs. Murray's room for hours, with her hands folded on her lap, watching the lady at her work and sometimes talking softly, or she would follow her from room to room, gazing with rapt delight at every beautiful object.

Mr. Roberts knew that she was in the house, but he said nothing. He was conscious sometimes that the child stopped near him and stood with her hands behind her, regarding him with grave scrutiny, but he did not drive her away, as he might have been expected to do a few weeks before.

He was in his study one morning when he heard Mrs. Murray come into the adjoining room. The door was ajar, and, softly as she spoke, her words came to him distinctly.

"That was a present from my son last Christmas," she said. "Dear boy! He never fails to send me something every Christmas and every birthday."

Then came a small voice, full of wistful meaning:

"Mrs. Murray," it said, "do you like Christmas?"

"Why, Marjorie!" was the shocked reply. "Why, of course, I do! Everybody likes Christmas!"

"I don't," said the small voice—such a desolate little voice it seemed. "I had rather leave Christmas out of the year."

"Marjorie!" No words could express the horror and amazement in Mrs. Murray's tone.

"I would!" The small voice had grown thinner and higher in its painful intensity. "What's the use of a Christmas that never gets to some people at all? There was little lame Peter Franks, who lived in the room opposite to ours, and, oh, he wanted a Christmas so much, Mrs. Murray! He used to hang his stocking up every year, every single year, and he always thought there'd be something in it next morning, but there never was anything—not a single thing—and now poor Peter's dead, and he never had a Christmas in all his life!"

"My dear! My dear!"

The old gentleman in the study heard the exclamation, and he knew that the voice that uttered it was full of tears. He rose hastily and slipped out of the study and then ordered his carriage and went driving.

The day following was Christmas eve. Carriers from town were busy all day bringing in the presents that he had bought for the servants, and there was great happiness in the servants' hall, with much confusion and many awkward attempts to thank the master, who waved off every such attempt with an air of lofty patronage. Outside of this family of servants he had never given any one a present in all his life. He had never contributed to charities, public or private. He had never helped the poor—indeed he had never listened to their appeals.

He had important business in another city which would keep him away all through Christmas week, he explained to Mrs. Murray, and he must leave that evening. In the afternoon he muffled himself in greatcoat and furs and drove away, and as soon as the carriage was half way down the hill the servants relaxed from their usual stiff propriety and began to enjoy themselves in their own way.

A telegram was handed to Mr. Roberts at the station as he was about to buy his ticket. What little things sometimes change the whole course of a life! The information thus received made the trip unnecessary, and after loitering about the city for awhile he returned home on foot and entered his house quietly by a side door.

Sounds of boisterous merriment came from the servants' quarters, and the owner of the house frowned ominously. So this was the way they took advantage of his absence?

He made his way to his study, unseen by any one, and shut himself in—a lonely, selfish, desolate old man. Even the fire, which still burned in the grate, annoyed him, and he withdrew behind a screen and threw himself into an easy chair. He heard Mrs. Murray come in after awhile, but she only moved about softly and decorously, setting things in order, and he did not speak. She was just passing into the sitting room when she gave a little cry of alarm, followed by the exclamation:

"Mercy me, child! How you frightened me!"

"Mrs. Murray," said a thin little voice—a voice that Mr. Roberts had heard before—"I've come up here to stay all night!"

The listener behind the screen heard Mrs. Murray fall into a chair and again she cried, "Mercy me!"

"I just had to come!" the eager voice went on. "Mother's very, very sick—and she needs things, Mrs. Murray—and maybe Santa Claus might bring 'em if he knew—and how is he to know when he never comes there? But I knew if I went to some fine house he'd come and find me, and so I came here."

"Poor child! Poor child!"

Mrs. Murray had gathered the little waif to her bosom and was rocking her softly to and fro. The old gentleman behind the screen could see that by the shadow on the floor. He could see, too, that the housekeeper was furtively wiping her eyes.

Presently she rallied and said cheerily:

"I'll tell you what we'll do, Marjorie. I'll go right down and see your mother, and you shall go with me, and, who knows, maybe Santa Claus will come there, after all."

"Oh, no, he won't!" replied the child with sorrowful conviction. "You don't know that place! Santa Claus has never heard of it! He goes to rich people's houses, and so I've come here, and I must see him tonight—oh, I must, Mrs. Murray! I don't care for any other Christmas after this, but I must see him tonight, on mother's account, you know."

There was a dismayed silence on Mrs. Murray's part, but presently she said:

"Well, come along into Mr. Roberts' study—thank goodness he's away from home—and sit here before the fire till I come back. I'll take John and go down and see your mother."

In another minute the sound of her retreating footsteps had died away, and the old gentleman, peeping from behind the screen, saw a little figure sitting before the fire, gazing intently into the glowing coals.

Dusk was settling down over the city. He had not been conscious of it until the electric burner above his table flashed into sudden radiance. The flash startled the child, and he heard her moving softly about. What was she doing? Preparing to steal something probably. These children from the tenement districts were all thieves.

But, no! When he ventured to look again, she was at the study table—his table—writing. She had his sacred pen, which no other mortal had ever dared to touch, and she was writing slowly and laboriously. Could presumption go farther than that? What would these people be trying to do next?

It took her a long time to write the letter, but at last it was finished, and she laid the pen down with a weary sigh. Then she unrolled a little bundle that had been lying beside her and shook out—could the watcher believe his eyes?—a stocking, a poor, forlorn, ragged little stocking! Now what could she want with that?

She stood on tiptoe and peered around the corners of the mantel for a place to hang it. Finally something struck her fancy as suitable, and she began pushing a heavy chair toward the mantel. When it was near enough, she climbed upon it and hung the stocking upon the "brave caduceus" of the bronze Mercury that he had bought last year in Rome and for which he had paid such a price!

Presently she had jumped down and was surveying the stocking with the greatest pride. Then the note was carefully folded, and she climbed upon the chair again and pinned the folded paper to the toe so conspicuously that the winged Mercury seemed to stand there for no other purpose than to hold up a ragged stocking for all the world to see.

And then—why, then she was lying down upon the rug with her thin cheek on her thin little hand, and the listener heard a tired sigh.

After a long while the old gentleman behind the screen ventured to move slightly. After a little longer he moved again and so gradually came out of his hiding place.

Was that old Mr. Roberts tiptoeing across the room to keep from startling the poor little waif sleeping on his hearth rug? Was that the sordid old man whom even his friends had come to call a mere money machine, that man whose hands trembled as he unpinned the little note and spread it out before him?

DEAR SANTA CLAUSE—When you come tonight pleas look at me. I'll be down on the rug. Youve never seen me before. You needent give me ennything, but pleas fill the stocking with things for mother shes sick. I tied up the toes so they wouldent drop out. The docter says wine and things and housrent.

MARJORIE HOLMES.

For a long time the old man sat in the chair before the fire. Something within him was breaking the cold and selfish crust that years had helped to form. He sat there looking from the sleeping child to the forlorn little stocking and from the stocking to the child. It was the first time a stocking had ever been hung up in his house—the first time!

Suddenly the old gentleman rose. He lifted the child gently and laid her on a couch which had always been sacred to his own use and covered her with rugs. Then he went softly out and astonished the unsuspecting servants by appearing among them and ordering the carriage.

Could this be old Theodore Roberts, the money machine, the selfish, brusque, irritable old man, this man who went from store to store, ordering and buying and spending money as he had never spent it before? Could this be the Mr. Roberts that Mrs. Murray knew, this man who went into that sickroom, followed by a great hamper filled with "wine and things and house rent?" Was this the man that all the charitable organizations shunned, this man who drove about half the night, leaving behind him a trail of Christmas rejoicing, mingled with such blessings as he had never heard before?

And who was it that drove up the hill at last under the silent stars, with a carriage full of bundles and with a strange, soft feeling tugging at his heartstrings? He smiled as he went, and yet he had to keep wiping his eyes. He was glad it was dark, so that no one could see.

And what strange figure was this in the study afterward, this figure that moved so stealthily and that was so busy stuffing the stocking until it was ready to burst, and pinning things all over the outside of it until the bronze Mercury seemed almost to stagger under his burden? What had come over the old gentleman whom so many people envied and whom nobody loved?

Just before day Mrs. Murray, coming softly in, found him sitting by the fire, watching the sleeping child.

"It'll be a sad time for her," she said. "Her mother's gone, and whatever's to become of the little thing I don't know."

"I don't see why the child shouldn't stay here, Mrs. Murray," said the old gentleman, with his face turned the other way. "It would be some extra trouble for you, but I dare say you would not mind it."

"S-sir!" Mrs. Murray managed to articulate.

Then the old gentleman turned around, and she saw what was shining on his cheeks.

"Do you see that stocking, Mrs. Murray?" he cried, in a voice that she had never heard before. "That's the first stocking that was ever hung up in my house. It looks homelike, doesn't it? I have decided that we'll have stockings hung up every year. And here's a child that needs a home, and, thank heaven, I've a home to give her."

The child sighed and stirred and then suddenly sat up.

"Did he come?" she cried eagerly, with a dazed look at the bursting stocking, and the old gentleman beside her gathered her up in his arms and said:

"Yes, my little one, he came!"—Philadelphia Times.

The Russian Christmas.

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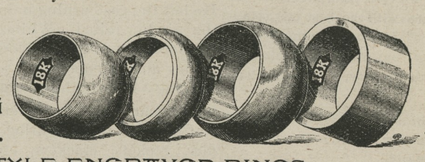

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