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CHRISTMAS.

Feathery flakes are dancing, dancing,
In the gray morn's frosty gleam—
Herald they of roarer prancing
From the garden of our dream—
From the bright land of the Elf-King,
Where the bonbons only grow
Just like sweets of summer garden,
Where the troops hold in row.

Feathery flakes are falling, falling,
From the sales imported way,
And between our windows calling,
"Soon it will be Christmas Day!"
Don't you know how to the spirit's
Wint'ry snows are scattered wide
T're the lovely purple blossoms
Dare to peep from where they hide?

Feathery flakes are sitting, sitting,
Through the still December air—
Here, and there, and yonder drifting,
Making everything more fair,
Laying water fairs than linen
On the houses and the trees
Brighter than the richest damask
Spread our dainty guests to please.

From the hill tops will be falling
As the flakes have fallen to-day,
And the children will be calling
To their parents—out so gay.
"Ah! we know when you're so trifled
You would frown, dear Santa Claus,
For we always (you remember)
Know the wind's way by the straw."

From the trees as late as any
That ever have withered with snow,
Will be planted—'till the sunny
In our better homes. And let
Something better than snowflakes
Shall be lying about their crown—
Candles, toys, and fairy tales,
Lighting up the merry scene.

And the children, dancing, dancing,
Till all tired their little feet,
Shall, with half-shut eyes up-glancing,
Wonders "Why is life so sweet?"
And some ten for you shall whisper—
Flake-like falling from above:
"Christmas is so sweet, my darling,
Just because its king is Love!"

THE JOY OF MARGERETTA

A CHRISTMAS STORY.

HEARLY defined shadows were falling across the aisle of the old church on the hill, the gray, lonely building that had stood there so long, amid sunshine and shadow, watching, as it were, the peaceful village in the valley below.

Above it the pine trees, green ever in winter, waved their long branches restlessly in the wind and flung their weird reflections over the snow, the white, soft snow, that covered all the hillside as with a mantle of palest velvet.

And the day was beginning to close in, to spread its gray wings over the dim sky and the snow-bound world, lightened only by the warm gleam that came from many a window in the village. The afternoons were short; now, said the bustling French to each other, as they went about their work; but, after all, was it not the eve of the Christmas feast, and what could one expect? So the cottages were warm and cozy, and the pine logs in the tiled stoves crackled and burned away merrily, and few were the footsteps that passed over the snow outside.

As the clock in the tower chimed four, old Johann Maria entered the dimness of the church upon the hill, where soft red lights shone like far-away stars before the altar. There were



THE FAMILY GATHERING.

A few other dark figures already there, kneeling to whisper a prayer at an old oaken prie-dieu. But they looked up as the old man came forward, and gathered together more closely. He would say the evening litany, perhaps, and they would join in the solemnly sweet responses, breathing in each heart the names of their dearly loved ones, and committing them to heaven's safe keeping for the night.

And old Johann Maria, as they had



expected, kneeling in the soft halo that the lights made, began the old, old words that they knew so well, and that they followed so earnestly, while the wind wailed outside over the snow on the steep white road. And Amalie and Dorechen and Aida, girls with fair dresses and eyes blue as the skies of the Fatherland in the sweet summertime, listened and prayed in all the fervor of youth and hopefulness and joy. Was not to-morrow the feast of the Christ-child. And had not the sacristan already brought beautiful wreaths of berries holly and white-veined ivy, laden to twine round the carved pulpit and the choir-stalls? Yes, it was a time of joy and gladness, this Christmas season, and they were very, very happy. Why not so? Every one was gay and glad at Christmas time, when there were kuchen in the cottages, and little fir trees laden with presents, and sugar angels to be bought at the shops or the market in the town yonder, to remind them of the great Christmas long ago, when the angels sang over the star-lit fields at Bethlehem.

And by and by, that same evening, there would be a great service, when the priest would pray and preach, and they would all listen, oh! so intently. But now there was only the quietness of the little church, with its scent of the freshly-cut boughs, and the quivering, monotonous voice of Johann Maria repeating the old litany, as he had repeated it so many times before in the same place and in the same accents.

There was another girl in the corner, kneeling at her prie-dieu, and whispering the words of the sweet old petitions with white lips and an aching heart. Christmas brought only sorrow for her, she said to herself. There was no gladness for her to expect, no loving voice to give her the Christmas greeting, no tender lips to press her own in that love-sweeter than others, even at the season of universal love.

No, all was dark and dreary—dreary as the shadows that fell upon the white snow; and while the others rejoiced and looked forward to keeping the festival her heart was heavy and her thoughts roamed back, pitilessly, painfully, to a bygone day—a day that was marked with the shadow of death.

It was Christmas time again, and the priest had preached and prayed, and given the old beautiful benediction, that floated out like a message from Heaven over the kneeling people—over her lover and herself.

Ah! her lover! He had been kneeling by her side then, with the lights flashing on his soldier's coat and his brave, handsome face, and she had heard his voice throughout all the service, in ringing, clear tones that she knew and loved so well, so truly and passionately. And she had been so happy, so very very happy, although the thought of the morrow's parting had come even now and then to her heart, with the throbbing pain of some sorrowful dream. But he had begged her to forget—to forget all the pain of parting for that

one day. "Let us be happy together, sweetheart," he had said, looking into her eyes with his own, all filled with so much love and tenderness. And she had obeyed him, as she always would obey the voice that was more to her than life itself, and they had been happy—perfectly, passionately happy—in their great, unfaithful love.

"What is love?" he said to her, as they walked home in the evening, watching the star gleams, like points of diamonds, flash on the dark waters of the Neckar. "What is love?" he had asked, and she had looked up to

pale face, and his love hiding a last good-by, while the stars paled and the tardy daylight struggled into the cottage. And, with quivering lips, she had whispered of hope, of their next meeting, of the brave deeds that he was to do, of the patient waiting that would bring them such joy at last. And he knew that she was right, that his own heart told him the same story, while he kissed his dear, dear love over and over again, murmuring the "Auf wiedersehen" that he knew would bring her comfort. "My dear beloved, God keep you," she said, brokenly, with her sweet arms, for the last time, clinging about his neck, and her head pillowed on his strong shoulder.

And then she had raised her lips to his for the last, long kiss, and it was over with her heart's story, told in that one "Auf wiedersehen."

Ah! the peasant's litany was over, and the women had gone out softly, while the ripple of the girls' voices sounded already some distance down the hill.

Johann Maria had followed them, and the sacristan had brought in a great bunch of red holly-berries to decorate the altar.

And she must go, too, passing out into the night once more. They had left her to her own thoughts, these happy girls, and she was glad of it. She knew their sympathy and loved them for it, and they would be very tender with her all through the feast, she felt.

Even now, perhaps, Amalie was saying, "Ach! the poor Margeretta! Is it not two Christmas festivals since her lover died in the war?" And the others would look grave for a moment and sigh a soft "Yes." Ah, it was true. Two long, dim years had passed away since the skirmishes on the frontier land, where, amid the dry heather and the dead bracken, he had told her that her lover had died. But that was all. They knew not whether his body had been rested; they knew not whether he had suffered agony or had parted with his brave soul in the heat of the battle. All was vague, uncertain; only her lover was gone from her—gone, gone, she knew not where.

As she went down the hill road on that Christmas Eve alone some one was waiting under the shadow of the bending pine trees. Some one came forward to meet her with a quick, glad cry of joy and heart's delight. Was it a dream as the thoughts in the church yonder had been—a dream of Christmas, and of her lover, her own, her life's love, but lost to her—lost? Nay, for a voice spoke to her, and beams have no voices, they are silent and sad; and this was a living, throbbing voice, full of passion and tenderness.

"Heart's beloved! Sweet one!" he was calling her—all the old dear names that she remembered so well; and his kisses were burning once again on her lips and brow, and his eyes were telling her all the love his loyal heart bore for her. He had come back to her, to his Margeretta, back to his life's love, from the very gates of death!

And, clasped to his breast, in the hush of the evening, with her tired head resting on his heart, they heard the bells ring out for the eve of the festival—the festival of Perfect Love.

By-and-by he told her the story of his wanderings, of his supposed death, of his captivity and escape, and she listened, with her hand still locked in his and with her glad eyes fastened on his face.

And at the service time he returned thanks in the brightly lighted church on the hill, gay with holly and evergreen and the morrow's high holy day. And when the mass ceased and the others went softly away, together they

still knelt on, while each loving heart breathed its tender petition and whispered its thanks for the others' happiness. For the "Auf wiedersehen" had been spoken in truth, and they shall keep Christmas together—The Lady.

CHRISTMAS OF CHILDHOOD DAY.

"My first thought of Christmas," says Lillie Devereux Blake, "is of the great playroom at my grandmother's, where we children gathered for our evening frolics; of the fun we had in the warmth and light, while sleet struck its icy fingers across the windows or the hoar frost covered the glass with fantastic lines of beauty; of the faces of those gathered there, so young then, that are growing old now or have faded from this world forever. Then there comes a wider vision of the Christmas of the world, of the joyous bells ringing in many lands for the feast of love and good will, of the hearts made happy by the gifts, the kindnesses, the good cheer that brings light to the humblest home, so that there is hardly any being so forlorn that some ray of brightness does not reach him. Then yet again, and deeper, is the reflection of what the festival means. It is the celebration of the eternal miracle of unity, the wonder of birth into the activities of this world, that has been in all ages and by all peoples observed."

It is an occasion for gladness; the welcome those already here give the new born soul to the brief, passionate years of human happiness and human despair that we call life.

THE JOYS OF CHRISTMAS.

One of the most blessed things about Christmas is that it makes so many people feel young, writes Edward W. Bok, in Ladies' Home Journal. It is the one season of the year when everybody feels that they can dismiss abstract thoughts, put dignity aside, forget the worries of the world, and for a time return to their youth. It always seems a pity that men try to conceal this feeling so often at Christmas. Only a few men are capable of being gracefully caught in the act of making a miniature train of cars go over the carpet. Catch them at it a night or two before Christmas, and nine out of every ten will instantly get up from the carpet, brush the dust from the knees of their trousers—for dust will get on the carpets of the best regulated homes—and immediately begin to apologize. I have often wondered why men resent being caught in this way. But a woman feels differently, and it is a blessed thing that she does.

SUPERSTITIONS OF CHRISTMAS.

The superstitions of Christmas are more numerous even than the observances which owe their origin to heathenish rites. Among certain European peasants the belief still prevails that on Christmas morning oxen always spend a portion of the time on their knees. This they do, according to the peasants, in imitation of the ox and the ass which, a legend states, were present at the manger and knelt when Christ was born.

In certain counties of England the idea prevails that sheep walk in procession on Christmas Eve, in commemoration of the glad tidings first announced to shepherds. Bees are said to sing in their hives on the night before Christmas, and bread baked at that time never becomes mouldy—at least so once thought many English housewives.

THE EPICURE'S BIRD.

The eagle has the laugh on the turkey at Christmas time.—Philadelphia Record.

"Sometimes," said Uncle Eben, "the houses that has de biggest families an de littlest turkey seems ter hab de most Christmas 'em."—Washington Star.

The Goose—"What's the difference between the Easter gift and the Christmas turkey?" The Turkey—"I dunno." The Goose—"Why, you're dressed to kill an' the other is killed to dress."—Truth.

MOTHER GETS HER INSTRUCTION.

If you were not so good, you would be a turkey. For I want to see what you're made of.

SCIENTIFIC SCRAPS.

In Germany and France twenty-five per cent of the suicides are women; in Japan the proportion is thirty-eight per cent.

Cartridges, tested by the Roentgen rays to determine if they have been carefully loaded, are offered for sale by a London gunsmith.

Leaving out patients that were moribund at the time the injection was made, 5,794 cases of diphtheria treated in private practice in this country by the antitoxin method gave a mortality of only 8.8 per cent.

The ordinary horse of Japan originated in China and is called a griffin, perhaps because he is so ugly. He thrives on straw, but is not capable of much endurance. Although he resembles the Mexican burros in appearance, a journey of fifteen miles completely wears him out.

Two French zoologists, Martin and Respal, have ascertained that of twenty young songbirds that are hatched seventeen perish in the same year, mostly before they have left the nest. Of sixty-seven nestlings one pair, forty-one were destroyed by cats, squirrels and other animals.

Work has been begun on an underground electric road in London. It will be fifty feet under the city and extend from the heart of the city to one of the suburbs, ten miles. At some places it will be one hundred feet below the surface. The elevators to hoist the passengers will lift 250 people at one time. There will be forty trains per day.

A novelty in the building trade of Gateshead, England, is being introduced in the covering of some new premises with vulcanite. It is intended to utilize the premises as a cafe, and it is claimed that the new material is not only water and storm proof, but fire proof.

Russia has sent an expedition to Khiva, under Count Gromohovski, to find a means of diverting the course of the Amu Darya, the Oxus of the ancients, into its old bed, so that it may flow into the Caspian Sea, instead of into the Sea of Aral. It should empty then into Uzandak, south of Krasnovodsk, the terminus of the Transcaspian railroad.

A QUEER ACCIDENT TO A CAR.

A very peculiar accident to a freight train has just come to the attention of the motive-power department of the Panhandle in this city, and in its details it assumes the nature of a miracle as strange as those of old. The train was running at a rapid rate between Xenia and Trebrens, a distance of four miles, when the trucks of one of the cars gave way and jumped onto the tracks of the Cincinnati, Hamilton and Dayton road, which runs parallel with the Pennsylvania at that point. The trucksighted square on the rails, and continued running until they smashed into the pilot of the Cincinnati, Hamilton and Dayton engine running in the opposite direction. The Panhandle train evidently did not suffer any inconvenience owing to the loss of trucks, as it was not discovered until Trebrens was reached, and then it was found that the body of the freight car was held in position by the couplings and had run two miles without any wheels. The accident is perhaps without a parallel in annals of railroads. Although absolutely true and verified by the motive-power department officials, it seems stranger than fiction.—Columbus (Ohio) Press.

The Cook—Discharge me, is it? Well, you don't dare. O! I expose you to the boarders.

Mr. Spindletop—What do you mean?

"Oh! I mean the fresh mutton they talk they're getting every morning are a little bit the owl was blown up with the you pump!"

SOMETHING TO TALK ABOUT.

Woman—You expect Mrs. Phipps to be so beautiful? What's that strange? She was always considered as a beautiful woman and a very good one.

Woman—But you seem to forget that she has just returned from a three weeks' tour of Europe.—Columbus (Ohio) Press.