# THE HEADLIGHT.

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### CHRISTMAS THOUGHTS.

From heaven to earth at night's high noon
There flashed a ray of sacred fire,
And Nature's voice was all a-tune
With songs of sweet desire.
O wondrous night! O holy morn!
When peace and harmony were born.

The anthems of all Nations ring
Over the seas from shore to shore;
The song the Christmas joy bells sing
Echoes forevermore.
O Christ! to think Thy baby hands
Could grasp and hold so many lands.

May joy abide in every breast!
May loving thoughts and kindness sway
The souls of men to quiet rest,
For Christ was born to-day!
Let bitterness and envy cease,
And all His children be at peace!

O spirit of this Christmastide,
Abide with us, and give us power
To conquer upon every side
The battle of life's hour.
And grant that we may know with Thee
The joy of immortality.

—Helen S. Conant.

## A CHRISTMAS MIRACLE.

BY MRS. M. C. HALE.

"UGH!" said John Blake, stamping off the snow and swinging his arms about. "This is the coldest Christmas eve I remember in a long time. Whew! Shut the door, Frank. Quick! What on earth do you let in any more air than necessary such a night as this?"

Farmer Blake had finished the chores early to-night, and had just come in "for good," as he said. Everything had been done, except the "lockin' up," which Frank, the oldest boy, was to attend to, and all was to be ready for "the Christmas fixin'," "the young' uns had to get to bed, so as everything'd be done in season."

The farmer sometimes grumbled that "it was mighty hard work keeping Christmas," but if he had been given his choice, he would not have had the day omitted from his calendar for a good sum of money. As for his wife, for six months she looked forward to Christmas with pleasure, and back upon it with delight for the other six months.

"There'd be no use living," she said, "if it weren't for Christmas and children."

Frank was now to take the warm water to the chickens, for, as the farmer said, "Look's if it might set in for a good spell o' snow; an' the critters 'd better have enough feed for the mornin', in case we couldn't get to 'em."

So Frank pulled down another armful of hay, packing it into the manger. He patted old Dobbin and Molly, as, turning the lantern from side to side, he glanced around.

"There!" he said to himself, "if I haven't forgotten the big key? Too cold to come out again. Father won't think of asking about it, and they are as safe as they ever are."

The solemn, slow munching of the animals as they drew out the hay in long wisps, only slightly disturbed the silence as the boy stood still for a moment. It was not a very important matter. It had happened before that the barn had been left unlocked, but only when it had been forgotten, and as Frank thought, "If anything should happen, father would blame me." But the wild sweep of snow, as he opened the barn door, blew out the light, and in the dark, half blinded by the sleet, he fumbled at the latch; until at last, having secured it, he hurried into the house, and then—he really forgot.

A sturdy boy of eleven he showed himself to be, as he stamped the snow from his rubber boots, and tossed his wet cap and "comforter" into a chair.

Rob, a little fellow of about five years, had been drawing pictures, as he called his marks, and looked up with a dreamy air.

"Is is snowing, father?" he asked.

"Now, father!" exclaimed Frank. "Do you hear that? Who would ask such a question but Rob? Yes, you silly boy, it is snowing, and likely to keep on for a good while. Do you think it will last all night, father."

"Can't tell," said the farmer. "This time o' year ain't wuth bettin' on. Might keep on for a week, an' might clear off 'fore mornin', an' the stars come out."

"Mother," said Rob, suddenly raising his head; "Did it snow when Jesus was born?"

"Land sakes!" exclaimed Mr. Blake.

"Hear that now! How d'you suppose we know, child? We weren't there!"

Mrs. Blake patted the little golden head, but thought it wise not to attempt an answer.

"Everything in shape, Frank?" said his father.

And Frank, a little conscience-stricken, looked out toward the barn door, and said:

"Yes, sir; it's awfully cold, too."

"I hope no one is out-of-doors to-night," said Mrs. Blake. "Did the lantern blow out, Frank? Well, now, the snow's driving around so, it seems as if I'd feel better if there was a light in it, and it was hung out on the porch. Some one might be losing their way, just for want of the light it gives. There's very little light between the Cranford station and the 'Mills,' and anyway, I'd feel better."

"Pshaw! mother," said her husband; "don't you think the windows give light enough?"

"Well, the windows will be dark when we go to bed," she answered. "and besides, no one can see them till they get in front of the house. I guess I'll hang it out."

And with the wick turned up to give a bright, clear light, she hung it by a nail on the outer post of the porch, where it had often hung before.

The kitchen and dining-room faced the Cranford road, as it was usually called, because it was near the point where several roads from Rahway, from the "Mills," and from Roselle, turned into the one leading to the village of Cranford. The construction of the house was very odd, but as the neighbors said "When Jane and John Blake set out to build a house, you might be sure it wouldn't be like any other." And it had not altered their opinion when Mr. Blake explained that as they were to spend most of their lives in it, he didn't see why they should build the best part for somebody else. When he built the barn beside the house, its door directly opposite one from the side of the kitchen, the neighbors only laughed good-naturedly and said: "That's like them, too."

Though Frank was old enough to stay up and help with the "fixin's," he made no objection to going to bed with Rob, and the two boys snuggled together in the effort to get warm.

"Say, mother," said Rob, as she leaned over the bed to give them the good-night kiss she never omitted, "do angels ever come down now?"

"I'm not sure," she answered. "Some people think they do, but others don't."

As she went down stairs she added to herself. "I'm one of the people that think they do—for awhile."

She was thinking of the baby girl who had lain in her arms, and blessed her life, for one short year.

When she came into the kitchen her husband sat beside the bright fire, with both hands on his knees, gazing at the light, a troubled look on his face.

"What's the matter, father?" said his wife, who knew the sighs of mental disturbance.

"Well, there is somethin' that bothers me, sure enough," he answered. "You see, when I was driving back from Elizabeth, this afternoon, I stopped at Derby's and Crane's to leave some things, and get the turkey trimmings you wanted; an' they both mentioned 't they'd heard that John Granger 'd been on a spree, an' driven his wife an' child out o' the house, an' locked 'em out, too. I suppose the poor critters 'll be taken in an' cared for by the neighbors near there 'fore this time; but it makes me feel kinder shivery to think she may be out in this storm. Ugh! the wind goes through one like a mowin' machine through the grass!"

Mrs. Black went toward the front window and looked out on the road.

"Yes, it is a bitter night," she said, thoughtfully. "I'd like to feel sure the girl was under shelter. Ah, John, it was a bad day for Anna when she married him. Poor orphan! I haven't ever laid it up against her when she got the idea that marrying anybody was better than being 'bound out' to us. Pretty, gentle-spoken child, and I don't see how any one could ill-treat her. Mr. Winslow says he's heard her crying out; 'Don't strike me again, John!' Ah, poor girl, poor girl! And a baby, too, only about six months old. A girl baby!"

"I ain't stopped there of'en lately," said Mr. Blake; "John has been so of'en half drunk, or all drunk, that it ain't been pleasant. Well, I suppose we'd better begin fixin' the tree, hadn't we?"

"I suppose so," his wife answered, but she still lingered beside the window. She pressed her face close to the pane, and peered out. The lamp on the porch sent a bright stream of light out into the road. All about the lantern the flakes were whirling, like flies and gnats on a summer's night.

John had brought in the tree, placing it in a corner of the dining-room, while his wife was upstairs with the boys, and taking the lamp with them, they now proceeded to trim the tree. The ornaments saved from one year to another were brought out and fastened, the rosy-cheeked apples and golden oranges were hung on, the popcorn they had spent several evenings in stringing were flung over the branches, looking as if a flurry of snow had frozen there. The candy ornaments, and last the candles, completed the pretty effect.

"My!" exclaimed Mr. Blake. "Who'd think you could heat up on such a night? It makes one as warm as a-hayin'. Most done, ain't we, mother?"

"Almost," said his wife, as she stepped toward the kitchen door. The light from the porch was faintly reflected on both of the windows, while the inside of the kitchen was without light except from the fire.

As Mrs. Blake looked toward the window facing her, she repressed a scream as she saw a woman's face outside. With a beating heart at the apparation, she drew nearer the window. As she did so she saw a white hand raised, and a slight tap sounded on the glass.

"What is that, mother?" called Mr. Blake from the next room.

His wife hurried to his side.

"Did you hear it, John," she asked.

"Why," he answered slowly. "I heard a tappin,' sorter."

She was worried and troubled.

"I saw a face, a woman's I think, against the window," she answered. "And she tapped at the glass. It did frighten me a little, but it must be some poor creature, cold and faint, maybe, We must go out and look for her."

But John, who hated to leave the warm comfort indoors, for the cold discomfort without, suggested that whoever it was, would probably be glad to come in. But though he opened the door and peered out and around, he saw no one.

"There'r no one there, Jane," he said. Then he added, curiously, "Did you say you hung the lantern on the porch? Well, it ain't there!"

"Now, we must go," said Jane, decidedly. "Some poor soul is out there, and must be brought in. Set the lamp in the kitchen window, so we can tell where to come back to, and we'll get the other lantern from the barn. Wrap up warm, John. Ready? All right."

It had taken them several minutes for preparation, and as Jane glanced toward the clock, it was with a slight thrill that she saw it was a few minutes before twelve.

Like the lovers they had been fifteen years before, they stood upon the front porch, hand in hand, and peered ahead of them.

Down the road, a few lights from the village glowed faint as a glowworm's torch, but in the opposite direction none could be seen. Slight marks, partially covered, showed here and there, but the white space seemed endless, looking like white capped waves. The lamp in the window threw its beams far out on the road, and the snow, now falling softly, formed a golden haze in the light.

The lantern was not where Mrs. Blake had placed it, certainly, and they passed to the side of the house. There, hanging on the latch of the barn door, was the lantern.

Slowly, for the snow had drifted here, they pressed toward the glimmering light, keeping their eyes fixed on it as if it were a beacon. The snow around and about it, the soft flakes falling over it, gave it a weird, uncanny look, like a halo spreading indefinitely until loss in the whiteness around.

John shivered and wished he had stayed in, but Mrs. Blake drew him forward. Some one had been here. Some one had moved the lantern. In her mind were the words, "And they followed the star."

They reached the barn, unhooked the lantern, and John then discovered that the door was not locked.

"That little scamp!" he muttered. "But as we are here we may's well see if the critters are all right." And they went in. Old Molly had been led from her stall, and was standing on the other side. This so startled John that he raised his lantern, swinging it from side to side.

"There there! John," said Mrs. Blake, catching at his arm. "In Molly's manger. What is that?"

They drew nearer, till the light flashed down on the fragrant hay heaped in the manger, on which a woman was crouching; while pressed closely to her breast was a little baby, fast asleep. The mother's dark eyes gleamed at them questioningly; fear and joy at once showing in her face.

"The baby, John. A little baby in the manger," said Jane, in a trembling voice. "Oh, you poor girl! Oh, Anna, Anna, why did you not come to me at first?"

But the young mother, the cruelly treated wife, had fainted. John carried the slight form in his strong arms "into the light out of the night," while Jane held the baby—the baby girl—pressed closely to her heart.

A short journey, but to the young mother the change seemed like that from death to heaven. To Jane Blake it seemed like a realization of the ever new Christmas story. They, too, had followed the light where it led; they, too, had seen the babe lying in a manger.

When Anna had told how she had tried to reach the house before dark—how, when she did reach it, her heart had failed her, and knowing how Mrs. Blake had pleaded with her not to marry John Granger, she had feared she might not befriend her—how she had entered the barn and laid the baby in the warm hay—how she had passed from one window to another, had almost entered several times—when all this was told the rest remained unsaid, because so well understood by all. Anna, whom they had all loved for many years, had come back to her home. That was all.

When in the early morning Mrs. Blake and Anna arose and began the daily work, Jane suggested that the boys' room, which was heated by a pipe from the kitchen, would be a better place for the baby. So the cradle in which Jane and Jane's mother had been rocked, with its solid sides and hoodlike top of mahogany, was moved into the other room.

Jane smiled to herself as she heard the boys' bare feet on the floor overhead. She imagined their start of surprise at sight of the cradle. But she did not carry her imaginings far enough.

A shrill whisper of "Mother!" "Mother!" came from the stairs. Both mothers hurried into the hall. Rob, quivering with excitement, stood on the middle stair, while Frank, half wise, half mystified, but wholly curious, was at the top both nightowned, barefooted.

"Oh, mother!" said Rob, "Angels do come nowadays! One has been in our room and left a Christmas baby there. Come and see!"—New York Observer.

### Christmas Festivities.

Modern ingenuity has wrought on many inventions, not only in the ordinar affairs of life, but in the manner of conducting holiday festivities. The old fashioned Christmas festival has been reconstructed, and no doubt many person believe it to be greatly improved upon. But it is a question whether there ever can be anything better than the Christmas tree and dear old Santa Claus with his white coat, big fur hat and a bundle of toys on his back.

How dear to every childish heart is the story that begins

"'Twas the night before Christmas,
When all through the house
Not a creature was stirring,
Not even a mouse."

And the stockings hanging in a row by the chimney, what a flutter of excitement is created in the little hearts when bed-time comes. However can they go to sleep with the house full of such delightful possibilities, but try as hard as they may to keep awake, the little lids will droop and cover the wondering eyes. The early bird is the happy bird the next morning, and whether the earliest wide-awake trips down-stairs alone to take a peep, or wakens the whole flock, when all go scampering down together, it matters little. The excitement is simply intense. And, it must be confessed, that the interest in the contents of those wonderful stockings is not confined alone to the youngsters. Gray heads and wrinkled faces do not insure exemption from the interest in such precious parcels. More than one smile has appeared on the face of the grandfather or grandmother when some unusually pleasant and much-desired gift has found its way through the channels of Christmas to their hands, and more than once the head of age has been bowed and tears have fallen in silence, because the expected memento has been forgotten or neglected, or has degenerated into a duty gift, which is of all giving the most unsatisfactory.

Perhaps one of the most interesting features of Christmas entertainments is a magic-lantern, either of Scriptural subjects something pertaining to the occasion, or pure and unadulterated fun. Possibly this idea is the more attractive, and the educational and serious might come in another shape. It may be questioned whether it is well to allow anything of an absolutely serious nature to enter into Christmas rejoicings. It has been said by persons of experience that the Christmas memory that was the dearest, and remained in the mind with the most clearness and pleasure, was that which was associated with unmixed fun and hilarity; and, indeed, there should be nothing else mingled with the Christmas joys. There are enough sadness and somberness in the world at other times. Let us keep for Christmas good cheer, kindness of heart, gentle thoughts and innocent, even though boisterous and rolicsome fun.—Ledger.

### The Christmas Spoon.

One of the pleasantest and perhaps one of the most desirable of old time customs is that of presenting to the mother or ladies of the household at Christmas a silver spoon. The custom was introduced in the seventeenth century, and was much in fashion in England and on the Continent, particularly among the nobility and upper classes, and it came to be of considerable significance and importance, inasmuch as the donors vied with each other in securing for their wives or other friends such specimens of silver as were not only of intrinsic value, but of rare and unusual pattern and of exquisite finish. And so each spoon naturally came to be in a certain sense historic; at least it would be a souvenir of the particular Christmas festival when it was presented. The matron of middle life would have suggested much of her family history and experience by simply looking over her Christmas spoons. Beside, these gifts came to be valuable heirlooms, prized and handed down the family line as witnesses of high social position, if not of wealth and antique lineage.

The demand for Christmas spoons from high quarters very naturally stimulated dealers and silversmiths to exercise their genius and skill in designing and executing unusual forms and patterns, many of which were very fanciful and suggestive. These spoons of course bore the name of the recipients as well as the date of bestowal and any other legend which the occasion or the fancy of the giver might suggest.

### Christmas Eve.

Father—"Why Tom, what are you doing on the roof, this time of night?"

Tom—"Well, I've got my doubts about that Santa Claus story, and I came here to watch the chimneys, and find out if there is such a person."

### Christmas in Scandinavia.

In the cold northern lands of Norway and Sweden, name days, birth days and Christmas, are the principal festival of the year which are celebrated by rich and poor. The last, especially, is a time of great rejoicing, and all keep holiday from Christmas Eve until Twelfth Day, the 6th of January. At this season every cottage, as well as every mansion, is cleaned from top to bottom, white curtains are hung at the windows, and the tables covered with snowy cloths. Peasants and nobles don their best Suaday clothing, and the gifts, which few are too poor to prepare for each other, are sometimes thrown into the rooms, so that the donors may be guessed at, but not positively known. In country churches, service is held at four o'clock on Christmas morning, when, for the only time in the year, the sanctuary is illuminated with candles; but there are no evergreen decorations as with us. In the wintry dawn then sledges packed with good people may be seen gliding over the frozen lakes, and beneath the pine and birch trees, glittering with time in the starlight; and peasants trudge many miles through the snow to attend this early celebration of the Fast of Lights. In the farming districts, too,

FEEDING THE BIRDS.

they have a very charming custom, for, on Christmas morning, the farmer's wife distributes loaves of bread among all the very poor in her neighborhood, while her husband fastens a sheaf of wheat or corn on a tall pole, as a Christmas banquet for the birds, an attention which the little feathered pensioners of the air fully appreciate. So, the happy, holy season is made a time of "good will to all," in cold, frost bound Scandinavia, as well as in less frigid lands.

### Hot-Water Winter Fountains.

Hot-water fountains continue to be placed in the different wards of Paris, and not only prove a perfect blessing to the people near them, but also plainly demonstrate that more of them are wanted. In view of the approaching cold season, the cabmen have an excellent chance of heating their vehicles for the comfort of their fares, while hundreds of workingmen's families have hot water made handy for them at an hour of the day or night at a sou for a bucketful. The fountain in the Faubourg Montmatre, near the Passage Verdeau, which was opened on Monday forenoon, had 125 sous in the till by nightfall, showthat 125 persons had been served during the day.

### Money Makers Always "Get There."

The person who has a genius for money making always gets there some way or other, as witness the following: Private soldiers in the United States Army don't get big pay, and few of them, therefore, can put away much money. A soldier stationed at Salt Lake City, Utah, however, managed to save a small sum, with which he bought a nice piece of land, on which he erected a number of cheap frame houses. He rented these houses to his comrades, and now he is worth $25,000.—New York Advertiser.

### To Stir Him Up.

Donner—"I think we ought to give Gudolfellow something as a Christmas gift to stir him up; he's been with us for forty years, and he is now seventy."

Blitzen—"Yes; give him an alarm clock."

Enormous damage has been done in Spain, this year, to all kinds of crops, sheep and poultry, by hailstorms and river overflows.

There are several olive orchards in California with over 15,000 trees.