

THE CHRISTMAS TREE

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ADAPTED FROM THE GERMAN BY PETER H. DOYLE

OVER 100 years ago in Germany, winter, cold and drear, was upon the town of Thalau. No need to say there was much suffering, not only from the season, but also from hunger and disease.

There were troubled times in the kingdom, while the rich and poor were divided. But for all the social unrest that prevailed, charity in some thoughtful hearts still sought work to do.

A widow, whose husband was killed in the war, had died in extreme destitution. Her sole known relation was a son, who soon followed his mother to the churchyard.

During the illness of the pair another woman, also a widow through the war, but slightly better off in this world's goods, had done for them in kindness what her limited means—an allowance from a distant relation—permitted.

In this task of trying to relieve the necessities of her unfortunate neighbor and her child, she had had an earnest coworker in her own boy, Otto.

After their return from the funeral, where they had been the only mourners, the mother observed that Otto was very thoughtful. As this was not usual with him, she asked the reason.

"I don't think, mamma," he answered, "that poor Alfred ever had a Christmas toy, and it seems to me he would be happier even in heaven if he thought some one had been kinder to him on earth. I was going to give him the striped horse you bought for me last year, but I did not. And now I so wish I had."

She consoled him and said it was a good feeling, even if he did fall to carry it out into deed.

That same evening Otto continued his thoughtful mood. When engaged at preparing his school lessons he was in the habit of breaking in on the silence with questions from time to time; but tonight it was not so.

When he finished his task, however, he inquired: "If little Alfred was still alive, mother, wouldn't we light a Christmas candle for him this year?"

"Certainly, my son," she replied, "we might have done that, but hardly much more. For I may as well tell you now, Otto, the death of Alfred and his mother has cost us so much, you must do without the new coat I was going to buy you at the holidays."

For a moment the idea of losing what he had looked forward to with much pleasure saddened Otto's heart, but he got bravely over it.

"All right, mother," he said, with a pretense of content he did not altogether feel. "Some other time."

After his prayers that night he kept thinking of the dead boy in the graveyard. And he either thought or dreamed he came to him in a vision and asked: "Have I not enough poor brothers and sisters on earth who may take my place? Do for them what you wished poor Alfred had done for me."

When morning came the words were still ringing in his ears. After his devotions he sat on the bed a few moments to reflect, and a strong purpose came upon him.

"I'll write a letter to my schoolfellows," he mused, "and try to get a lot of presents or a good tree for the children of the poor school. Each one of us can do something for the less fortunate of the town."

"But it won't do for the writer of the letter to be known," he went on, half aloud. "Unknown I can more fully enjoy the fun and see what comes out of it."

Then, on going downstairs, he at once told his mother of his intent. She not only enthusiastically approved of it, but also suggested how he could carry out his wish to conceal his identity.

He should write the letter and she would copy it. This was done, and in an hour he had put down what he wished to say on paper, she had transcribed it and it was sent to the teacher of the high school, with the request that he read it to his classes at his convenience.

So Otto and she waited in joyful expectation of the outcome.

Several days passed without result. At last the

to you, and you must furnish the answer. Come, let me know what you think about it."

One lad stood up with the words: "Herr Lehrer, I think we should make a collection." Then the whole class rose and shouted with one voice, "A collection."

The teacher, with the brightest of approving smiles on his grave face, gave his consent, and then gradually led the excited youngsters back to consideration of their regular school tasks.

On the evening of that same day two men were talking in a miserable hovel lying some distance outside the town. Had the peaceful residents known what was the topic of their conversation, they would have slept less quietly.

There was considerable difference in the ages of the pair. One was about 20 and the other nearer 40. In the face of the latter was every sign of dissipation and wickedness. The countenance of his younger companion was as yet unmarked by those signs upon the downward path.

Whatever their topic was, the elder had paused a moment in his talk to take a draught from a black bottle before him. After handing a glass of the liquor to his comrade, he resumed:

"While my wife—your sister—was ill, and her baby worse, I had to work at the shoes night and day. What wonder I grew tired, nervous and cut myself—I there's the scar still—holding out his hand—'so that I could not work. No work, no money, no medicine and not a crust of bread in the house. Nobody would help me. I was starving; so was she—your sister—and our baby's cries pierced my heart."

"I went to the Baker Fromler, for whom I had done work. I begged him for God's sake to give me bread to save my starving dear ones. He laughed at me and ordered me out of his shop."

"I was mad. I did not know what I was doing. I seized him by the throat and would have choked him to death but that the police were too quick for me."

"I got ten years for it and served every day of my sentence. When I came out my wife—your sister—and my child were dead. Nobody could ever tell me where they were buried."

It was evident by his frequent mention of the words, "your sister," that he was trying to rouse a spirit of hatred in the heart of his young comrade.

"I came back here, and they think I am trying to lead a better life. But I am fooling them. I am a thief, a member of a band made outlaws by injustice like myself. We have sworn to be avenged when the time comes, and it is almost here. We intend this Christmas to light up the biggest tree this nation has ever known. Starting with the church and schools, we will burn every house in the town of Thalau. I shall kill Fromler, and then if needs Knuth dies content."

The young man whom he had, in the course of his remarks, addressed as Ludwig, shuddered and his face grew white. Before the other could resume his threats, a distant shot was heard.

"That is a sign for me," said the desperado. "If we hear two more it means nothing is to be done tonight."

He had hardly ceased speaking when a couple of reports sounded from different directions.

"It is all right," he remarked to Ludwig, "we may rest."

Almost immediately after the reading of Otto's letter, the boys got down to business. In fact, the day following, before the school he ran to his mother in great jubilation, shouting:

"Just think of it, mamma. Already the scholars have collected over \$5. Every one of them brought something else, too. We have, among other things, a cannon, a gun, and a box of lead soldiers. The teacher's own two boys, Gus and William, fetched a big rocking horse. All were taken to the front room of the teacher's house and what he had almost finished up with the care of the money, too. As first in class, he told me to keep the account of what is collected each day. It's just splendid, the whole business."

After some further talk on the subject, Mrs. Koerner sent Otto to the Baker Fromler's and the morning's bread, and meanwhile knitted a pair of stockings she intended should make one of her own contributions to the school's collection.

The house in which the Koerner's lived belonged to this man. He was between 50 and 60, stout and florid. Vain of his wealth, mean in spirit and coarse in appearance and manners, was his other self.

There was at the moment, a loud racket close to his store door. Two boys, on their way to school, were going by. They were doing their best to make a great uproar and fairly battered the door. One had a slightly used drum and the other a trifle battered but still serviceable trumpet, by means of which they were making the aforesaid din. These articles represented their gift collections for the day.

Fromler and his wife watched them as they ran gaily on. He shook his head despairingly, as though he gave up his feeling in the matter was natural enough, as he knew nothing of what was going on.

"There they go. That's the way children are taught nowadays. Going to their lessons with drum and trumpet. Bah!"

He and his wife were still exchanging opinions on the wrong educational ideas in vogue, and how the schools were going to the dogs, when a servant maid entered, basket in arm.

"Did you know the teacher is collecting money and Christmas toys for the poor school children?" was almost her first remark.

Fromler said he couldn't believe such a thing.

"But it's true," reiterated the girl. "Our house is turned upside down with the things. The school has gathered and there's no making anything out of Gus and Will, they're so excited over it. It must be a great laugh with teacher. He says an unknown boy wrote a letter to him, which he read to the class, and this is what's happening. Of course, that's only a joke."

"Not a doubt of it," added the baker's wife, in a tone of conviction; "he wants to make himself important by pretending to hide who the real person back of it is and then pretend to be surprised when it comes out."

"Well, if this is true," broke in the baker, "I think I have a word to say about it. This sort of business is no part of the school lessons. In the next meeting of the town council I'll see that the teacher is called to account. I'm not a member of it for nothing, and I won't allow such carryings on."

Even at the time this conversation was in progress in Fromler's store, there was an important conference being held elsewhere on various phases of the same subject. In the teacher's house was present Herr Schneider, the head of the poor school. He had called by invitation to talk over the coming festival.

"You know the idea," inquired Herr Lehrer.

"Only slightly," returned the other. "I heard some of our boys talking about wonderful things that were going to happen to them this year, but that is all."

After having explained to him the details of the affair, which pleased him beyond measure, he was shown the toy riches already accumulated. Herr Schneider could hardly believe his eyes.

As soon as he left the principal's house he went to the pastor in spiritual charge of the poor school and told him the story. In his turn the minister was delighted and promised all the aid in his power to make the affair a success.

That same night there convened an extraordinary meeting of the town council, called by the burgomaster, at the request of the master-baker, Fromler. The latter was first to appear. As the other members entered they saw him sitting grimly in his seat like a bomb about to burst.

After the session was opened in regular form, the burgomaster told the tale to state his reasons for requesting that it be called.

"Am I mistaken in assuming he told you what he thought Herr Lehrer should be having for his collection business. It is against decency and Christianity," he concluded.

"How," he was asked.

"It is filling the heads of the children with nonsense." Then he went on to tell of several conversations he had had in his store and what he had learned since. "And that's not the worst. It will teach them to steal. A case was related to me where a boy stole a box of his sister's toys to take them to school and so he was a big man among his fellows."

"Who told you that story?" inquired a member.

"It's all true; no matter who told me."

"You are mistaken, master-baker. It is not true. It was my son who was supposed to have taken his sister's toys, but she simply mistook them, and forgot



tree, and it was simply beyond the power of art to have made brighter lights than glowed upon its branches.

If there was anything that possibly beamed with brighter lustre, it was the eyes of the children as they gazed enraptured on the ravishing sight; but joy went even further when the girls were handed out—words, in fact, fall to do justice either to the variety of presents or the boundless exultation of the happy receivers.

Before the children went home, after an evening that must have been marked full of golden letters in their lives, the teacher announced a resolution, passed that afternoon by the council. It was to this effect:

"To those scholars who graduated at Easter, first in their class, three boys and three girls, should be presented confirmation garments, purchased by and given as an honor in the name of the community. Moreover, the three boys should be put to trades and their apprentice fees paid from the public funds."

And Otto Koerner, who had been the first to sow the little seed from which so much had grown, what of him?

Whether or not it was known his had been the head and heart which had devised so noble a scheme, remains doubtful. Still, there is reason to suppose that in some way or other it had come to the ears of some eminent and wealthy persons, who were incited by the circumstance to the encouragement of such kindly traits of character.

In any case, it is certain that at the most interesting part of the festival ceremonies Herr Lehrer ascended the platform and said:

"My dear friends, am I going to tell you something I know you will like to hear. The council has concluded to offer to the best scholar of this school a free course at the university. The credit of being the first to win this great honor has fallen upon one whom you all love and who I feel will prove himself worthy of the prize that has come to him. Otto Koerner, you have been selected as the one best entitled to this honor."

Although up to this point his name was not mentioned, all eyes had been fixed upon him from the start, and now a loud huzza, joined in by young and old, the very rafters ring while the lights on the tall Christmas tree shone with greater brilliance, as though trying to add their meed of glory to the crown that seemed to encircle the boy's fair brow as he wept his joy on his mother's breast.

"If little Alfred was still alive, mother—"

Rucker and the baker were the only ones to remain seated.

With the adjournment of the meeting, Fromler rushed out furious. He had aimed at doing the cause harm and instead he had actually instigated the council to take part in the boy's charity scheme.

On his homeward way his eyes were too blinded with rage to notice two familiar figures in an obscure neighborhood through which he had to pass.

They were Otto Koerner and his mother, with hearts just as full of love for the suffering as his was charged with hate to all they had, in their humble way, been visiting and brought such consolation as they could to a house of death, where a dead spairing young man had for a time raised over his mother, and declared that Knuth was right. But ere they had left him the kindness of his visitors had lessened his wrath. The eyes that had flashed with the fire of vindictiveness now shed tears and half-recalled threats began to be mingled with half-recalled prayers.

A few days later the town council was again hurriedly convened. Fromler, the baker, was the only absentee. Immediately the session had come to order the president read the following missive:

"To the Council of Thalau:

"A band of murderers and thieves have appointed tomorrow evening, the eve of Christmas, as a time to set fire to your church, your schools, and to start a scene of murder and pillage. I was to be one of the gang; for, like them, I had come to think there was neither thought nor mercy nor kindness for the poor in this world."

"But I have learned differently with my mother's death. There are still such things as love and charity. The knowledge has come to me too late for my own good, perhaps, but not to save you. I have written to the leader of the band that I have betrayed their plans to you. You need fear nothing, only let Baker Fromler, who stands in imminent danger, beware."

"When this letter reaches you, I will be on my way to another land, where I may become another and a better man."

A name had been signed to the communication, and then crossed out.

The council was still consulting about what measures should be taken to guard the peril referred to should the villainous band persist in carrying out its purpose to light the greatest Christmas candle Knuth, the council shoemaker, had killed Master-Baker Fromler. The murderer was himself shot down by a citizen as he attempted to escape.



"All were taken to the teacher's house."

where she put them in her bureau. Hereafter, don't be so ready to listen to the story of our servants when they go to you for bread."

"I still insist," cried Fromler, chagrined at his defeat, "that it will make the children disobedient, liars and lead them to steal."

This last remark caused general commotion. Half a dozen members were prompt to say that though they had children interested in the collecting, they had noticed no tendency to lying, stealing or disobedience in them.

Next in the order of speakers was Herr Rucker, a factory owner. He was a man of rather shallow mind, had traveled to some of the larger cities a day or two at a time and picked up some of the jargon of politics and economic questions. These words he worked into his talk wherever he could. Two favorite expressions were "dear" and "principles."

"Gentlemen," he commenced, "this matter has a dangerous side. I am opposed to the whole idea. The alleged principle of it is 'goodwill.' Goodwill is another word for charity, and what does that lead to? To laziness. People who can get money or goods without working will come to demand them as a right. Not I give folks bread only when they labor for it. That is my principle."

"I never thought a good and innocent thought would meet such opposition or be so misconstrued. Children have done what we failed to do. They should be ashamed of ourselves. One of you speaks of this movement as a new idea. In love toward the poor a new idea? It is really as old as the gospel of the Lord, one of the first teachings of Jesus Christ."

These final words made a deep impression and there fell upon the assemblage a deep silence, which was only broken when the president asked if Fromler's motion to approve the teacher should pass. Only two voted for it, Rucker and the baker himself.

"And now," said the burgomaster, "I propose that following the example of the children, we do something like this Christmas for the poor of our town. Those in favor of further favorably considering the matter will rise."

There never had been such a condition of things in Thalau as was observable that holiday season. New and strange notions were abroad. Among them support of the ailing and employment for the well.

These principles were nobly carried out that day, or at least a start made, and became a source of joy for the poor in the present and of promise for the future.

The festival of the children was to come off in the evening.

How many youthful hearts found fault with the slowly-moving hours, and how often the wooden clocks against the wall were gazed at with longing eyes; and where these tardy time-measureers were absent, how



The Ancestors of Our Christmas Carols

CHRISTOPH VON SCHMID, the author of the story here adapted from the German, was among the first writers of Christmas tales as we know them in modern times. He was one of the leading writers of his day for the younger element, but his works, filled with religion and philosophy, would be, in the original, much too prosy to suit the youngsters of the present.

The story here adapted in, as he wrote it, of a length equal to our novelettes. It goes deeply into the psychology of Christmas and contains long exhortations on pretty nearly all the virtues of the calendar, with plentiful warnings on what will happen to those who fail to heed the penitence of advice.

Like the yuletide tree, we have really inherited our holds from Germany. As it stands at present, English is probably as rich in Christmas literature as any language. Dickens made the Christmas story his own. Thackeray and a good many other writers have turned their hands to it on occasions. Besides, there are multitudes of poems, long and short, for both old and young.

The same can hardly be said of the continental languages in general. French, for instance, has no such array of holiday literature. Baudet, Coppes and Paul Aréna have produced some Christmas stories that perhaps rank with almost any that have ever been written; but in quantity the yuletide productions do not in any way compare with those of English and German.

Christoph von Schmid, the author of the present in question, wrote much and long. He was born in 1764 and did not end his life until 1851. A large number of his juvenile works, like the one here presented, were turned out at the beginning of the nineteenth century.

The Germans always were strong for the yuletide good things, and by no means content themselves to eat every feast. As one authority says:

"Many of the beliefs and usages of the old Germans, and also of the Romans, passed over from heathenism to Christianity and have partly survived to the present day. But the church also sought to combat and banish and in heathen feeling by adding, for the purification of the heathen customs and feasts which it retained, its grandly devised dramatic representations of the birth of Christ and events of his life. Hence sprang the so-called 'manger' songs and a multitude of Christmas carols, as well as Christmas dramas, which, at certain times and places, degenerated into farces or folk's feasts. Hence, also, originated at a later period the Christ trees, or Christmas trees, adorned with lights and gifts, the custom of reciprocity at presents and of special Christmas meals and dishes, dumplings, etc. Thus Christmas became a universal social feast of young and old, high and low, and as no other Christian festival could have become. At one time the festivities were continued until Candlemas and Twelfth day."

In England the Christmas plays are as much a part



"What a glorious picture!"

of the holidays as the stories are with Americans. Children through to the pantomimes, which are but the degeneration of the old dramatic representations of Christ's ascendancy of the religious, however, has been reduced. No trace of the religious, however, has been retained by the pantomimes, which tell some fairy tale and always have a Harlequin, a Columbine and other character actors familiar to children.

As to the stories, it was well within the life of Christoph von Schmid that the most popular of all was published. The "Christmas Carol" of Dickens made its appearance in London in 1843, and 15,000 copies were sold immediately by the firm that would buy many "They netted Dickens \$2000—a sum that would now, in more Christmas presents than it would now. In popular interest and sentiment the 'Carol' has been been without a rival.

THURSDAY, DECEMBER 12, 1912.

LAST

Do you or when you think like s than the re this great a few days

Clothing

If not, we will have most stores. We in Toronto and We are offering to for it ourselves. up, and you will Bohne's Clothing and other makes of limited.

The Christmas go: 24 buy here Remember in any of these

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