A CHRISTMAS STORY of LONDON

"Yes, you can have the tree for ninepence," said the stall woman, "only make up your minds one way or the other."

She spoke to the children impatiently, but not unkindly, busy as she was with the rush of customers that crowded about the stalls of the market anxious to make their Christmas purchases.

The man of the stall turned as his wife spoke and frowned as the two small figures that pressed against the corner of the stall, seemingly unable to purchase or to go away unsatisfied:.

"And be quick about it," he said. "We've no time to wait all night on the likes of you."

The children stood irresolute.

"We didn't count to give so much," the boy said; "we wanted some of the money over for the toys." He looked at the money that lay in his open hand, a sixpence, five broad penny pieces and two half-pence.

Beside him stood the little girl in a faded red cloak with the hood half drawn over her golden hair and blue eyes wide with fascinated eagerness.

Before the children on the stall counter where the woman had placed it, stood the Xmas tree, a brave little spruce, potted and trimmed, and with its glittering tin candle-holders only waiting for its Xmas tapers.

"Look-a-here," said the woman. "If you can't buy the tree, why don't you get something else instead? Why not get a flower in a pot; it's just as good. I'll let you have this one for fourpence, and it's a bargain, too, at that." With this she picked from a shelf and set down on the counter a lemon colored chrysanthemum that nodded its feathered head on its tall stem.

The little girl shook her head. "I want the tree," she said, half under her breath, her eyes, which never left the spruce, large with the vision of lighted tapers dancing upon its branches.

"But you see, Elsie," said the boy, "if we get the tree there ain't nothin' over for candies and toys."

And as he spoke he pointed with his thumb over his shoulder across the street to where the flaring gas lights of the toy stall illuminated its rows of dolls, drums and trumpets.

"Don't you see," he said, keeping down the choke in his voice, "if it all goes on the tree it won't be much of a surprise for mother after all."

In his own mind he saw it all well enough—the miscalculated little savings, the penny that should have been a shilling, the humble sum seemed doomed to shipwreck before the hard facts of the Christmas market.

It went hard. Mother would have liked it so much, mother who had to stay at home all day, now on a sofa in the dingy little home that the Christmas tree had been meant to brighten. The children had planned it all as a surprise—the tree brought home in secrecy, and suddenly revealed with its nodding tapers and its presents.

"See," said a woman's voice, "that was it, exactly such a little tree as that."

A trap had drawn up in the street just outside the flower stall. In it were a young man and a woman, evidently husband and wife.

The band of crape around the man's arm, and the deep mourning in which the woman was dressed, bore witness to a recent bereavement. But the signs of it were in the faces, too. The woman looked about her with sad eyes at the scene with its bright gas lights, its fresh falling snow and its group of merry purchasers. She was thinking of a little grave in the cemetery up on the hill and of a Christmas never to come again. It was just a year ago that they had bought a tree like this. And this year they had come to the Christmas market again. But they bought not for the living, but the dead. It was for the little grave beyond the hill.

"Tell him, John, to bring it," said the woman, "the little tree at the end of the counter where the two children are standing."

But the tall man had heard already. "The tree, madam," he said, coming out with it in his arms from the doorway to the stall, "Certainly, and a fine little tree it is, one shilling, ma'am."

The young fellow in the trap handed a shilling to the stallman, reached over from the trap and took the tree.

The children had turned from the stall, followed the tree to the side of the trap.

The little girl held to her brother's arm.

"They're taking our tree," she said.

Under the gaslight, the little face beneath the red hood showed pale and stricken with disappointment.

The woman in the trap had heard. She looked down at the children, and her eyes rested a moment on the little girl.

"Your tree?" she said; "were you wanting to buy it?"

"We had almost bought it for ninepence; we didn't count to give as much, because of the candles; but we were just going to say we would," the boy explained. He stared up at them, his face pale, his eyes aghast with sorrow and dismay.

"I said as they could have it for nine pence; they didn't seem able to make up their minds," the stallwoman explained.

Her husband looked back. "It's sold now," he said, roughly.

The young fellow in the trap hesitated, the tree still in his hands. He glanced at his wife. She smiled at him waveringly. "Yes, give it to them," she said.

It was the claim of the living against those of the dead, and his face worked. He bent low.

"Here," he called to the weeping child, "take your Christmas tree."

"Poor dears," said the woman. "Give them a bit of holly, too. They'll feel better if that has a bit of holly." She motioned him towards the great clusters at the back of the stall.

She took it from him, her sobs dying away.

"Here's the shilling, sir," said the boy.

He shook his head. "Keep it."

Sitting erect in the trap, they watched the children press gladly away. The girl still carried the Christmas tree, the boy talked excitedly, his money held fast in his hand. They were making for the toy stall.

The young husband turned to his wife. Her eyes, too, had wandered. They were resting sadly on a little holly wreath in the stall.

"That?" he questioned her.

She shuddered. "No, not that." Her glance fell, her eyes filled with tears.

He looked aside, caught sight of the lemon chrysanthemum stretching out its pale sweet blooms.

"Hilda——" he said.

She looked. Her eyes, too, were caught and steadied.

"Yes," she said slowly, "let us buy it for her. It is fresh and sweet and fair." She was thinking of the child she had lost. She bent her head. "It has nothing to do with death," she said.

Justice at Christmas

"I really don't see how I am going to get through this Christmas!" sighed little Mrs. Evans, the dressmaker. "I want to make it happy for mother, you know, and give her all the comforts she needs; but my expenses in other ways are pretty heavy."

"You surprise me," said her neighbor, Mrs. Baker, who had run in with a tumbler of jelly for the old lady. "The college girls like you so much, and give you so much to do, that I supposed you were quite prosperous."

"Oh, there's work enough," rejoined the other, a bit wearily. "But the girls are thoughtless. They order expensive dresses, often at the shortest possible notice — and pay when the fancy takes them. Most of them are friendly and pleasant-spoken, and a few of them pay promptly. These are not the rich ones, either. You can depend much more on the poor girls, who have to plan closely. A bill means more to them."

"It's a shame," murmured her friend, sympathetically.

"Did you notice that tall girl who was just going out with a suit case and a box as you cae in?" asked Mrs. Evans. "That's Miss Richards. Isn't she handsome? She's a sophomore; and they say she's one of the most popular girls in college. Well, she came in here a week ago, and said she'd just got to have a dress made to take away this afternoon. College closes to-day for the holidays. She's going home with one of the other girls, and there's some special party in her honor to-morrow night. She coaxed me until I promised to do it, though I had more on hand already than I knew how to put through.

"Well, the dress turned out a beauty. I wish you could have seen it: pale blue charmeuse, with Irish lace; just the thing for her complexion. And this afternoon in she sails, just before traintime, and says it's 'wonderful,' and she's 'so much obliged, Mrs. Evans.' She can hardly wait to have it put in the box, and sails out again with never a word about the bill. You'd think it might occur to her that I might have some special plans for the holidays, to say nothing of the fact that I bought the lace and findings out of my own pocket, and shall be out that much extra until the bill is paid."

"It's simply outrageous!" exclaimed Mrs. Baker. "When do you suppose she will condescend to pay you?"

"Oh, some time in the middle of the winter, perhaps. But I've no doubt she'll buy a lot of fine Christmas presents for her friends. And I shouldn't be at all surprised if she even sent me a pretty Christmas card. Well, I guess Christmas cards are about all I shall be sending this year."

"I call such performances downright dishonest!" cried the indignant Mrs. Baker.

"No, it's not that," replied the little dressmaker. "Theyre good girls, and are sure to pay some time, but they just don't stop to think. And I don't believe they've been taught as they should be. I hear Miss Richards is planning to do settlement work among the poor. I guess the poor could teach her a few things about paying for things promptly."

"I guess they could," said her neighbor.

SOME HOLIDAY ADVICE.

Here are some bits of advice which the woman who has the true holiday spirit in her heart should follow:

First, finish up all shopping as soon as possible. There are always some last-minute purchases necessary. Someone has been forgotten, or something neccessary for the tree or the stockings has been forgotten. But sit down now and make out a list of the things you know about now that you need before Christmas and buy them tomorrow if possible.

Second, don't plan to do more than you can do without making yourself ill. If you feel nervous and rushed with work to finish your Christmas gifts, don't finish them. Send letters or cards instead of the gifts you had planned to make. Remember, that you owe it to your family not to be ill or tired to the point of exhaustion or nervous on Christmas Day.

Send your Christmas gifts as early as you can send them. The attractive tags that are sold now to put on Christmas boxes to warn those who receive them that the boxes are not to be opened until Christmas can be used on the boxes sent now. But remember that the express men and the postal clerks and carriers will be overworked for the next three days, and try to make their work easier by sending your gifts at once.

The world is a cage in which humanity is tamed.

Money may help a man who helps himself.

DON'TS FOR CHRISTMAS.

Things to Be Avoided During the Merry Season.

Don't send celluloid Christmas cards to your friends. They are dangerous.

Don't use cotton wool for Christmas decorations, or for dressing up children as "snow fairies," or adults as Santa Claus. It is almost as inflammable as celluloid, and may be even more dangerous to life and limb.

Remember that there is never a Christmas passes that does not witness numerous fatalities due to neglect of this rule, and some of them are of the most shocking character, as, for instance, when five little girls were burnt to death at Chesterfield the Christmas before last owing to a spark falling upon one of their cotton-wool dresses.

Don't have naked lights on Christmas trees. Only so recently as last Christmas, Mr. and Mrs. Robert A. Raetze, prominent members of New York's "Four Hundred," were burned to death through lighting candles on a Christmas-tree, erected in a drawing-room for the pleasure of their children. The tree dry as tinder, caught fire, and soon the house, with all its costly tapestry and valuable furniture and art treasures, was in flames. Mr. and Mrs. Raetze could have escaped by walking out of the front door, but instead of doing so, they rushed upstairs in search of their youngest child.

Better bar snapdragon from your list of children's games. If you must have it, however, be careful not to start replenishing the dying flames in the dish by pouring spirit on them out of a bottle. There have been dozens of fatalities recorded owing to this idiotic practice, and hundreds of minor accidents. The flame is very apt to leap up, and communicate with the spirit in the bottle, which then, of course, explodes, with disastrous results to all concerned.

Small white china dolls, known as "pudding dolls," are put by many people into their Christmas puddings in order to surprise and amuse the children. Don't you do this. The little ones are apt to swallow the dolls, under the impression that they are almonds or bits of suet, and if they get stuck in the air passages asphyxia may very easily result.

When pulling Christmas crackers, do not remove the "snap" from its ornamental outer case, or cover; neither is it advisable to grasp the ends of the case, and tear the whole cracker apart in the middle. The proper way to pull a Christmas cracker is for the two people concerned to grasp the opposite ends of the snap between their forefinger and thumb, and give a short, sharp pull.

In this way any small flying particles resulting from the explosion are caught and arrested by the surrounding case. There are many instances of people, especially children, having been blinded through neglect of this precaution.

Remember that the Christmas cracker snap is made from fulminate of mercury, probably about the most powerful explosive known to science—its strength is many times greater than that of dynamite—and although the quantity placed inside each individual cracker is very, very small, it is, nevertheless, sufficiently large to do irretrievable damage to the eyes of a too inquisitive child.—London Answers.

SEEMS TO ME.

Seems to me the stars shine brighter
Christmas night;
Seems to me the snow lies whiter
Christmas night;
That the solemn trees stand straighter,
And the frosty moon sets later,
And the hush is stiller, greater,
Christmas night.

Seems to me sad things are fewer
Christmas night;
Seems to me glad things are truer
Christmas night;
Seems to me the bells ring clearer
From their steeples, louder, nearer,
Seems to me the whole world's dearer
Christmas night!

How to Cook Your Xmas Goose

The goose is the time-honored Christmas bird. And there are even more ways of stuffing and roasting a goose than there are ways of stuffing and roasting a turkey.

Before the stuffing, however, comes the choosing. And this is an important part of the peparation of the Christmas goose.

A goose is never fit to eat after it is three years old, and is far better when it is less than three. The young goose has smooth, yellow legs, free from feathers. Its breastbone bends easily if the goose is tender as it should be. If the feathers are left on the wings, as they sometimes are, they should be sharp and pointed in a young bird, blunt in an old bird. The windpipe in a young goose is flexible and easily moved between the thumb and fingers.

The flesh, of course, should be plump and elastic to the touch. The feet should have short, sharp claws, as the claws of an old bird are long and blunt.

So much for the choosing. Next comes the stuffing, and about this there is a good deal of difference of opinion.

Some persons put a few pared apples and onions in a goose and remove them when the goose is cooked.

Here is an old recipe for stuffing the Christmas goose: Season mashed potatoes with pepper, salt and butter, sage and onion juice to make a savory stuffing. Fill the goose with this.

Another old recipe calls for bread crumbs, chopped apples, sage, onion juice, salt, pepper and a little butter.

Still another stuffing is made in this way: Cook four peeled and cored apples and four onions in a saucepan until they are tender and then rub them through a sieve. Add to them half a teaspoonful of sage, pepper, salt, half a teaspoonful of thyme and a cupful of mashed potatoes.

After the goose is stuffed rub it well with lard or sprinkle it thoroughly with flour. Put it in a roasting pan, season with salt and pepper, add half a cupful of boiling water and roast, basting often, until it is tender. Cook the giblets and chop them. Mix them with the gravy in the pan in which the goose was cooked, thicken slightly, skim off the grease and serve as gravy.

Here is a way to cook a goose with a different sort of dressing from any of those yet described: Rub the goose the night before it is wanted with salt, pepper, sage and sweet marjorum, inside and out. Make a dressing the next day of a handful of seeded raisins, the same amount of currants, a cupful of chopped sour apples, a mealy boiled potato, some butter and bread crumbs to make enough to fill the goose. Use no spices or other seasoning.

PRAISES FOR PLUM PUDDING.

"I have no patience," said one of our best-known physicians to the writer, "with the people who heap abuse on that grand British institution the Christmas pudding. They are marpleasures, who would, if they could, rob life of all its enjoyment. Why, so far from being harmful, plum-pudding is a most nutritious dish; and, if properly made, at least as digestible as most foods. My sympathies are all with the boy who demands "another slice."

If there is any danger at all in plum-pudding, it is because it comes last in a too liberal meal, and thus has to bear the blame of the courses that have proceded it. This is its misfortune, not its fault; and, even so, it would be harmless enough if people would only restrain their appetites a little, eat at the proper time, and assist digestion by excercise as they do on other days.

Our advice to all who wish to enjoy their Christmas dinner to the full without fear of consequences is to eat it in the evening—not at midday—when the digestive organs are at their best; and to help digestion by providing plenty of fuel in the shape of oxygen. This is best done by walking.—London Answers.

A Ballad of Christmas

With the old familiar sign
The festival divine
Ruddies the snow-clogged way,
Butchers' and toy shops flame—
Because the Lord Christ came
To wash our sins away.

Without 'tis merry snowing,
A-roaring and a-blowing;
Within the wine is flowing,
And men and maids are jolly
With mistletoe and holly—
Because the Lord Christ gave
Himself our souls to save

Yet underneath the singing,
The fiddling and the flinging,
A thought I cannot still
Stalks like a guest unbidden,
Steals like a secret hidden,
Laying its fingers chill
Upon the heart of mirth
That laughs for Jesus's birth.
(Out on such melancholy,
With mistletoe and holly!)

From an old book I read,
Somewhere within my head
The story lingers—
Of a grim castle hold,
In dreaming days of old,
And knights and singers,
And ladies clad in vair,
And a great feasting there,
Torches and swords in air—
Then in some lull of mirth,
From far beneath the earth
Came there a wailing—
The wind, was it, waiding?
A voice of woe so vast
It held the feasters fast:
So might the lost in hell
Pierce for a little spell
The peace of Paradise
With uncouth cries.

Once more the feasters laughed,
cozened their fears and quaffed—
'Twas but the knaves that lay,
Far from the light of day,
Beneath their dancing feet,
Rotting and raving,
Chained down 'mid rats and slime
Cast out of space and time—
Souls not worth saving!
So kept they Lord Christ's day
In the time fled away.

What was my thought, though?
Hearken the whispering snow
Against the pane;
Lord Christ! the wind doth blow
A wild refrain;
Louder, O music, play,
Nimbler, O dancers, glide—
Nay! music, cease to play,
Dancers, a space abide,
Hearken yon wailing—
The wind, is it, wailing?

Nay, 'tis the folk that lie
Out in the night there,
The men that starve and die
Far from the light there;
From the oubliettes of pain,
From wheel and rack and chain,
Beneath your dancing feet,
Tripping so fleet, so sweet,
From folk that rave and rot,
Forsaken and forgot,
Comes the wild wind's refrain,
Comes all that wailing
To-day as long ago,
Long as the wind shall blow,
Long as shall fall the snow.

(But merry is the street,
And merry is the hall,
And a merry Christmas, gentles all!)

SHEPHERD'S VISION DEPICTED.

Announcement of the Birth of the Saviour.

It must have been about midnight, writes Thomas Nelson Page in Scribner's. The moon had crept slowly up the sky and flooded the hills with light. The oldest of the shepherds was on watch, while the others slept. Many things revolved in his mind—the promises to Abraham and to his seed forever—the words of peace that the traveller from Nazareth had spoken, swept through his memory. He began to dream. And the first thing that struck him was the strange behavior of the sheep in the folds. They rose from the ground and facing towards the mountain, knelt as lambs kneel at their mother's sides. But they were all still, as still as if carved of stone.

And while he wondered, suddenly there stood near him—so suddenly that it was as if he had dropped down upon him—a presence. He had no time to question—a light—a glory unimaginable—brighter than the moon—more glorious than the sun—like the glory of the Lord. It awoke some of the others. It was round about them, and they were sore afraid. Then a voice sounded in their ears—and the angel said unto them:—"Fear not; for behold I bring you good tidings of great joy, which shall be to all people; for unto you is born this day in the city of David, a Saviour, which is Christ the Lord, and this shall be a sign unto you; ye shall find the babe wrapped in swaddling clothes lying in a manger."

Astonished and still terrified—stunned beyond thought—the shepherds lay as they had been found—and suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the Heavenly host, praising God, and saying, "Glory to God in the Highest, and on earth peace to men of good will." Then they went away upward—up into the Heaven—and only the shepherds were left on the earth with their flocks. When they recovered their courage and looked up, the sky was as usual on clear and cloudless nights—and only the moon was shining down, flooding the fields with light. They began to talk in low tones of what they had seen and heard, and to wonder what it all meant.