

THE LEGEND OF SAINT NICHOLAS.

In old Italian story, ere Florence went astray,
Mistaken by wealth and glory, in stern, sad Dante's day,
A certain Knight, in hard-fought fight, was captured by his foe,
Who swore a fierce, unkindly oath he would not let him go
Without a ransom such as might a king or prince set free—
Ten thousand golden crowns paid down—and that right speedily.
The Knight refused these cruel terms; they cast him then straightway
Into the castle's oubliette, where one poor loaf a day
And draught of water—less and less—were let down by a cord,
While a hoarse voice above exclaimed: "By order of my lord
Again I ask, wilt thou, Sir Knight, make terms for thy release?
If not—to-morrow—any day—thy dole of food may cease."
"I will not cast my children's bread to dogs," the answer came.
"I will not bring my babes and wife to beggary and shame.
I cannot raise ten thousand crowns—nor would I if I could.
Far better that my enemy should triumph in my blood
Than Pia with her sweet sad eyes, and Nella with her smiles,
And sweet Costanza, rosy-lipped, all kisses and all wiles,
Should come to poverty through me; for who is there but knows
The hardships that a maid of rank, undowered, undergoes?"

But his lady fair discovered where her lord was held in prison.
In her woman's might, for her own true Knight, to the rescue she has risen.
She has mortgaged their castle stern and grim, and all she can sell has sold;
She has pledged the dower she brought to him for three thousand crowns in gold;
She has pawned her tapestries, lace and plate, her jewels and robes and furs—
There is nothing in all her coffers left of the treasures that once were hers.
Still, lands and stuff were not enough to set the captive free:
A thousand golden crowns she lacks to buy his liberty.

She has taken her three little girls by the hand, Costanza, Nella, and Pia,
And she stands with shame on her glowing face, in open day in the market-place,
She holds out her hand with a piteous grace, and alms drop down at her feet space,
For her wifely courage and woeful case melt the hearts of all who see her.

The ransom was completed thus by public charity.
They weighed the gold, its tale they told; they set the captive free.
The gallant Knight with armor bright he to the fight had sped;
A broken cripple he came back, with bowed and silvered head.
He entered his courtyard still and bare; no wife came forth with greeting;
Costanza, Pia, and Nella were there, with tearful eyes and a frightened stare,
"Where is your mother, children—where! Is this our longed-for meeting?"

"Oh! father, come; you must make her wake; she lies all white on her bed."
They took his hand and they led him up to the chamber of the dead.

A dull despair came over him there, and it lasted many a day.
The damp, the mould, the cruel cold of that fatal cell on his life had told:
They had made him a man prematurely old, and had turned his black locks gray.

Not far from the good Knight's garden wall a little low hut there stood,
Where he whom we call Saint Nicholas dwelt, then only known as the Good.
We know how he looks from our story-books, as he travels our land of snow.
But he was a Florentine cobbler once, in the far off Long Ago.
He was old and gray, and merry, they say, and his cheeks though withered, were red.
His dress was leather, whatever the weather, with a hood to pull over his head.
He saw the Knight sit night after night alone in a big straw chair;
He could hear him groan as he sat alone, and wrestled with dumb despair.
"I shall die; I am dying," was ever his plaint; "and alas! when I am gone,
My three poor portionless pretty maids will be left in the world alone.
These poor little feeble creatures left to the cruel mercies of men—
Costanza seven, and Nella eight, and Pia, the eldest, ten.
I cannot even provide the fee each convent asks with a nun,
O Father, strengthen my heart for me till I say, Thy will be done!"

"Alas! alas!" good Nicholas cried, when he heard the sad Knight's words,
"I see it needs hope to prop up faith and to bend our wills to the Lord's.
Last night I saw Costanza sweet feed a bird with her scanty bread,
And blithe little Nella blew me a kiss as she mounted the stairs to bed:
And motherly, patient, pious, and good is the eldest of all them—Pia;
I think the angels must love that child as they bend from their thrones and see her
Patiently sewing and mending by night, and hearing her sisters praters,
And folding their clothes and making them neat, with her little motherly airs.
I have good in my chest the Lord has blessed my labors from day to day:
Three thousand crowns in gold I hold till He shall give it away.
'Twas His by vow, long ago, and now I wait His word
To say in my heart, 'Rise, do thy part, bestow the gift of the Lord.'"

I seem to hear that voice draw near. Speak, Lord; is it really so?
My dearest Lord, may I spend my hoard? In Thy name may I go
And rain on this desolate house a shower, a shower of golden rain,
Till each sweet flower beneath its power shall blossom in hope again?
But, ah! I must do my part in stealth, for kindness may be unkind
If it woundeth the pride of a noble race, and leaveth a sting behind."

He sat down then on his cobbler's bench, and he made him a bag to hold,
Packed close and tight, a thousand bright red crowns of Venetian gold.
The bells at midnight rang out clear on Christmas Eve so merrily
When the good man crept like a thief in the night on his errand of charity.
The sad Knight keeping his lonely watch sat still in his big straw chair,
And the maidens three in their purity asleep in their chamber were.
He gave one look—good aim he took—the bag fell flop on the floor;
It burst, and out of it rained the Knight a golden shower did pour.
Upon the bag there was written thus: "Take this and dower thy Pia,
God loves the faithful, and His eyes with sweet approval see her."

Down on his face the father fell, the gold all scattered round him.
"God will provide," a kind voice cried; "never again misdoubt Him."

The next night came good Nicholas, cautious, by by-paths creeping,
When all the town had gone to rest, and the three babes were sleeping.
"How shall I fling my bag," he said, "to-night for little Nella?
I would not have it miss its mark, and yet to-night the house is dark;
I cannot see of light a spark, from coping-stone to cellar."

But as he spake out peeped the Moon—sweet Lady Moon soft-hearted,
And with a smile the curtain clouds that hid her face she parted.
She let a shining beam fall where the old Knight was lying,
And in a moment, quick as thought, another bag came flying.
The Knight sprang quickly to his feet, still deeming he was dreaming,
But through the window on the floor a flood of light was streaming,
And Lady Moon peeped down to see (for she had none to tell her)
How the glad father joyfully received the bag marked "Nella."

The third night came, this time all black with clouds and drenching rain,
Saint Nicholas to his good work crept stealthily again.
He carried in his hand a bag on which were writ these words:
"For her who, though in need herself, yet fed God's little birds."
But as he raised his arm to fling this his last gift of gold,
Two arms behind him clasped him tight, with a convulsive hold.

The arms that grasped him were the Knight's. "Oh, Nicholas," cried he,
"Servant of God, why should you seek to hide yourself from me?
Here in my little maidens' names I humbly kiss thy hands,
And pray this deed that thou hast done be told through many lands."
"Nay, nay, Sir Knight, I beg, I pray—I kneel upon my knee—
Let this thing be a secret kept between thyself and me.
I love, when all are sound asleep, to creep by stealth at night,
And comfort little lonely babes, or add some new delight
To those that happy homes provide for good girls and good boys.
If watched, how could I carry round my sweetmeats, cakes, and toys?
Be silent, then, Sir Knight; some day my mission will be over;
Then tell them all (for then you may) I was the children's lover."
But as he spoke the midnight bells seemed as by one endeavor
To ring out softly like a chime. Forever—ever—ever!

Eight hundred years have passed, and still the good saint has permission
On every Christmas Eve to start upon his happy mission.
He carries round the world that night (to fill our hearts with wonder)
Gifts to make children's Christmas bright, and burst their socks asunder.
His name is now a household word, to no one land restricted,
But world-wide and "for evermore," as the church chimes predicted.
We know him, love him; his pet name we hail with glad applause,
All happy children's patron saint, our own dear Santa Claus.

—Harper's Magazine for December.

A Fine Fellow.

He may be, but if he tells you that any preparation in the world is as good as Putnam's Painless Corn Extractor distrust the advice. Imitations only prove the value of Putnam's Painless Corn Extractor. See signature on each bottle of Polson & Co. Get "Putnam's."

The question why "t" is silent in "often," "soften," "hasten," "castle," and kindred words, has been explained on the ground of physics and environment. This explanation is entirely correct, the "t" in the words named being placed between conson-

ants which are pronounced more easily than the hard and sharp "t" is. As a matter of convenience or laziness therefore the "t" was dropped, and the less pedantic pronunciation has become the standard.

Colonel Ingersoll declares that "no man has a right to own more land than he can use." The Colonel should explain the uses he has for one half a ranch in New Mexico, ninety miles long and sixty miles wide. A St. Louis editor, who started without a cent forty years ago, is now worth \$100,000. His fortune is all swing to his own energy, industry and frugality, and the fact that an uncle recently left him \$99,999.99.

Happy Responses.

Andrew Jackson, it is related, was at one time entertained at dinner by a gentleman, and among those present was one of those people who often find their way into story books, etc., as the style of that offensive class of Americans who are always trailing their nationality in the dust in the effort to extract their individual independence. This particular gentleman, over the wines and walnuts after dinner, in order to emphasize his own independence of disposition, of which he was loudly boastful, remarked to General Jackson:

"I always vote against you, sir."
The company was naturally rendered speechless by this unexpected disclosure, and the scene actually looked squalid; but General Jackson put a stopper on the boastful individual and avoided further trouble by amilingly remarking:
"And I, sir, have always fought the battles of my country that you might enjoy that privilege."

Another instance of a happy response is that of an old Southern judge, but whether judge by courtesy or in fact, the writer cannot state, who must have had the faculty of quick and appropriate reply pretty well developed, if the story related of him is true. Speaking at a certain place one evening in the interest of his own candidacy of Congress, some one in the audience, who evidently had a good memory, inquired:

"Didn't you speak here just before the war?"
"I did," promptly responded the judge.
"And didn't you say we could whip the durned Yankees with pop-guns?"
"I did," replied the unabashed judge, "but confound 'em, they wouldn't fight that way."

Peculiarities of the Trout.

A writer in Chambers' Journal says, "I put a quarter pound trout, along with others, into a perfectly barren loch. In two years some of these trout attained to four and a quarter pounds weight, developing huge fins and square or rounded tails, lost all spots, took on a coat of dark slime, grew huge teeth and became ferocious in that short time. The common brown trout, taken from a very high burn in the hills, in two years became indistinguishable from the salmon ferret. The first year they grew to a pound or a pound and a half, took on a bright silver sheen of scales, were deep and high shouldered, lusty and powerful. This was when their feeding and condition were at their best; but as the food decreased the trout rapidly increased in number, spawning in innumerable quantities, and with no enemies the larger fish began to prey on the smaller, grew big teeth, swam deep and lost color, grew large fins and a big head, and became salmo ferex, so called."

YOUNG MEN suffering from the effects of early evil habits, the result of ignorance and folly, who find themselves weak, nervous and exhausted; also MILDLY-AGED and OLD MEN who are broken down from the effects of abuse or over-work, and in advanced life feel the consequences of youthful excess, send for and read M. V. LUBON'S Treatise on Diseases of Men. The book will be sent free to any address on receipt of two 3c. stamps. Address M. V. LUBON, 47 Wellington St. E. Toronto, Ont.

Troubles are hard to take, though they strengthen the soul. Tonics are always bitter. —T. De Witt Talmage.

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Slippery places may fling up the heels of great giants, and little temptations may overthrow well-grown Christians.—Lee.

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Sufferers are not generally aware that these diseases are contagious, or that they are due to the presence of living parasites in the lining membrane of the nose and catarrhal tubes. Microscopic research, however, has proved this to be a fact, and the result is that a simple remedy has been formulated whereby catarrh, catarrhal deafness and hay fever are cured in from one to three simple applications made at home. A pamphlet explaining this new treatment is sent free on receipt of stamp by A. H. Dixon & Son, 808 King Street West, Toronto, Canada.

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