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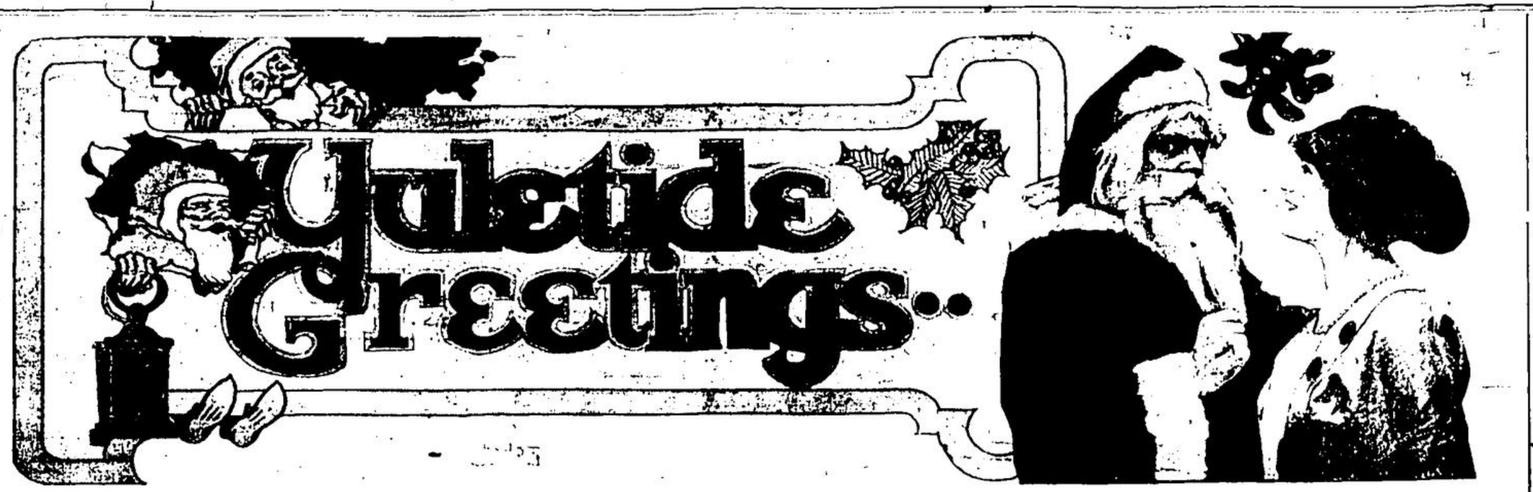

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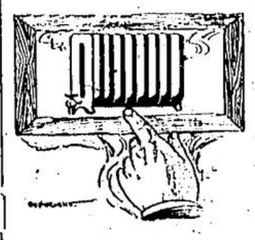

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Poetry.

SANTA CLAUS

I used to watch for Santa Claus
With childish faith sublime,
And listen in the snowy night
To hear his sleigh bells chime,
Beside the door on Christmas Eve,
I put a truss of hay
To feed the prancing, dancing steeds
That sped him on his way.

I pictured him a jolly man,
With beard of frosty white,
And cheeks so fat that when he laughed
They hid his eyes from sight;
A heart that overflowed with love
For little girls and boys,
And on his back a bulging pack
Brimful of gorgeous toys.

If children of a larger growth
Could have a Christmas tree
From Father Time, one gift alone
Would be enough for me—
Let others take the gems and gold,
And trifles light and vain,
But give me back my old belief
In Santa Claus again!

Select Family Reading

BOBBY

By Chas. George Smith

BOBBY was a wee wisp of a boy. He was ten years old, and yet he could only just see into the shop windows or above the table by straining on tip-toe. Not that he had any table to see above as a rule, for he and his mother were homeless. They spent their days wandering about the thronging streets of London selling bunches of flowers for a penny a piece, and they were glad enough sometimes to get even a warm doorstep to sleep on at night. It was a bitterly cold night in December and Bobby and his mother had come to their last penny. It was the Sunday before Christmas, and they watched the ladies robed in silks and furs come daintily down the steps of the big mansions in Cavendish Square, holding light shawls before their mouths (for the wind was in the east) and stepping into their easy, warm-lined carriages, drive off.

After watching them for some time Bobby grew very cold. He had only a thin shirt on, worn into holes, a little jacket out at the elbows, and a torn pair of trousers that hung in rags about his ankles, affording no protection against the cutting wind. He shivered like an aspen leaf, his teeth began to chatter, and he tucked his bony blue hands under his arms to get them warm. "Mother," he said, "its rare and cold. Can't us get somewhere warm to sleep in to-night?"

"No," she answered, "we've only a penny left, and we shall both want something to eat; we can't be warm and have bread, Bobby; that 'ud be too much." And she uttered a faint, bitter laugh.

After a long pause Bobby spoke again.

"Mother, where do all them ladies go?"

"To church."

"Aye; but what is church?"

"A great place, all lighted up, where they have music, and where all the rich folks sits and listens, and are warm and comfortable."

Bobby was silent for a while, pattering along the pavement with his little frozen feet. Presently they came in sight of All Saints' Church, a huge gothic building, all lighted up, casting a warm glow out into the dreary night and revealing in letters of flaming gold the beautiful and deathless words of Jesus, inscribed on one of the richly stained windows: "Suffer the little children to come unto Me." Fierce gusts of wind whirled around the corner of Margaret Street.

"Let's go in," urged Bobby, clutching at his mother's faded gown.

"Bless you, they wouldn't let the likes of us in; why, its for rich folk."

"Let's try," pleaded Bobby, under his breath, "mebbe they won't see us, and it's bitter cold out here."

"It is bitter cold!" she muttered, and more from apathy and misery than from any desire to see what was inside, she followed the boy up the massive stone steps, and unnoticed they slipped into a vacant pew at the back of the church.

The service had just commenced, and the worshippers, led by the mighty organ and the fresh ringing boys' voices, were taking up the ever-popular strain;

"As with gladness men of old
Did the guiding star behold;
As with joy they hailed its light,
Leading onward, beaming bright;
So, most gracious God may we
Evermore be led to thee."

Bobby sat entranced. He had never heard anything like that before, though he had always lived in London. Neither he nor his mother could read. Bobby's heart glowed within him.

"Ain't this first-rate?" he whispered. "Mother, is this 'aven?"

But his mother didn't hear. She was gazing dreamily before her, apparently recollecting the time when she knelt at the marriage altar in the dim past, the only other occasion she had ever been in a church. All Saints, like half the other churches in the West end, is high and ritualistic and those poor outcasts were at a loss how to conduct themselves. Several times the people were kneeling but these two failed to notice. Once when they all rose from their knees Bobby said: "I guess we ought to have knelt down like the other folks, but," he added, with superficial philosophy, "nobody seed us, so it don't matter."

Soon he saw a man walk up to the place above the heads of the congregation.

"What's you lie's stood up in?" he inquired.

"Hush," his mother answered. "It's a pulpit. You listen, he's going to talk."

He did "talk" too, for it was the Bishop of London himself, the simplest and most searching preacher in all his great diocese. He was a young man, not more than forty, with a pale, pure face, and eyes that had a wonderful fire and earnestness in them. He announced his text in a rich, ringing voice, that thrilled through the building: "Thine eyes shall behold the King in His beauty." In earnest words he told of the vision we may all have of the King, in the manger, on Calvary, in glory, and without which vision our yuletide would be poor indeed. Then he began to talk of the place where the King lives: the shining city, with golden streets and great pearly gates which were never shut, so that the weary, the sick, or the needy, might always enter in. Poor little Bobby! It was so beautiful he could hardly believe it all, as he sat eagerly listening, with his tangled hair hanging in festoons about his great childish eyes.

"Could it be really true?"

Then again the preacher leaned forward and pleaded with his people.

"Is there none of you here," he said, "who will leave the life of selfish pleasure, and give yourselves wholly to Him and enter the little strife now to win the great glory and peace afterwards?"

Bobby was so carried away by the preacher's fire that he was just going to start up and cry out that "he'd go if anyone 'ud show him the way, when he remembered himself and turned to look at his mother. She was still gazing before her, in that curious absent way, as though she scarcely heard. Then all the people stood up and she took Bobby by the hand and hurried out of the church.

"They're all coming out now," she said, as soon as they got outside, "we had best get outside. "we'd best get out of the way."

"Did you ever hear the like of that, mother?" said Bobby, when they had both slackened their pace a little. "I never knew there was such a beautiful place anywhere, as he talked about. Do ye know what King it is? Couldn't we go?"

"I never heard of any king as was ever beautiful," she answered, thoughtfully, in that dense ignorance of the London poor, hardly to be imagined by those who have never come in contact with it.

"Do you think father knew anything about the King?"

"No, I doubt he didn't Bobby, or he wouldn't ha' died."

The tears slowly gathered in her eyes as she spoke. If it were true, if they had only known where the good King was, perhaps He could have saved him. But she did not say anything. The poor are so used to suffering of all kinds. Suffering had made her incredulous too, of any real good. But it was otherwise to Bobby. His mind harped constantly on one subject—if only he could see the King! Everything would surely be right. The next day a bitter frost set in, and a dense fog blotted out every ray of sunlight. The pavements were thick with ice, and the pedestrians hurried past with their Christmas packages in cautious strides, for it was almost impossible to keep a foot hold. It was a bad day for trade at the street corner and the basket of violets that Bobby and his mother were selling went very slowly. Presently, Bobby caught sight of a lady on the opposite corner who often bought of them, selling two bunches he darted off to catch her as fast as his feet would carry him. The crossing was dangerous—a mass of slippery, uneven ice—but he managed to get safely to the "island" stand in the middle. He had just commenced the second half of his journey, when a handsom sharply rounded the corner and suddenly swerved aside to avoid a big dray. There is no need to describe what followed. A hundred such things happen every year in this great city—a little ragged boy knocked down and run over, a tall dark figure darting in among the staggering horses and tenderly bearing the child out again, its face white as death; the violets crushed and dirty, still clutched in one little hand that was whole; a woman, weeping and wringing her hands, following. This is all the world saw. "Poor child!" it said; "but boys are so foolhardy, and they are always in the way."

They laid the little mangled form on a comfortable cot in one of the big wards of "Bart's." The nurses and doctors shook their heads. There was no hope. The little life was slipping rapidly away. In response to his mother's pitiful plea: "Let me with him, sir; he's all I have!" they allowed her to remain by the cot. During the most of that long evening Bobby was unconscious. The fever ran high and he talked incessantly. Sometimes he fancied he was selling violets, and would say pitiously please lady, buy; mother an' me haint nothing to eat!" Anon he fancied he was shivering in the east wind although there was a huge fire in the grate. But most often his mind would run on the great theme that had absorbed it before the accident. "If only we could see Him, so beautiful and kind. He'd take care of us and we'd never be unhappy any more, never hungry, never thirsty, never no more pain." His voice sank to a whisper and he dropped into a

(Continued on Page 4)