

at Christmas. This was reserved for New Year's Day, which we called St. Basil's Day, and the gifts St. Basiliques. The young troubadours were again abroad on New Year's eve; but you must not think that they were any less eagerly awaited than when they first came. Their tune this time was livelier. They sang of St. Basil's life for about five minutes, and then verses—home-made, like their instruments—about the children and young ladies of the household. Many were made about me, but the one I liked best was one that said: "When your mother was about to give you birth, She knelt before the ikons and prayed: 'May God give her beauty, Give her black eyes, Give her golden hair, And give her arched eyebrows.'"

Beyond the black eyes I have nothing to show that my mother's prayer was granted. But I looked on the song as most befitting me, and took much satisfaction in it.

Another song, only second in favor, declared,

"Your figure is like a cypress-tree; Your complexion is like a June rose; Your eyes the color of heaven, And your heart a pure jasmine."

I was always as little as a minute, and the cypress-tree reference to my height never failed to please me.

The singers were again rewarded with a package of food in their bag and pennies in their hands, and went away after singing this last verse:

"Here, where we have sung, May not even a stone be broken, And may the master of the house live for a thousand years."

On New Year's Day, as I have said, presents were exchanged, and the gentlemen called on the ladies. A large table was set in the drawing-room, laden with salad, eggs, cold chicken and other meats, cakes, and wine; and every visitor to the house, whether rich or poor, had to eat in order that he might have broken bread with the family and be friends for the ensuing year. Each family, moreover, made it a point of honor to supply the poor of the neighborhood with coal, rice, and meat.

The last time I witnessed Christmas in the East I was seventeen years old; yet the excitement of it gripped me as completely as it used to when a child.

The Borrowed Stockings.

Minnie Reid French.

Grandfather sat in his big arm-chair With Bible opened at some loved place. Grandmother bent o'er a stitch she dropped, To hide the tears stealing down her face. It was Christmas Eve, but the old home nest Was empty and quiet, the birdies flown; And only the old folks, withered, gray, Were left to dream by the hearth, alone.

Their neighbor sat by her windowed hearth, And sadly gazed at the little row Of stockings hung with such perfect faith. By the eager children an hour ago. While they gaily talked of the Christ-mastide, She strove to speak, but her lips were dumb— How could she tell them the bitter truth, That, this year, Santa Claus would not come?



A gentle tap at her cottage door! Rising, she wiped the tears from her eyes; With trembling fingers she raised the latch, Then started forward in glad surprise. For, standing outside in the falling snow Were two who were gray, and bent, and old, With baskets heaped full of Christmas cheer, And bundles more than their arms could hold.



"We've come to borrow some stockings to fill," Grandfather said in a quavering tone. "We long for the sight of them, mother and I. Since all our dear little ones are gone, Santa Claus hasn't come to our house for years. Because no children expect him there; But we thought we might tempt him back again. If you only had some stockings to spare."



Such a merry Christmas dawned next day After all the sorrow, and grief, and tears! In His wisdom and love, God planned it all, As He plans our days, our months, and years. Assurance He gave to the needy ones That His tender mercy should never cease; And upon the empty and lonely hearts, He bestowed the gift of His perfect peace.

Once there were faces, young and fair, Filling the house with springtime bloom; Once there were voices gay and sweet, Merrily ringing from room to room. And beside the old fireplace, wide and deep, The stockings hung in those days of yore; Now the old folks sigh for the wandering feet, And the feet that will wander never more.



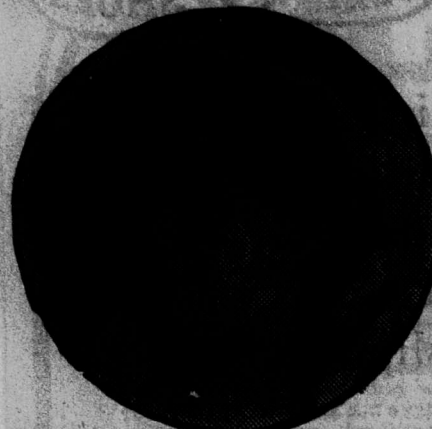
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