

A Christmas Princess

By W. R. Gilbert

A full minute they stood facing the king. In that minute, by the light of the jewel of Truth, the king and the princess learned many things. The king saw the tender, yearning love in the heart of his daughter. The princess saw deep into the empty, hungry heart of her father and understood him as never before.

"My child!" cried the king, and the princess ran to him with happy tears.

"My grandchild!" cried the king, and folded the beautiful boy in his arms.

Now, the king, in embracing the princess, had allowed the precious stone to slip from his grasp and it fell to the marble floor of the chamber, chipping off a tiny fragment. The page hastened to pick up the stone. As he did so, he felt it taken from his fingers and a melodious voice said: "Farewell, O King! Farewell, happy princess and charming child! Farewell, valiant page!" For a moment the Fairy Truth appeared before them, surpassingly sweet. In a twinkling she was gone; and on the marble floor lay the tiny chip from the Jewel of Truth.

"See," cried the page, "she has left us a chip off the Truth Jewel!"

"So she has," agreed the king.

"So she has," echoed the princess.

"So she has," cried the child, and they all looked at one another.

It was none of your modern Christ-masses of warm sunshine and balmy breezes, deluding mankind into the belief that spring itself is near at hand, only to chill poor credulous fools with biting winds and belated frosts, a few weeks later.

No, it was the real old-fashioned Yuletide of our youth, with ice and snow on the ground, and thick white rime on the trees, and when night came—a brilliant star of promise in the East.

On this correct Christmas eve a little figure trudged along the frosty roads, knee deep in crisp, white snow. He left the lights of the town behind, and followed the beckoning star shining above. Along the lonely highway he went till he reached a road where houses standing in their own grounds loomed large to right and left.

The boy opened the gate of one garden, and walked timidly up the drive. One of the windows was open, and from behind the drawn curtains he could hear

peals of merry laughter and a babel of tongues.

For a few moments he stood and listened then, apparently discouraged by the noise within retraced his steps. Pursuing his way along the road, he found a gate standing invitingly open: the garden was very silent, and when he reached the front door, the windows all looked down blankly upon him. The house was empty. Awed and frightened—he knew not why—at the strange stillness of the place, he turned and fled back to the high road. Keeping his eyes fixed on the star, and quickening his pace he presently came on a house larger than the rest, which rose directly in front of him. The iron gates of the drive were closed, but lights shone in some of the windows. The boy leant against the gates and looked wistfully up the wide avenue. Dare he venture into the dark unknown before him?

The overarching trees made a trellis work of white frost, which shone and sparkled in the moonlight like an enchanted way.

Visions of castles and ogres, of princesses in distress, and brave knight errants, flashed through his childish brain.

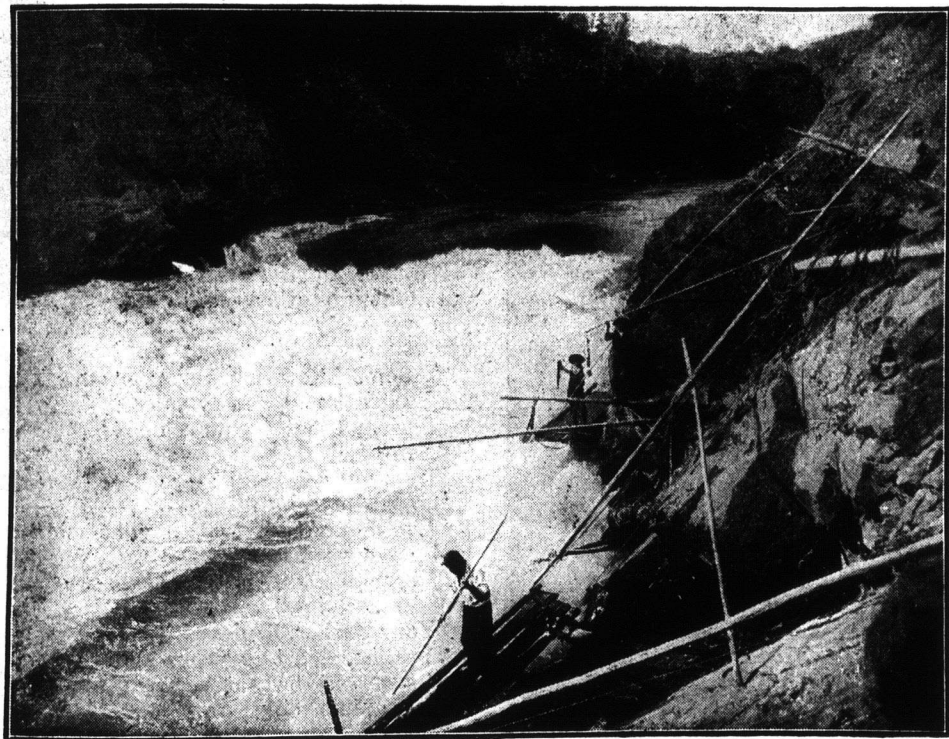
Perhaps imagination transformed him then and there into a knight of old for, with a firm hand, he finally turned the handle of the heavy gate, pushed it open, passed through, making his way boldly to the house, under the overhanging boughs, which dropped white rime on him as he passed beneath them.

Reaching the lawn before the house, the boy stepped into the light of the lamp hanging in the porch.

Then with hands thrust deep into his pockets and head upraised, he commenced singing in a clear, childish treble:

"Hark, the Herald Angels sing,
Glory to the new-born King.
Peace on earth and mercy mild,
God and sinners reconciled."

Having sung the hymn conscientiously through, he waited a moment to see if the inmates of the house would show any appreciation of his efforts, but the door remaining closed, and the silence



Babine Indians Fishing, Courtesy G.T.P. Railway

"We will keep it," announced the king at last. "Perhaps she will return for it. If not—"

"If not, Sire," cried the page, "why not set it among the jewels of your crown? Is it not well worthy so high a place?"

"Wisely spoken," declared the king. "We will do as you suggest." And so, as the fairy did not return, the jewel was placed in the royal crown.

So the princess remained at her father's court, and the handsome boy grew up, strong and noble, the delight of his grand-sire's heart. And so beautifully changed did the king's nature become, that in a surprisingly short time, he became as good and great as anyone could have desired. The page, as a reward for his loving service, was appointed a high office in the kingdom, which he fulfilled with great wisdom. And so they all lived happily ever after.

A couple of city men were playing golf when they saw an old gentleman looking at them wistfully. They asked him to join the game, which he did with alacrity. He was mild in speech and manner and played well. But once when he made a fizzle he ejaculated vehemently the word "Assouan!"

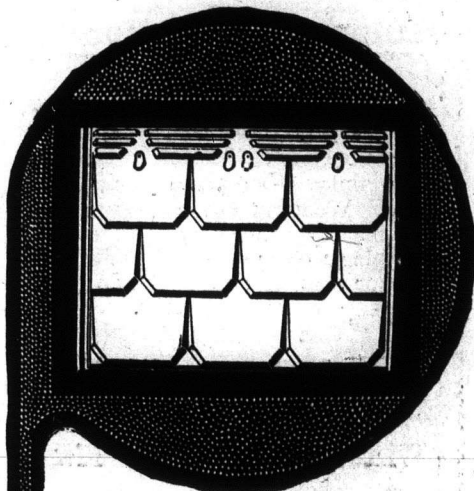
A few minutes later, when he had made another bad play, he repeated: "Assouan!"

The fourth time he said this one of his new-made friends said

"I do not want to be inquisitive, but will you tell me why you say 'Assouan' so often?"

"Well," said the old gentleman, "isn't that the biggest dam in the world?"

He was a Presbyterian clergyman.



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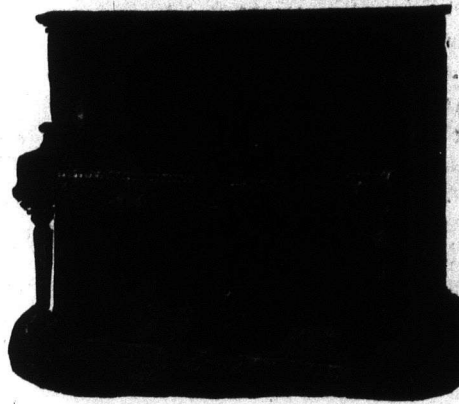
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