

## Some Clippings from a Christmas Story.

### The Christmas Angel.

By Abbie Farwell Brown.  
INTRODUCTORY.

Not a real Christmas Angel, after all, you will probably say, and yet an Angel with a mission, just as surely as if veiled in silvery cloud or with tuneful harp in hand. But it is time to let our author introduce to you the Christmas messenger, and the very human personality to whom the message was so faithfully delivered.

At the sound of footsteps along the hall, Miss Terry looked up from the letter she was reading for the sixth time.

"Of course, I would not see him," she said, pursing her lips into a hard line. "Certainly not."

A bump on the library door, as from an opposing knee, did duty for a knock. "Bring the box in here, Norah," said Miss Terry. Let it down on the rug by the fire-place. I am going to look it over and burn up the rubbish this evening. She glanced once more at the letter in her hand, and then, with a sniff, tossed it upon the fire.

"Yes'm," said Norah, as she set down the box with a thump. She stooped once more to pick up something which had fallen out when the cover was jarred open. It was a pink papier-mache angel, such as are often hung from the top of Christmas trees as a crowning symbol. Norah stood holding it between thumb and finger, staring amazedly. Who would think to find such a bit of frivolity in the house of Miss Terry!

Her mistress looked up from the fire, where the bit of writing was writhing painfully, and caught the expression of Norah's face.

"What have you there?" she asked, frowning, as she took the object into her own hands. "The Christmas Angel!" she exclaimed under her breath. "I had quite forgotten it." Then, as if it burned her fingers, she thrust the little image back into the box and turned to Norah brusquely. "There, that's all. You can go now, Norah," she said.

"Yes'm," answered the maid. She hesitated. "If you please 'm, it's Christmas Eve."

"Well, I believe so," snapped Miss Terry, who seemed to be in a particularly bad humor this evening. "What do you want?"

Norah flushed; but she was hardened to her mistress's manner. "Only to ask if I may go out for a little while to see the decorations and hear the singing."

"Decorations? Singing? Fiddlestick!" retorted Miss Terry, poker in hand. "What decorations? What singing?"

Norah tells how the windows along the street are full of candles, and the choir-boys are going about singing carols of welcome to the Christ-Child whose advent was so eagerly expected on the morrow.

"Fiddlestick!" again snarled her mistress. "He had better be at home in bed. I believe people are losing their minds!"

"Please 'm, may I go?" asked Norah again.

Norah was young, warm and enthusiastic, and sometimes the spell of Miss Terry's sombre house threatened her to desperation, and it was so this Christmas Eve. However, the ungracious "Yes, go along," was permission enough, and with a brightening of her blue eyes and a demure "Thank you, 'm," she flew down the steps, and the area door banged behind her quickly-retreating feet.

"H'm! Didn't take her long to get ready!" muttered Miss Terry, giving the fire a vicious poke. She was alone in the house, on Christmas Eve, and not a man, woman or child in the world cared. Well, it was what she wanted. It was her own doing. If she had wished—

She sat back in her chair, with thin, long hands lying along the arms of it, gazing into the fire. A bit of paper there was crumbling into ashes. Alone on Christmas Eve! Even Norah had some relation with the world outside. Even Norah could feel a simple childish pleasure in candles and carols and merriment, and the old, old superstition.

"Stuff and nonsense!" mused Miss Terry scornfully. "What is our Christmas, anyway? A time for shopkeepers to sell and for foolish folks to kill themselves in buying. Christmas spirit? No! It is all humbug—all selfishness, and worry; an unwholesome season of unnatural activities. I am glad I am out of it. I am glad no one expects anything of me—nor I of any one. I am quite independent; blessedly independent of the whole foolish business. It is a good time to begin clearing up for the new year. I'm glad I thought of it. I've long threatened to get rid of the stuff accumulating in that corner of the attic. Now I will begin." She tugged the packing-case an inch nearer the fire. Then she raised the cover. It was a boxful of children's battered toys, old-fashioned and quaint, toys in vogue thirty, forty, fifty years earlier, when Miss Terry was a child. She gave a reminiscent sniff as she threw up the cover and saw on the under side of it a big label of paste-board, unevenly lettered.

PLAY BOX  
of  
TOM TERRY & ANGELINA

"Humph!" she snorted. There was a great deal in that "humph!" It meant: Yes, Tom's name had plenty of room, while poor little Angelina had to squeeze in as well as she could. How like Tom! This accounted for everything, even to his not being in his sister's house this very night. How unreasonable he had been! So why think of Tom to-night? But here were all these toys to be got rid of. Miss Terry stooped to poke over the contents of the box with lean, long fingers. In one corner thrust up a doll's arm; in another, an animal's tail pointed heavenward. She caught glimpses of glitter and tinsel, wheels and fragments of unidentifiable toys.

Why, surely nobody wants such truck as this. Now, could any child ever have cared for so silly a thing? She pulled out a faded jumping-jack, and regarded it scornfully. "Idiotic! Such toys are demoralizing for children—weaken their minds. It is a shame to think how everyone seems bound to spoil children, especially at Christmas time. She tossed the poor jumping-jack on the fire, and eyed his last contortions with grim satisfaction.

But as she watched, a quaint idea came to her. "I will try an experiment," she said. "I will prove once for all my point about the (so-called) 'Christmas spirit.' I will drop some of these toys out on the sidewalk and see what happens. It may be interesting."

#### HER EXPERIMENT.

Miss Terry rose and crossed two rooms to the front window, looking out upon the street. A flare of light almost blinded her eyes. Every window opposite her along the block, as far as she could see, was illuminated with a row of lighted candles across the sash. The soft, unusual glow threw into relief the pretty curtains and wreaths of green, and gave glimpses of cosy interiors and flitting, happy figures.

"What a waste of candles!" scolded Miss Terry. "Folks are growing terribly extravagant."

The street was white with snow that had fallen a few hours earlier, piled in drifts along the curb of the little-travelled terrace. But the sidewalks were neatly shovelled and swept clean, as became the eminently respectable part of the city where Miss Terry lived. A long flight of steps, with iron railing at the side, led down from the front door, upon which a silver plate had for generations in decorous flourishes announced the name of Terry.

Reaching the play box, Miss Terry drew out the topmost toy—a wooden box with a wire harp for fastening the cover. Unconsciously she presses the harp, and a rattle of jack-in-the-box springs out to comfort her with a squeak, a head, a body and a red nose. Miss Terry looks at it with distaste. "I always disliked that thing," she said. Tom was usually frightening me with it. I remember."

As if to be rid of unwelcome memories, she shut her mouth tight, even as she shut Jack back into his box, snapping the spring into place. "This will do to begin with," she thought. She crossed to the window, which she opened quickly, and tossed out the box, so that it fell squarely in the middle of the sidewalk. Then closing the window and turning down the lights in the room behind her, Miss Terry hid in the folds of the curtain and watched to see what would happen to Jack.

Two little lads of the ragamuffin class catch sight of the imprisoned Jack. The younger sees it first.

"Hello! Wot's dis?" he grunted, making a dash upon it.

"Gee! Wot's up?" responded the other, who was instantly at his elbow.

"Gwan! Lemme look at it."

The smaller boy drew away and pressed the spring of the box eagerly. Ping! Out popped the Jack into his astonished face; whereupon he set up a guffaw.

"Give it here!" commanded the bigger boy.

"Naw! You let it alone! It's mine!" asserted the younger and smaller one, and they fell to pummeling one another with might and main.

"I told you so!" commented Miss Terry from behind the curtain. "Here's the first show of the beautiful Christmas spirit that is supposed to be abroad. Look at the little beasts fighting over something that neither of them really wants!"

"So that is the end of experiment number one," quoth Miss Terry, smiling grimly. "Now, let's see what becomes of the next."

#### THE FLANTON DOG.

She returned to the play-box by the fire and rummaged for a few minutes among the tangled toys. Then, with something like a chuckle she drew out a soft, pale creature with four wobbly legs.

"The Flanton Dog!" she said. "Well, I vow! I had forgotten all about him. It was Tom who coined the name for him because he was made of Canton flannel."

She stood the thing up on the table as well as his weak legs would allow, and inspected him critically. He certainly was a forlorn specimen. One of the black beads which had served him for eyes was gone. His ears, which had originally stood up saucily on his head, now drooped in limp dejection. One of them was a mere shapeless rag hanging by a thread. He was dirty and discolored, and his tail was gone. But still he smiled with his red-thread mouth, and seemed trying to make the best of things.

"What a nightmare!" said Miss Terry contemptuously. "I know there isn't a child in the city who wants such a looking thing. 'This isn't going to bring out any Christmas spirit,' she sneered. "I will try it and see."

Once more she lifted the window and tossed the dog to the sidewalk. He rolled upon his back and lay pathetically, with crooked legs, yearning upward, still smiling.

The fate of the Flanton dog was apparently decided by a dapper-looking young man, who, after poking the object with his stick, tossed it contemptuously into the road, where it fell under the wheels of a passing automobile. On the other side of the street a mother and her little boy were passing at the time. The child's eyes caught sight of the dog on the sidewalk, and he hung back, watching to see what the young man would do with it. But his mother drew him after her. Seeing his hopes of becoming the owner of the Flanton dog thus hopelessly shattered, the baby uttered a howl of anguish. Miss Terry herself was surprised to feel a pang shoot through her as the car passed over the queer old toy. She retreated from the window quickly.

"Well, that's the end of Flanton," she said with a half sigh. "I knew that fellow was a brute. I might have expected something like that. But it looked so—so—" She hesitated for a word, and did not finish her sentence, but bit her lip and sniffed cynically.

#### THE NOAH'S ARK.

"Now, what comes next?" Miss Terry rummaged in the box until her fingers

met something odd-shaped, long, and smooth-sided. With some difficulty she drew out the object, for it was of good size.

"H'm! The old Noah's ark," she said. "I wonder if all the animals are in there."

She lifted the cover and turned out into her lap the long-imprisoned animals and their round-bodied chief. Mrs. Noah and her sons had long since disappeared. But the ark-builder, hatless and one-armed, still presided over a menagerie of sorry beasts. Scarcely one could boast of being a quadruped. To few of them the years had spared a tail. From their close resemblance in their misery, it was not hard to believe in the kinship of all animal life. She took them up and examined them curiously one by one. Finally she selected a shapeless, slate-colored block from the mass. "This was the elephant," she mused. "I remember when Tom stepped on him and smashed his trunk. 'I guess I'm going to be an expressman when I grow up,' he said, looking sorry. Tom was always full of his jokes. Now I'll try this, and see what happens to the ark on its last voyage."

Down the steps she went, and deposited the ark discreetly at their foot, returning to take up her position behind the curtains.

A man hastened by; a woman; two children; a boy and a girl, but none appeared to notice the ark. "One would think they had something really important in hand. I suppose they are just going to hear the singing. Fiddlestick!"

Then came a sad-faced woman, walking slowly, with bent head, seeing none of the lighted windows on either side. Noticing it, she drew her skirts aside, but finally took the oddly-shaped box into her hands, shivering with an uncontrollable emotion.

Just then up came a second woman with two small boys hanging at her skirts. They were ragged and sick-looking. There was something about the expression of even the tiny knot of hair at the back of the woman's head which told of anxious poverty. With envious curiosity she hurried up to see what a luckier mortal had found, crowding to look over her shoulder. The woman in black drew haughtily away and clutched the Noah's ark with a gesture of proprietorship.

"Go away! This is my affair," Miss Terry read her expression and sniffed. "There is the Christmas spirit coming out again," she said to herself. "Look at her face!"

The black-gowned woman prepared to move on with the toy under her arm. But the second woman caught hold of her skirt and began to speak earnestly. She pointed to the Noah's ark, then to her two children. Her eyes were beseeching. The little boys crowded forward eagerly. But some wicked spirit seemed to have seized the finger of the Ark. Angrily she shook off the hand of the other woman, and clutching the box yet more firmly under her arm, she hurried away, the poor woman and her boys following forlornly at a distance.

"They really wanted it, that old Noah's ark!" exclaimed Miss Terry in amazement. But why did that other creature keep the thing? I see! Only because she found they cared for it. Well, that is a happy spirit for Christmas-time, I should say. Humph! I did not expect to find anything quite so mean as that!"

H. A. B.

(To be continued.)

#### By Henry Van Dyke.

These are the gifts I ask,  
Of Thee, Spirit serene;  
Strength for the daily task,  
Courage to face the road,  
Good cheer to help me bear the traveler's load,  
And, for the hours of rest that come between,  
An inward joy of all things heard and seen.

These are the sins I fain  
Would have Thee take away:  
Malice, and cold disdain,  
Hot anger, sullen hate,  
Scorn of the lowly, envy of the great,  
And discontent that casts a shadow gray  
On all the brightness of a common day.  
—Selected.