

[FOR THE CRITIC.]

## A CHRISTMAS SKETCH FOR THE CHILDREN.

While the annual season of good cheer approaches, young and old are looking forward to its joyful days with happy anticipations; perhaps trying to decide what sort of presents they shall make in these close times, when money is so hard to get, and so easily lost when one happens to have a little of it.

In conducting the Christmas celebrations that always go with this present-making, many queer plans are arranged and carried out, and although one would suppose every possible style of entertainment must long since have been given a great many times, each Christmas is sure to bring out its list of novel and freshly interesting programmes.

The way that some friends of ours managed the affair is, without doubt, purely original; and it went off so amusingly, that we will let master Charlie, one of the little people concerned, describe it in his own language.

"We were all disappointed in not enjoying the good time that had been planned for our summer vacation. But a lot of troubles came on when we were not looking for them, and so completely upset everything that we had to just let it go, and get what comfort we could by hoping for better luck next year.

In the first place, little Jonnie, the prettiest, smartest and liveliest of us children, must go to Katie McKay's birth-day party, when there was a storm too bad for anybody to be out in, and catch an awful cold, that made her sick with sore throat, and she didn't get well for almost three months.

Then Fred came home from college to help us enjoy ourselves; and 'he fellow hadn't been in the house three hours before he begun to feel squirmish. When we called Doctor Crabb, who makes such terrible tasting pills, and other stuff, that worthy looked more solemn than ever. He looks solemn enough at any time. After the doctor had felt of Fred's pulse, looked at his tongue, and did several other things, he pronounced it a bad case of chicken-pox. How absurd for a fellow almost grown into a man to take a disease only fit for children.

Of course, this put the Maxwell mansion (Maxwell's our name) into lots of confusion. Still, as we small folks had all had chicken-pox, I suppose we would have got along all right, and managed to enjoy part of the fun, if the uproar caused by having two sick people in the house at once, had not brought on a fresh attack of aunt Rebecca's brain trouble.

You see, aunt Rebecca writes books, describing beautiful rainbows, splendid sunsets, and fairy people that walk on air, and father says, thinking so much about such light subjects, has made her head light.

Anyhow, she took the brain disorder, and no sooner gets better of one spell, than something or other brings her down again. This time she fell so dangerously low, that all hands had to keep very quiet. The minute we came home from school or anywhere else, we must take off our shoes, and hardly speak above a whisper.

This was bad enough on us fellows and girls who were well, and wanted to shout and laugh, and tear about, oh, so much. But the sick ones took it a great deal worse than we did. Jonnie said she should think we were getting ready for her funeral, and Fred declared the next time he got chicken-pox, he hoped they would take him to the hospital, which was likely to be a much more cheerful place than our house.

That's the way our affairs went on for a while. But early in November, when we began to think of Christmas, the prospect showed up a little better. Fred got over the chicken-pox, and Jonnie's throat, after several relapses, finally healed up in first-class style, so she could laugh and play around, and sing as sweetly as ever.

As for aunt Rebecca, the instant her head got settled just a little, they packed her off to Florida for the winter, and if she gets better, she will write another book, all about oranges and alligators.

So, for the big fun day of all the year, our folks determined to organize a demonstration worthy of the occasion, as father says when he talks about political meetings, and gets to writing speeches in favor of Sir John A. Blake, or against Mr. Edward McDonald, and although they wouldn't say a word to us about what they were going to do, we knew by their important looks and mysterious private talks that a gay treat of some kind was coming.

At last, they let us know there was to be a great party at our house on the evening before Christmas, and that the Smiths, the Browns, the Clemmons, the McKays, and two or three other families, had been invited, with all their children. This was splendid news! It's very nice to have a party where children can receive and entertain their friends just like grown up folks.

But the afternoon before Christmas we received a great disappointment, when cousin Jack Anderson, who had been invited, and counted on as sure to come, didn't arrive by the last train from his town.

Well, people began to come in pretty early, and by seven o'clock, our double parlors were quite full; and when the folding doors were opened, it looked like some kind of public meeting waiting for the speaker.

But all the men and women kept wonderfully still for old people; and we children could do nothing but sit and look at them, trying to imagine whatever in all the world was the matter. Jennie whispered to me that she believed they were going to have a Quaker meeting. Even Prof. VonBlinkers, the German-player, who has such immense eyes, such big spectacles, with two windows in each one, and such a long nose; and who is so very small in every other way, instead of giving us some music, only sat on the piano stool as stupid as the rest.

Still, a Quaker meeting did not seem to be exactly what they were up to, for while there wasn't much talking, we could see they were all in a flutter, expecting something, of which the small people knew just nothing at all.

Just about the second when they got tired out waiting, and we got tired out imagining, the bell rang, and father skipped to the door, as if that was

exactly what he expected. At the same moment, Prof. VonBlinkers struck up a tune that took so many different notes, he had to fly right and left, and up and down, until he seemed to be scattered all along the keys, and we couldn't, for our lives, decide where the man really ought to be.

While I was hoping he would get through without coming to pieces, all at once the folks gave a little shout, and the music stopped so suddenly, I was almost afraid the Professor had been taken with a fit.

When I turned to see what it meant, father was coming from the hall, leading a person who looked exactly like the pictures of Santa Claus, and I shouldn't wonder if most of the little children believed it really was the Saint they had heard so much about, while we big boys and girls didn't know what to think.

Father introduced the strange guest by telling us that Santa Claus had honored us by coming in person to distribute his annual tokens of esteem and affection.

Then, the Saint made a low bow, and without saying a word, went around and gave everyone a package from a bear skin bag, which he carried. At first, the bag was so big and heavy, he could hardly lug it, but when he got through, it seemed to be all emptied out. After going to everybody, he made another low bow, and was gone before we thought to open our bundles, or ask him any questions.

In a minute, several of our boys rushed out to find where he went next; but not a sign of him could we see.

Jennie said the front door had hardly closed behind the gentleman, when she heard a sound as though a sleigh was being driven rapidly away.

When we opened the packages he left us, we found they contained all the pretty Christmas Cards we had sent to our mates, and besides, a special card for each of us, larger and finer than any we ever saw before.

On the lovely present was written in beautiful gold letters, "keep this token to remember the visit of Santa Claus."

A little while after, before we got through looking at our gifts, and trying to find out who had the most, the bell rang again, and while we were wondering if the generous Saint was coming back to see how we liked his presents, in walked cousin Jack just too late to see the fun.

But when this young man kissed Jennie, her sharp eyes spied a curl of white hair on his coat collar, just like that worn by the make-believe Santa Claus, and then, of course, we knew all about it.

So father told us the whole story. Jack came down in the morning, and stopped at a hotel, and they fixed it with the letter carrier, so that any cards we sent should be left with him.

Then they went and dressed him up with fur clothes, false hair, and a red mask, and he came round in a sleigh, made the presents, and was driven back without anybody finding out the secret.

When Jack got out of his Santa Claus fixings, he hurried over to our house, to help strip the big Christmas tree at the back end of our long room, that had 50 candles burning on it, and the best present we ever got. I didn't think to tell about this before.

You better believe we had a royal time that evening! Speaking pieces, reading and singing, and for once, the smallest children were allowed to sit up as long as they wanted to.

Prof. VonBlinkers did amazing things with the piano! Old Miss Anguin said he executed like an angel. I wonder where she ever heard an angel execute on a piano? Anyhow, he played all the tunes I ever heard, and a good many more, and played them splendid too!

About thirteen or fourteen o'clock, the party broke up at last, and I guess everybody went home happy."

JONATHAN.

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## CHRISTMAS AT OMBERLEIGH.

It is a bleak December afternoon, and the younger portion of guests at "Omberleigh Manor" are busily decorating the ball room for the 24th. Outside the snow is falling heavily, and it looks if possible, bleaker and more dismal in contrast to the brightness within. Huge pine logs are burning in the great old fashioned fire-place, throwing their ruddy glow over the group of merry girls, whose skillful fingers are twining wreaths of evergreen and holly.

At last pretty Kathleen Vane breaks the silence that for the last few minutes seems to have settled on them. "Do you know Sir Guy Travers is coming to-night for certain? I heard Lady Austen ordering dinner to be an hour later on his account; Dick says he is, oh so handsome, and quite a catch too. I mean him to be my special property," she adds with a glance of defiance, "please do not look so shocked, fifteen thousand a year is not a joke to a penniless girl."

"Oh, that is not fair, when Miss Vane enters the list it is time to give up, ye lesser mortals," said Madge Dunraven, with a mocking laugh. (They well knew that). Pretty girls there were among them, but none so fair as Kathleen Vane. She would have made an artist a fortune could he have painted her as she stood, with the fire-light falling on her pretty face, giving a weird look to those lovely violet eyes, and turning her bright hair to threads of dazzling gold.

"I for one wish you success," cried Gladys Austen, "once safely Lady Travers you are past mischief."

Then comes the faint tinkle of a bell, they all hurry off to dress for dinner, each one intent upon outshining her lovely companion. Miss Vane's maid wonders what capricious sprite possesses her mistress, dress after dress must be brought out only to be rejected, at last when poor Johnson's patience is well nigh exhausted, Kathleen chooses one of white and gold, nothing could be more suitable.

When the sound of laughing voices floating across the hall, the drawing-