

The man gave a short laugh. "That's the first time I've been taken for any one that's half decent," he said to himself; and then he answered, in a whisper loud enough for Bobbie to hear: "Well, not exactly, sonny. I'm only his assistant."

"His what?" said Bobbie. "Sh! Not so loud, my boy—you'll wake the family; and if you did that I'd just vanish like the mist," said the man. "I said I was only Santa Claus' assistant. You see, my lad, there are so many more children now-a-days than there used to be that the boss has to get outside help Christmas Eve, or he'd never be able to finish up his work in time. So he sends for me and a few others like me—heaven help us! and we do his distributing for him. I'd just laid these things out here when you surprised me."

Bobbie approached the tree. "Oh, isn't it beautiful!" he cried. "All these things for me! A watch too, just the very thing I wanted!" The man drew back as the boy spoke, and with a queer light in his eyes sat down in one of the chairs suddenly.

"Are you tired?" asked Bobbie, leaving the tree and crossing to Santa Claus' assistant. "Yes," said the man. "Very." "I'm sorry," said Bobbie, affectionately, as he took the other's hand in his and kissed it. "Don't, don't do that," said the man, huskily. "It's not—not clear."

"I shouldn't think it would be," laughed Bobbie, "climbing in by sooty chimneys can't be very clean work. Do you know, I always wonder why there's never any soot left on the toys?" "Oh, we take care of that," said the assistant. "You see, this bag keeps the soot off. But I didn't come by the chimney this time, he added hastily, observing that there was no soot on the bag either. "I thought the window was easier."

"You're all through, aren't you?" said Bobbie, looking at the bag. "How do you know that?" asked the man. "Your bag is empty. Isn't there any one else for you to take a toy to?"

The unexpected guest buried his face in his grimy hands, and a great lump rose up in his throat.

"There was one other," said the assistant, "but there's nothing for him—and—and it's all my fault. I neglected to look after him."

"And won't he get anything?" asked Bobbie.

"No," said the assistant, roughly, rising and taking a step toward the tree.

"He can have one of mine," cried Bobbie. "Here, take him this. I've got plenty thanks to you." He handed him one of the treasures beneath the tree.

The unexpected guest looked at the boy for a minute, and then he slowly reached out his hand and took the proffered toy.

"I'll see that he gets it," he said, "and God bless you for it! Good-bye, little one. I must be off or he'll wake up and be disappointed."

He moved toward the door, when Bobbie ran after him, and holding up his little face said: "Won't you take a kiss for Santa Claus from me?"

"That I will," said the other, and he bent over, and, kissing the child, fled precipitately out through the window and disappeared in the darkness of the street.

"Well," said the unexpected guest the following morning, as he watched his own pallid-faced little youngster playing with the first Christmas present he'd ever known. "that was the rummiest thing I went out to steal, and the only thing I bagged that wasn't really given to me was a kiss. It was a rich haul, but I think I'll get a more decent job—at New Year's."—Harper's Magazine.



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A CHRISTMAS APPEAL

By L. W.

(Written for the True Witness.)
Hold, busy world, for one brief moment stay
Thy restless energy, thy ceaseless strife;
Ye men and women of the world to-day,
Check for a while the throbbing pulse of life.

And come with me to where the Infant King
Lies silently in poverty enthroned;
Whilst angels make the earth and
Heavens sing
With canticles of praise sweetly intoned.

Draw near unto the manger where
He lies
His gaze upturned towards His mother pure,
While she, the trace of sorrow in her eyes,
Reflects upon the pains He must endure.

The shepherds; they are there, yea, even kings,
Directed by that wondrous Eastern Star,
Forgetting for a time all earthly things,
Have come to pay Him homage from afar.

But why does His sweet countenance portray
That silent grief within His Sacred Heart;
What is it mars the gladness of this day,
On which both men and angels bear a part?

It is because of those who will not share
The fruits of that great sacrifice He made,
Those heartless souls, who do not seem to care
For their Redeemer's love, or Heavenly aid.

Therefore, dear friends, on this glad Christmas morn,
Draw close to Him, who said, "My yoke is sweet,"
To Him Who on this day for you is born,
And kneel in adoration at His feet.



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A NIGHT IN BETHLEHEM

The royal city lay asleep;
The shepherds watched their silent sheep;
The stars shone brightly overhead
And silver touched a humble shed.
A holy hush held all the air,
As if the angels were at prayer—
And there, 'twixt night and early morn
A winsome little Babe was born.

The heavens opened and a throng
Of winged ones warbled into song;
Nearer and nearer the song-waves rolled,
Clearer and clearer the harps of gold;

"Glory be to God on high,
Whose Son in lowly crib doth lie,
And peace on earth to men below
Who walk the way that He doth show!"

The morning broke in roses red,

Through Bethlehem the news was spread
"A Child was born to us this night,
A King of everlasting might!"
But Mary folded to her breast
Her little Dove, as in its nest,
And Joseph in enraptured mood
Saw visions of a Crown and Hood.
—Raphael, in the Young Catholic Messenger.

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