

ous offspring of what was meant by the Yule season, when all should be peace and goodwill, friendly sentiment, hospitality and good cheer. He had impressed upon them the grandness of the duty of hospitality at all times, but more especially at this particular season, and told how men often-times entertained angels unawares. The hired girl listened with wide-open eyes and ditto mouth. Old Peterkin's relation had been a revelation to her, and she had heard things of which the poor, honest, hard-working, lie-abed-in-the-morning girl had never dreamt. And so the happy family sat. The younger members cracking nuts; the older girls flirting with their male cousins, who were present in full force; the big brother home from sea, lying about what he had seen abroad, when—a "tap, tap," low, soft and gentle, came at the outer door.

The hired girl, Matilderann, started to unlatch the portal, and as she threw it wide open, there she saw a man, poorly clad, unshorn and unkempt, shivering in the cold, clear moonlight, and she felt that the being who stood before her was an angel come from the celestial regions to be entertained unawares by terrestrial mortals. She bade him enter; he did so. The whole household crowded round the wanderer, who displayed an enormous appetite for a representative of those bright beings who are not generally supposed to require such ordinary sustenance as we of this earth find it necessary to partake of.

The angel unawares made half a goose look as silly as a whole one; a pound or so of cold roast beef went down his angelic throat and he paid particular attention to the wassail bowl which steamed on old Peterkin's hospitable board. The hired girl's round eyes opened wider than ever as she beheld the prodigious feats of gastronomic power displayed by the celestial visitor, but the more he devoured, the more old Peterkin heaped upon his trencher, and pressed him to try one little slice more of roast goose.

When the angel unawares had satisfied his internal (more like infernal) needs, he was placed in the easiest chair before the blazing log; the children cracked walnuts for him; the big brother home from sea was less energetic in his mendacity than he had been before the arrival of the celestial; the pretty cousins only said "Do stop now," "Have done," and so on, in subdued squeaks, and the angel himself stretched out his legs to the blaze and told even more wondrous yarns than the big brother home from sea. The hired girl, Matilderann, merely sat and gazed at the angel who might have been supposed to be occasionally winking at her were it not that such a supposition would be sacrilegious; doubtless what looked like winking was merely the glinting of the fire-light in the angel's eyes.

And so the time flew on till midnight arrived. Of course old James Peterkin ordered the best bed in the house to be prepared for the celestial; the softest blankets, the most snowy sheets and the warmest quilts were spread upon his couch, and after he had given his angelic benediction to the wassail bowl, he retired to the chamber prepared for him, and ere long silence reigned throughout the house.

The children had been sent to bed some hours before, to dream of Santa Claus and entertaining angels unawares. And so the night passed away. The bright stars twinkled in the clear, crisp atmosphere, and may have sang together as the morning stars did of old, for all I know. But day dawned, the glorious sun rose, and so did old James Peterkin and his family.

The children, after investigating their stockings, crept gently to arouse the angel unawares, and to tell him that breakfast would soon be prepared.

The angel's bed was empty!

Old Peterkin bawled for Matilderann to

come down stairs and get the grub ready. There was no response. He ascended the stairs and tapped at the door of the hired girl's apartment. Dead silence! He opened the door. Emptiness! void!

The children came running to tell Mr. Peterkin that the angel had been an angel unawares indeed, and that he had flown away to his heavenly abode.

"Yes, confound him," roared old James, "and he's taken Matilderann with him."

It was too true.

The angel unawares had eloped with the hired girl!

Most of the silver spoons and forks had apparently also joined in the flight heavenward; and such portable miscellaneous valuables as rings, watches and so forth had gone beyond the stars with Matilderann, the hired girl, and the Angel Unawares.



A MISPRONUNCIATION.

TO WHICH MR. ROBERTSON'S ATTENTION IS CALLED.

A CHRISTMAS GHOST STORY.



The Gentle Reader.

GENTLE reader—for of course all readers of GRIP are gentle or I should have died by their hands long ago, as surely the villainous jokes, puns and other enormities of which I have been guilty in the pages of this noble journal, from time to time, were worthy of death—gentle reader, again I repeat, have you ever in the course of your blissful existence—for it must be blissful, as you are a reader of—no, a subscriber to GRIP—have you ever, I ask, when sitting in the solitude of your chamber, either writing or reading or otherwise exercising your powerful mind, become suddenly aware that you were not alone? That there was someone or some thing behind your chair; a PRESENCE, as it were? Has not a chilly, creepy sensation made itself felt just at the roots of your hair, making that capillary adornment feel as though it wished to rise to its feet and stand up on end? Has not a cold, icy feeling run down your vertebral column when you thus became aware that the PRESENCE was in the room? You did not hear the door open, yet you know your solitude has been intruded upon.

Well, thus it was with me. I was sitting laboriously engaged in evoking comic paragraphs one evening when I suddenly knew that I had a visitor. The lamp, which up to this moment had been burning brightly, went out without a moment's warning, but, in place of darkness ensuing, a pale, bluish glare filled my apartment. I turned and there, close behind me, stood a tall, rather well-built—skeleton.

Over its bones played the light, the glare of which illuminated the room. Strange music seemed to sound in the air and I saw that the fleshless gentleman swept his metacarpal bones up and down over his ribs as though he played upon a harp.

"Are you cold?" I enquired, for I determined to let him see I was not a bit scared,—though I was, terribly, "you are not very fat. You do not seem to eat much or else your food does not agree with you."

He grinned a most skeletony grin and, waving his hand over my head, I seemed to fall into a mesmeric trance.

The bony gentleman then led me out of doors. We passed through several streets, snakes, from whose eyes lambent flames streamed, licking our feet with their forked tongues as we went.

We at length reached a large building. We entered; an overpowering and most disgusting sickening odor assailed my nostrils as we did so. I would have fainted, but I could not, for the mesmeric skeleton prevented me.

"What do you smell?" he enquired in hoarse voice. This was the first time he had spoken.

"I smell," I replied, "an odor worse than that of any dissecting room I was ever in. I smell decomposing matter, both animal and vegetable. I smell horrible chemicals. Where am I?"

"Never mind. Come in here," said my bony friend, leading me into another department. "What do your olfactory senses perceive now?"

"Fish dead for six weeks. Boarding-house butter. Meat condemned by Inspector Awdo as being unfit for human food on account of decay. A chemist's laboratory when the man of stench is making experiments with the worst smelling articles he can lay his hands on. I smell everything that is vile."

"Enough," replies my anatomical companion, "we will return."

Once more we were in the open air. Once more the snakes licked our feet and twined themselves round our nether limbs. Blue dogs with pink forelegs followed us, apparently with a view to obtaining some of the bones which were so plentiful at this moment.

We sped on. We again reached my chamber.

"Where have we been?" I asked.

"You have been," replied my guest, for so he now was, in slow, measured tones, "you have been through the basement of No. 1 Police Station." He made a few passes over my head and I awoke from my trance. The light was burning brightly. I looked round for my friend. He was nowhere to be seen. A grave-yard, vaulty perfume was the only trace that was left of him.



Mr. W. H. Fuller's new piece, "Off to Egypt," under the management of Mr. Gus. Pitou, is proving a hit at the Grand. The company is first-class, and Mr. Pitou has certainly done all that enterprise and taste can do to making the comedy a success. Mr. Fuller is a Canadian, and we all feel proud of his second triumph in the dramatic art.

Mrs Holman intends producing "Bunthorne Abroad" in fine style at London during the first week of January. Mr. Bengough has carefully revised the libretto, and it is now considered a first-class attraction.