



ANNIE AND WILLIE'S PRAYER.

A CHRISTMAS STORY.

BY SOPHIA P. SNOW.

'Twas the eve before Christmas; "Good-night" had been said,

And Annie and Willie had crept into bed;
There were tears on their pillows, and tears in their eyes,

And each little bosom was heavy with sighs,
For to-night their stern father's command had been given

That they must retire precisely at seven
Instead of eight: for they troubled him more
With questions unheard of than ever before.
He told them he thought this delusion a sin,
No such a thing as "Santa Claus" ever had been.

Eight, nine, and the clock on the steeple tolled ten—
Not a word had been spoken by either till then;
When Willie's sad face from the blanket did peep,
And whispered, "Dear Annie, is you fast asleep?"
"Why, no, brother Willie," a sweet voice replied,
"I've tried in vain, but I can't shut my eyes;
For somehow it makes me so sorry because
Dear papa had said there is no 'Santa Claus';
Now we know there is, and it can't be denied,
For he came every year before mamma died;
But then I've been thinking that she used to pray,
And God would hear everything mamma would say,
And perhaps she asked him to send Santa Claus here
With the sacks full of presents he brought every year."

"Well, why can't we pray just as mamma did then,
And ask him to send him with presents aden?"
"I've been thinking so, too," and without a word more

Four bare little feet bounded out on the floor,
And four little knees the soft carpet pressed,
And two tiny hands were clasped close to each breast.

"Now, Willie, you know we must firmly believe
That the presents we ask for we're sure to receive,
You must wait just as still till I say amen,
And by that you will know that your turn has come then.—

Dear Jesus, look down on my brother and me,
And grant us the favour we're asking of thee:
Bless papa, dear Jesus, and cause him to see
That Santa Claus loves us as much even as he;
Don't let him get fretful and angry again
At dear brother Willie and Annie, amen!"
Their prayers being ended, they raised up their heads,

And with hearts light and cheerful again sought their beds:

They were soon lost in slumber—both peaceful and deep,

And with fairies in dream-land were roaming in sleep

Eight, nine, and the little French clock had struck ten

Ere the father had thought of his children again—

"I was harsh with my darlings," he mentally said,

"And should not have sent them so early to bed;

But of course they've forgot their troubles ere this,

But then I denied them the thrice asked for kiss,

But just to make sure I'll steal up to their door,

For I never spoke harsh to my darlings before."

So saying he softly ascended the stairs,

And arriving at their door heard both of their prayers,

His Annie's "bles papa" draws forth the big tears,

And Willie's grave promise falls sweet on his ears

"Strange, strange, I've forgotten," said he, with a sigh.

"How I longed when a child to have Christmas draw nigh,

I'll atone for my harshness," he inwardly said,

"By answering their prayers, ere I sleep in my bed."

Then he turned to the stairs and softly went down,

Throw off velvet slippers and silk dressing gown,

He first went to a wonderful "Santa Claus" store

(He know it, for he'd passed it the day before).

And there he found crowds on the same errand as he,

Making purchase of presents, with glad heart and free,

Nor stopped he until he had bought overerything

From a box full of candy to a tiny gold ring.

Then homeward he turned with his holiday load,

And with Aunt Mary's aid into the nursery 'twas stowed.

There were balls, dogs and horses, books pleasing to see,

And birds of all colors were perched in the tree;

While Santa Claus, laughing, stood up in the top,

As if getting ready for more presents to drop.

And as the fond father the picture surveyed

He thought for his trouble he'd amply been paid;

And he said to himself as he brushed off a tear,

"I'm happier to-night than I have been for a year

Hereafter I'll make it a rule, I believe,

To have Santa Claus visit us each Christmas eve."

So thinking he gently extinguished the light,

And tripped downstairs to retire for the night.

As soon as the beams of the bright morning sun

Put the darkness to flight and the stars one by one,

Four little blue eyes out of sleep opened wide,

And at the same moment the presents espied.

Then out of their beds they sprang with a bound,

And the very gifts prayed for were all of them found;

They laughed and they cried in their innocent glee,

And shouted for papa to come quick and see

What presents old Santa Claus had brought in the night

(Just the things they had wanted) and left before light.

"And now," said Annie, in a voice soft and low,

"You'll believe there's a Santa Claus, papa, I know;"

While dear little Willie climbed up on his knee,

Determined no secret between them should be;

And told, in soft whispers, how Annie had said,

That their dear, blessed mamma, so long ago dead,

Used to kneel down and pray by the side of her chair,

And that God, up in heaven, had answered her prayer!

Blind father! who caused your stern heart to relent?

And the hasty word spoken so soon to repent?

'Twas the Being who bade you steal softly upstairs,

And made you his agent to answer their prayers.

A CHILD being asked what were the three great feasts of the Jews, promptly and not unnaturally replied:—"Breakfast, dinner, and supper."

CHRISTMAS IS COMING.

A MERRY, merry Christmas to all our little people! May the day be to each one a day of right blessed cheer! and may it be followed by many and many another even more bright and blessed!

Christmas is first of all the children's day, because it is kept in memory of the birth of one perfect child who came from heaven to found a kingdom of child-hearts. The true child-heart is loving, faithful, and obedient, and it is the gift of the Child-King, the gentle Jesus, who reigns Lord of all in heaven and in earth.

Any one who can receive a gift may enter this kingdom; and what time can be better for one that is yet outside than this lovely Christmas-time, when the very air seems full of giving and receiving?

Come, dear children, come now and give yourselves heartily to the blessed Lord who gave himself so completely to you on the first Christmas-day, and who has been giving, giving every day since! If you have already entered his kingdom, give yourself to him now for fuller love and service, and let this Christmas be the time we shall learn how truly blessed it is to give. Remember how Jesus when he was on earth took the little ones in his arms and blessed them, saying, "Suffer the little children to come unto me, and forbid them not, for of such is the kingdom of heaven."

NOT SO FAST.

"O, MAMMA," cried little Blanche, "I heard such a tale about Edith. I did not think she could be so very naughty. One—"

"My dear," said her mother, "before you tell it, we will see if your story will pass the three sieves."

"What does that mean, mamma?"

"I will explain it. In the first place, let us ask about your story, *is it true?*"

"I suppose so; I got it from Miss White, and she is a great friend of Edith's."

"And does she show her friendship by telling tales of her? In the next place, though you can prove it to be true, *is it kind?*"

"I did not mean to be unkind, but I am afraid it was. I would not like Edith to speak of me as I have of her."

"And *is it necessary?*"

"No, of course, mamma; there was no need of me to mention it at all."

As we put flour in sieves to get the good apart from the bad, so let us ask, when we are going to say something about others, these questions: "Is it true?" "Is it kind?" "Is it necessary?"