



Will Carleton's Christmas Poem

TELLING THE STORY OF "THE GIFT HE GOT FROM MOSE"

By Will Carleton, Author of "Farm Ballads," etc.

RECOLLECT the old man Starling, half a mile from Bennett's Corners,
Just a milkman's trip or two east of Amminadab Warner's?
Didn't he have a grip aroun' coins of low denomination?—
Money when it reached his pocket, knowed it had a long vacation.
(Thus said Ahab Adams, banker, full of thrift and fire and feeling,
To his brother, Reverend Adams, while in reminiscence dealing.)

How he used to shrink his livin'! sold the best an' e't the leanest:
Cattle went an' cattle came—but of all he stood the meanest.
Sold his childr'n colts for pennies, long before they even named 'em:
But when they would grow up hosses, then the old man always claimed 'em.
Made 'em borrow half their books, an' their other school-utensils—
Even sent 'em to the quarries for to dig off splinter-pencils!

Never spent a single cent for to make his home more pleasant;
Never crowned a Chris'mas mornin' with a blessed Chris'mas present;
Oft his childr'n fell to cryin' 'cause they had to go without 'em—
Till the sewin'-circle clubs used to sit an' talk about 'em!
So we thought, one prosp'ous year, when the crops took on expansion,
There should be one Chris'mas tree in the old man Starling's mansion.

So we started out to fix it: an' we canvassed 'mongst the neighbors,
Takin' up a town-collection, on the sly, 'twixt other labors;
Workin' on some people's pity, an' on some's imagination,
An' on some's amused desire for to see the celebration;
An' we gathered quite a fund, with a "don't you tell it" warnin',
'Nough to make the Starling childr'n happy one whole Chris'mas mornin'.

Mercy! how them childr'n acted, when the door was opened, fin'ly,
An' revealed to them the presents—lookin', doubtless, most divinely!
Whole thing didn't cost ten dollars: but 'twas heaven-like bewild'rin',
An' worth more'n a hundred thousan', to them hungry-hearted childr'n!
Every close-earned cent I planted in that job, I state sincerely,
Never yet has failed to draw reg'lar compound interest yearly.

How we wrapped the Chris'mas spirit 'round them thirteen ragged darlings!
(Childr'n was the only things that wasn't scarce' at ol' man Starling's)
How the small gals hugged their dolls! till it raised the vital question
If the stirred-up sawdust in 'em wouldn't produce an indigestion!
How the small boys whipped their drums! till the whole estate seemed wearing
Echoes something like a boiler in the process of repairing!

How the mother of the house watched the new administration—
Hardly knowin' which to feel—pleasure or humiliation!
How the big boys yelled with joy, 'round among their presents hopping,
When they come home from the woods, where their dad had kept them chopping!
How we wondered if a storm in the old man's head was brewin',
An' if wrathful shame would rise, when he see what we was doin'!

Not a shame!—he stood an' grinned, sayin', "Ain't this new an' funny!
Thank you, neighbors: these here trinkets ought to fetch a sight of money.
But you've made a small mistake—or a big omission, rather:
I don't find no present here for the fam'ly's sufferin' father!"
Then Mose Griggs, a half-growned giant, with consid'ble fun behind it,
Says, "You turn around a minute, an' I'll see if I can find it."

So old Starling turned around, something for himself expectin',
An' received a gift that long mingled with his recollection.
He was in the sittin'-room, when the gift was to him handed,
He was in the dinin'-room, when upon his back he landed.
"If you use these presents here in the way your talk discloses,
I'll give you another trip—to'rds the sittin'-room," says Moses.

Mad enough he was, to fight! but our laughter interceded,
An' convinced the man at last, that he'd got the gift he needed.
An' next year, at Chris'mas-time, he took some expense an' bother,
An' the childr'n all got presents from their stingy rich ol' father.
Meanwhile he embraced religion, which same caused it, some supposes:
But I al'ays set great store on the gift he got from Moses.

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