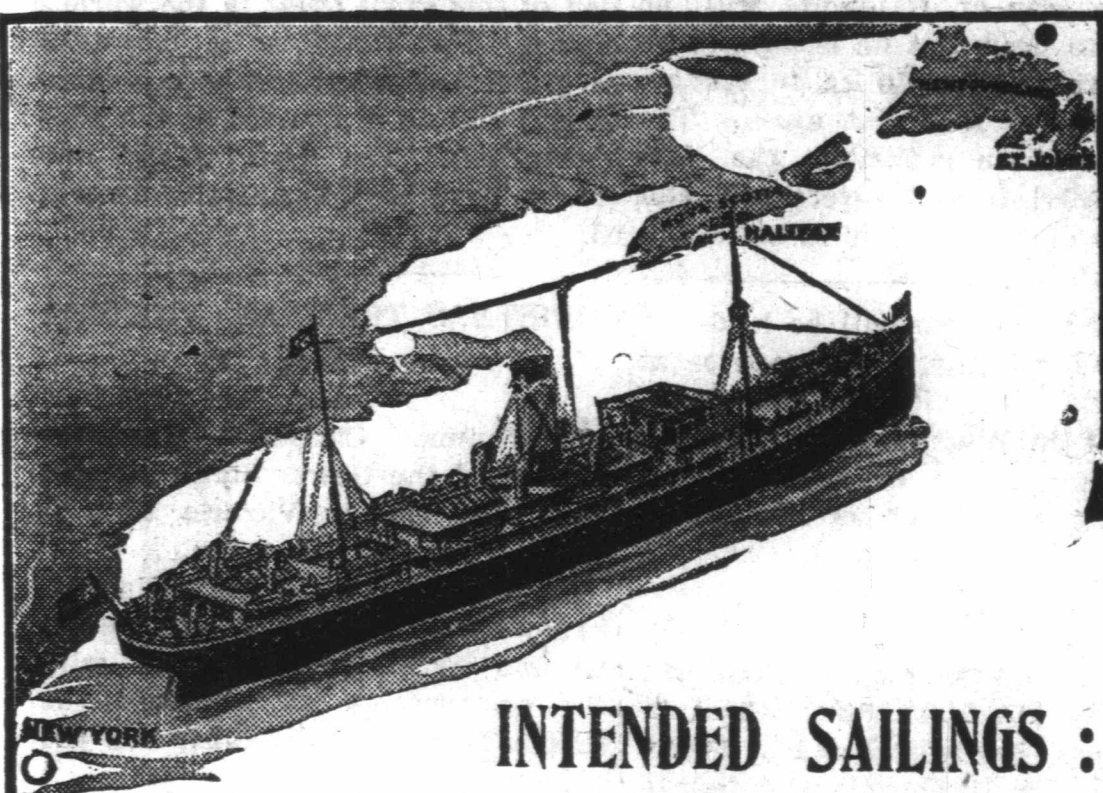


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The Gift of Love

It was a cold night for that part of the country, and the shepherds who were out watching their flocks upon the hillside drew their heavy cloaks about them. The wind whistled over them, and the sheep huddled more closely together.

"Our little lambs will suffer from the cold," said a young shepherd boy. "No," answered his father, "for the mother sheep protect the lambs with their warm bodies; they will not let their babies suffer."

"Just look at my little baby lamb," said the boy. "Oh, I do hope that no harm will come to it, for it is the tiniest lamb of the flock, and I love it."

"Come, boy," said the father, "you have rested all day; so you watch the flock for a time, and I will lie down here by grandsire and take a nap."

The cold wind carried the clouds across the sky like a flock of scurrying sheep, leaving the stars twinkling brightly in the dark blue vault of the heavens, and then the wind died down.

The boy looked at the group of sleeping shepherds and then at the sleeping sheep. As he watched, he saw his own little lamb stir uneasily.

"Poor little lamb, I believe it is lonely. I will hold it under my warm cloak while the mother sheep sleeps." And so the boy held the baby lamb closely to his bosom while the mother sheep slept peacefully.

A strange chill was over all the land, and it was so very still that the boy wished the men would awaken, or that one of the sheep would bleat, for he felt lonely and afraid, and he knew not why.

Suddenly he saw a bright light flashing through the heavens. Was he asleep or dreaming? He sat up and rubbed his eyes. No, the light was coming nearer and nearer, down toward the earth. The sheep were stirring uneasily, and he heard them bleating, for they were frightened from their sleep. The shepherds, too, were awakening.

"What is the meaning of this strange light?" said one. "Has a star fallen from the sky?" asked another.

"See this golden cloud of glory resting over us; it is so bright that I dare not look upon it."

The shepherds seized their staves, and some of them covered their faces with their cloaks, for they were very much afraid. The old man went down upon his knees, and looked up very reverently, and the boy stood motionless, gazing spellbound at the radiant vision; for in this cloud of golden glory a beautiful angel came down to the earth, and stood upon the hillside among them; and the angel said:

"Fear not: for, behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy, which shall be to all people. For unto you is born this day in the city of a David a Saviour, which is Christ the Lord. And

this shall be a sign unto you; Ye shall find the babe wrapped in swaddling clothes, lying in a manger."

And, as the angel ceased speaking, suddenly the heavens opened, and there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host who were singing and praising God, saying: "Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good will toward men."

Then the bright light was gone, but the shepherds still looked earnestly toward the sky.

"Truly it was a message from God," said the old man, as he bowed his white head. "God has sent us His angel to tell us that the promised King has come."

"But the angel said that the Babe was wrapped in swaddling clothes and lying in a manger. Is it not strange for a prince to come to such a lowly palace?" questioned the boy.

"Yes," said the old man, "it seems strange; but we know that He is truly the gift of love from God—His only Son who has been promised to us for, lo, these many years. Come, we must go in haste to find Him."

"What gift of love shall we carry to the King, grandsire?" whispered the boy.

"The most precious things we own," answered the old man: "that which we love the best."

"But we shepherds have no gold or silver, nor jewels fit for a king," said one of the shepherds. "So what can we carry to this child?"

"I know," answered the boy, as he looked lovingly down upon the little lamb, which he was still holding in his strong young arms. "I can give my lamb; I love it, and it is the best we have to offer."

And so the shepherds went in haste down the hillside, the boy holding in his arms the baby lamb. At last they reached the little town of Bethlehem, and they came to a low stable, and there found their King—a tiny babe wrapped in swaddling clothes, lying in a manger. They saw the cattle standing near, and Joseph watching over the mother Mary and the heavenly Child. This was no palace home—these were no royal robes of state.

But the shepherds knew that the words of the angel were true, and that this babe was their promised King. The heavenly light that had shone in the sky while the angel chorus sang over the hillside seemed to shine also around the holy Child, and the shepherds covered their faces, for they could not look upon its radiance. And they fell upon their knees and worshipped the Child, and thanked God that the Gift of Love had been given to all the waiting world.

The boy looked with wondering eyes, then he held out the little lamb. And the Babe smiled into the eyes of the boy, and stretched out his tiny hands.

Then the boy sank slowly down upon his knees by the Babe, and placed at His feet the tiniest lamb from the flock—a gift of love for the Christ Child.

The Legend of Saint Nicholas

Once upon time there lived a very good man named Nicholas. When he was a young man his father and mother died, and he was left all their fortune. He looked upon this money as belonging to God, and felt that he was the steward of God's mercies. So he went about doing good and sharing his riches with all who were in need.

Now there lived in that country a certain nobleman who had three beautiful daughters. At one time he had been rich, but he became very poor, and he did not know how to provide for his family. Their clothes were shabby, and sometimes they had very little food to eat.

The daughters were anxious to be married, but their father had no money for their marriage portion, and in that country no maiden could marry without a dowry.

When the good Nicholas heard of their troubles he longed to help them. He knew that the father was proud and would not like to take his money, so he thought that it would be best to surprise the family. He took some gold and tied it in a long silken purse, and he went to the home of the nobleman in the night. The daughters had gone to bed, but the poor father sat by the fireside, watching and praying.

Nicholas wondered how he could bestow his gift without being seen, when suddenly the moon came from behind a cloud, and he saw that a window was open. He crept softly to the open window and threw the purse right into the room, and it fell at the feet of the nobleman.

The father picked up the purse, and was very much surprised to find all the gold pieces. He awakened his daughters, and they all rejoiced and agreed to give most of the gold to the

eldest daughter, so that she could marry the young man whom she loved.

Not long after that Nicholas filled another silken purse, and went again by night, and threw his present through the open window. And when the father saw this second gift he gave it to the second daughter, and, like her sister, she married the man of her choice.

But the father was very curious to find out who had come in the night, for he wished to thank the person who had helped them with his golden gifts. So he watched and waited; and, after a time, Nicholas came with another silken purse, filled with gold for the youngest daughter. He was about to throw it into the room when the nobleman rushed from the house, and, seizing him by his long robe, he knelt before him and said: "Oh, good Nicholas, servant of God, why did you seek to hide?" And he kissed his hands and his feet, as he tried to thank him.

Nicholas answered: "Do not thank me; thank the heavenly Father who has sent me to you in answer to your prayers; I am but His messenger to help those who trust in Him. Tell no man of these gifts of gold nor who brought them in the night, for my gifts are given in His name."

Thus the youngest daughter of the nobleman was married, and she and her father and her sisters lived happily for the rest of their lives.

Some time later the good Nicholas was made a bishop, and he went about from place to place preaching and doing deeds of kindness, so that all the people loved him. And when he died the people said: "We will not call him Bishop Nicholas, but we will call him Saint Nicholas, for if there was ever a saint upon earth, it was our good Nicholas."

Teacher: "If a farmer sold five tons of potatoes at fifteen cents a pound, what would he what would he get?" Boy: "A motor car!"

The Boy With The One Gift

(A Christmas Ballad by Theodosia Garrison.)

Brave gentlemen, fair ladies, all and one,
Listen unto the tale I fain would tell—
A Christmas miracle
Concerning Christopher, the farrier's son,
To whom great good was done.

The little waifs sang in the inn yards
They sang in the squire's hall;
By casements bright
With Christmas light
They sang for their neighbors all—
Eleven o'clock on a Christmas Eve
—In a white snowfall.

Red-cheeked lads of Devon,
Hearty as apples and ale;
Only one,
The farrier's son;
Was little and crooked and pale;
But his voice was sweet as a linnet's pipe,
His heart was a knight in mail.

Red-cheeked lads of Devon—
All of their carols done—
Dashed off aglow
Through the drifting snow
With shouting, frolic and fun;
And, limping his bravest behind them,
Came Chris, the farrier's son.
His voice was only a linnet's pipe;
He called, but they did not hear;
The snow fell white
As a curtain might;

He halted to breathe and peer;
And here was the squire's stable,
Where one might rest, nor fear.

As he pushed the door aside,
The parish bell rang out,
Clashing in the steeple
One high, sweet shout;
As he stepped within the door,
Know you what he saw?
The great ox, the cattle all,
Kneeling down in awe.

Ere he came a step within,
Know you what was there?
Within a white light wonderful
A woman crowned and fair,
And in her arms a little Child,
Radiant and bare.

A little, crooked, limping lad,
He saw—he saw and knew
What might he bring
Unto this King—
To prove his loving true—
But this: he raised his linnet voice
And sang his carol through.

"God save you, merry gentlemen"—
Remember, 'twas his best!
A reverent priest
At Love's own feast,
He served an honored Guest—
A little lad who, singing, gave
The heart within his breast.

Bravely he sang unto the end,
Then sank upon his knee
And heard, as through
A dream come true,
A voice speak tenderly:
A sweet gift hast thou given Us—
My Son gives one to thee."

He knew a light touch on his brow;
Then darkness fell on all,
But still, he felt,
The cattle knelt,
Each one within its stall;
But Christopher, the farrier's son,
Stood straight and strong and tall!

Oh, straight and strong and tall he stood
As any lad might be;
And staunch he stood
As in the wood
Stands up a young oak tree;
He who had been the crooked one
Stood straight, and tall and free!

'Twas Christopher, the farrier's son,
Knelt on the stable floor;
A Devon lad,
Straight-limbed and glad,
Crooked and lame no more;
And suddenly the Christmas sun
Danced at the stable door.

Brave gentlemen, fair ladies, all and one,
This — of a Christmas miracle — is done.

ROOM FOR THE CHRIST CHILD!

By Daniel M. Henderson.
He had His birth by stall and bin;
There was no room for Him in the inn.

He brought good tidings of great joy;
Men turned from Him—poor Joseph's boy!

And only Mary's heart foreknew
The godly deed He was to do.

Judge not the past with bitter breath
The world has still its Nazareth!

Oh, men! We celebrate the day;
Our hearts are light; our halls are gay;

We feast; we ornament our trees;
We hold the ancient revelries;

Our children's voices ring with mirth,
But is the Christ Child by our hearth?

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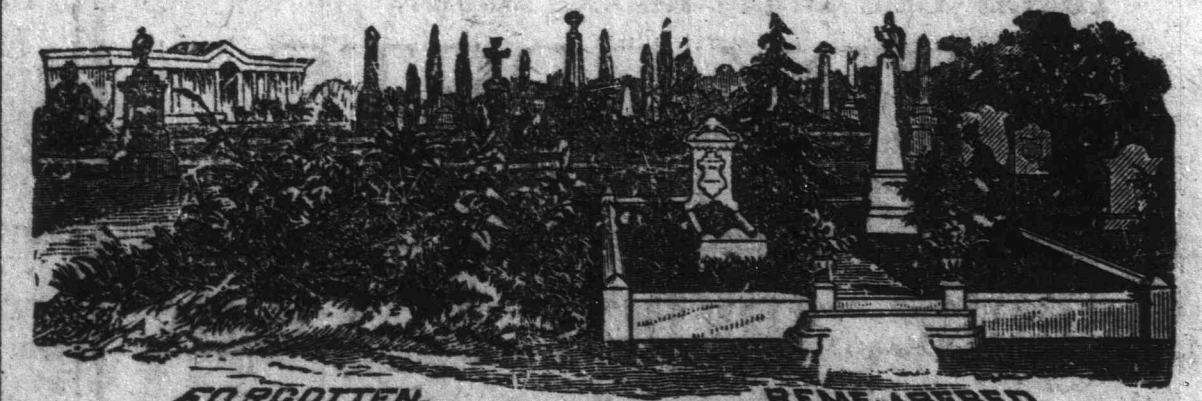
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