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FIRESIDE READING FOR JUVENILES.

Santa Claus.

We all know who Santa Claus is. He is the jolly little elf who on Christmas eve visits every home where there are boys and girls. He must be very, very old for he was making his annual rounds when Grandma was a little girl. In those days they did not have any big black stoves, nor even registers in the floor, but they had great wide fireplaces where they could roll in a log in the evening and make a blazing fire. The smoke and flames would curl round and round and go up in the biggest chimney you ever saw, and make a roaring noise as they went. The children would dance around the room in the glow of the fire for they did not have electric light in those days and the light from the fire was often the only one that they had in the room. What fun they had playing hide-and-seek under the tables and behind the chairs.

a chubby little fist thrust through the bars of the crib—and that is the way she knew her birdies were safe asleep.

Then, after the house was all quiet and verybody asleep, a little old man would climb down the wide chimney to the bed of ashes in the fire-place, and step on to the hearth. Sometimes he left tracks, and the children knew he really did come down the chimney. He would see that row of stockings, and chuckling all the time to himself, would stuff them full of everything the little children wantedlovely toys, candies and oranges. He had to hurry and climb up the chimney again, for there were lots of other houses that he had to go to yet.

That was years and years ago, for that yellow curl on the pillow was Grandma's hair when she was a wee little girl. Now Santa comes into our houses differently. You see the chimney is much smaller than grandma's was, and besides, Santa has got very fat and a little stiff. So it



"A CHEERLESS CHRISTMAS." From the painting by Nicholas Francois Tassaert.

But by and bye the fire would burn down, and the log would be only a red heap of coals, and pussy would sit comfortably on the hearth and blink as the sparks flew up the chimney. When the sparks would be pretty nearly all gone, then the children would sit down on the rug and pull off their stockings. They would pull a chair on to the hearth, and climb up in their bare feet. It was such a reach to hang their stockings on the mantleshelf that they had to stand on tiptoe. How they would scamper off to bed and hide their heads under the quilts. Now and then they would pop up and strain their ears to hear Santa Claus. Then there would be a rattle in the big chimney, and down would go the heads and not peek any more. mother would come up and see if the children were all covered and warm, all she would see would be a yellow curl on the pillow at the back of the bed, and a queer little round heap at the front, and she does not rise.

would be too uncomfortable for him to come down the chimney. One year he got stuck and made the stove smoke, and we decided then to leave the door unlocked on Christmas eve. We hang our stockings over the back of a chair, and he slips in quietly. He never slams the door when he is going out. In the morning we creep down-stairs in the dark. It is awfully cold and shivery too. We get our stockings all lumpy, and crackly with the things inside, and fly back to bed. We eat our candies and nuts and play with our dolls under the covers. It is fun till the bed gets prickly with the nut shells. Then we rush into Mother's room and jump on the bed, and hug her and kiss her, and say "Merry Christmas" to make her wake up. Father says we are worse than a hundred Indians.

It's the man who hammers the church down who complains most that

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