

A STORY OF CHRISTMAS EVE: HOW A YANKEE AND ENGLISHMAN SPENT IT

By Lawrence Perry in N. Y. World.

Villiers, seated disconsolately in a window of the Cavaliers, turned with a suggestion of renewed interest in life in his face as young Ashburton, of the British legation at Washington, advanced toward him across the reading-room, with a broad smile of greeting. Old Poppendyk, filled with the ardor of his latest story, intercepted him half way, whereat Villiers, who had partly risen, settled back in his chair with a scowl, and resumed his languid survey of the passing throng of vehicles and pedestrians on the avenue.

It was late in the afternoon of the day before Christmas, and of all stupid afternoons Villiers had ever spent this was supreme. For the past hour or so he had been informing himself of this dolorous fact, in ways as varied and as picturesque as he could devise, and had extracted some mournful diversion therefrom. He finally was obliged to confess that he had not been so utterly bored since he had missed the club car after the football game at Cambridge, and had been obliged to travel all the way from Boston to New York in a day coach at the side of a corpulent Yale man, who whistled the Boole when awake and snored the frog chorus from Aristophanes when asleep. This was an admission that no ordinary ennui could have extorted. However, Villiers felt little better for his frankness.

In fact, the flood of memories of that gloomy journey of more than five hundred miles, which followed logically upon the comparison, served only to aggravate his mood.

"Just chock full of Christmas spirit," he grumbled. "If I become much more enthusiastic I'll take that wreath of holly from old Nick Van Zant's picture up yonder and go prancing to the Piazza with the thing hung on my brow like a—like one of those Greek poets." The simile vaguely amused him, and he was about to smile, when Ashburton's perfunctory burst of laughter, with Poppendyk's cackling voice following hard upon it, in the preliminary verbal flourishes of "another and even better one," brought back the clouds.

"This is the fourth time this afternoon I've heard that old ass tell those chestnuts. I've reached the limit. If I hear them once more I'll quit this place for good. . . . Any man who pays dues for the sake of being tortured is a fool."

Now all this was entirely foreign to Villiers' nature. Ordinarily, he derived all sorts of amusement from Poppendyk and the stories which have been that gentleman's stock-in-trade for so many years—and the Cavaliers was his favorite club. He was a man not difficult to amuse, and popular for this and many other reasons. Villiers, in short, was a good fellow. He had an office in a downtown skyscraper, where, with an overplus of clerks and secretaries, he managed to carry along his legal practice, which consisted solely of the management of the late Randolph Villiers' estate, without the loss of any great amount of time or effort, on his part, at least. And more, his wife was an impartially pronounced beautiful and gracious, a worthy mother of two of the prettiest children that ever were, and all that sort of thing. Certainly there seemed no earthly reason why Villiers should ever feel discontent.

But he was discontented today, and for the life of him he could not tell why. That was the worst of it. In an undefinable way he was aware that the cause was involved in the fact that it was the day before Christmas. But how could that be? Because Dick Haggood had come down with grip at the last moment and had called off that Christmas stunt he had arranged at his country place in the Berkshires, was no reason why he, Hamme Villiers, should be genuinely disgruntled. He stretched his arm toward the bell in tacit admission of his plight, but withdrew it and leaned forward, gazing out with his chin resting heavily in his hands. It was cold outside. A shaft of wan sunlight came through a side street, and lay on the asphalt like a band of steel. The faces of the drivers on the electric hansom were blue-red, while the mechanics of the motor cars lay back in their seats showing only their eyes above the collars of great fur coats.

The street was a brilliant stream of vehicles of all sorts. And those who occupied them were laughing and talking, or else reclining snugly with expressions of ineffable self-satisfaction. The pedestrians impressed Villiers no less powerfully. They were full of this Christmas business, too. There was no doubt about that—nursing up, or hurrying down.

"Ought to be a red-hot Christmas when the mind of this old scoundrel is centered upon a single thought," he mused, half aloud. Then he stretched

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and yawned mightily. "What's the matter? Feeling sort of chippy? Do you know, I'm a bit that way myself." Ashburton drew chair alongside. "I came on from Washington for that bally Haggood affair, or, rather, had arranged to come on. Fixed up a brace of business appointments in Wall Street before the Stockbridge Limited was to pull out, and then, when the wire came, had to make the journey anyway—for the appointments, see?"

"Were you in that Haggood swindle, too?" exclaimed Villiers, eyeing the young diplomat with kindling interest. "Rather." Then the Englishman blinked at the implication that his friend also had been hung up downed upon him. "And you? Sorry. Still, I s'pose it might as well be you as the—as the next fellow." He laughed.

"Look here," remarked Villiers, irrelevantly. "You folks are more civilized than we. What do you do in London on a Christmas Eve?"

Ashburton raised his eyebrows. "What you do in New York, I suppose. And that, let me tell you, means anything, everything. Depends upon circumstances."

"Umph," Villiers scowled humorously at his companion. "I was never in England during the holidays; but do you know I always had an idea that everybody in London worth anything took stage coach out to some ancestral manor, was received by a parade of servants and villagers, ate a boar, and, later, got hilarious over ancient port mulled over a Yule log."

Ashburton smiled tolerantly, and shrugged his shoulders as though to imply that, whatever ideals his friend had, he was concerned with the holiday in London, he had done nothing more than his duty in shattering them with the mere truth. As for him, he was hardly in sympathy with Villiers' mood. He was extremely comfortable. He thought of the cosy grill downstairs, and the coming hour of cigars, liqueurs, and pleasant converse, to last until it was time to drive to the ferry for the ten o'clock train.

"I tell you," he said at length: "You dine with me here tonight, and I'll take about a real old English Christmas Eve I once spent in Surrey."

"Oh you will," said Villiers savagely. "You've nothing on then for the rest of the afternoon?"

"Care free—quite."

"Then, well, quit this sarcophagus and go out and see if we can pick up some of the 'all-pervading cheer,' as this evening paper calls it."

"But you can't pick it up, old fellow," objected Ashburton. "It's something from within. If you will have it, and on, and on. It was a wonderful Christmas story."

"Well," began Ashburton, "it was a beastly Christmas eve in Surrey—that's over the big ocean, you know. Beating evening—snow, wind, drifts, and all that sort of thing. And so, on and on. It was a wonderful Christmas story."

"I thrilled the hearts of the two children cuddled closer to Mrs. Burton. It thrilled the heart of Villiers, as he sat twirling his cigarette case. Something of his own childhood came back to him, old songs long buried deep, the feel of sheltered peace. He told a story himself, gayly, and sang a nursery ditty, marveling that he recalled the words. Then Ashburton showed just how Santa Claus would enter the nursery later in the evening, using for purposes of demonstration a Teddy bear, which he procured from his land-side overcoat; whereupon Villiers got down on the floor and demonstrated how a real live bear might act."

A moment later the dignified Ashburton, now utterly abandoned to the spirit of the evening, sang a song each line of which ended with a lighthearted "twee-dee-twee-dee-tum-tum," which reduced the younger portion of his audience to such gasps of mirth that the nursery governess confessed a momentary certainty that they would not sleep a wink.

"Now, then," said Villiers, after a score of good nights had been said, "I've got something rare downstairs that will fill in this evening nicely. And when those kids are asleep, we'll sing a Christmas carol that will make all other Christmas trees of history look like raw, unfinished things," which proved to have been no idle boast.

Later, after the young Englishman had departed, laden with every blessing that host may bestow, Villiers stole into the nursery, where he arranged the tin motor car that wound up the doll that flitted, placing them prominently among the toys—purchased in bulk, apparently—which Mrs. Burton was bringing in.

He was carefully placing his Teddy bear on top of a mahogany doll-house when he heard his wife's step upon the stairs. Flushing guiltily, he stole into his dressing room, and when she peered in, ten minutes later, he looked over his cigarette in a masterly way.

"I say, Helen," he remarked, "let's always arrange to spend Christmas at home after this."

"But aren't we at home?" asked Mrs. Villiers.

"Why—oh, to be sure we are."

"Well, then, dear, what do you mean?"

But Villiers made no reply.

JUST THE SAME AS MONEY.

It was at the close of a missionary sermon that Mr. Budd, whose wont it was to contribute ten cents to each of the charities to the support of which the church subscribed, was seen to take a blue slip from his pocket and look at it keenly and affectionately.

When, after a slight but evident hesitation, he dropped the slip carefully folded into the box, Deacon Lane, who was passing it, could hardly refrain from an exclamation of joy.

"The Lord will bless you, Brother Budd," he said, when the sermon was over, hurrying down the aisle to overtake the prosperous grocer.

"I hope so," returned Mr. Budd, dryly: "but I'm afraid you caltate on that being a check that I dropped in the box." The Lord will bless you, Brother Budd, he said, when the sermon was over, hurrying down the aisle to overtake the prosperous grocer.

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Mr. Dooley On the Christmas Spirit

THE PHILOSOPHER OF ARCHWAY ROADS TALKS OF PRESENTS—YOU DON'T WANT THEM, BUT WOULD BE MAD IF YOU DIDN'T GET THEM.

By F. P. Dunne (Mr. Dooley).

"Father Kelly says Christmas is a feeling as well as a feast."

"About this time in the year the Christmas feelin' comes along an' gives ye a nudge."

"Ye're thinkin' about cuttin' down expenses an' savin' money an' the Christmas spirit whippers in yer ear."

"Come, give up."

"But, says ye, 'why shud I be buyin' things fr people that don't want things fr me that I don't want?'"

"None if yer business," says the spirit of Christmas. "Loosen up."

"An' th' first thing I know ye'er in a jolly store buyin' a gold watch an' a diamond stud fr me, I think not, but I hope."

"I hope about Christmas time that I'm goin' to get somethin' that I've always wanted, but so far, havin' a matherly sixty Christmas, I've had little luck."

"Here's a little somethin' I got fr ye."

"An' ye'll open it up an' pretend to be overwhelmed with pleasure an' surprise whin we see a yellow cravat with green stripes."

"Well, upon me wurrud, how did ye come to think of this? There must be somethin' in thought transference, fr this is th' thing I was hopin' some wan wud give me."

"An' th' next week I observe that I've got a new cravat."

"I'll be bound to say, I feel I ought to take this. Why did ye go to such expense fr me? It makes my poor little gift look so trivial."

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"If ye hadn't given me anything or if ye'd given me something and I hadn't given ye anything, we'd both feel mad."

"There ain't any worse feelin' thin not gettin' somethin' fr somebody that ye've give somethin' to except to get somethin' fr somebody that ye've given nawthin' to."

"In wan case ye feel like a sucker an' in the other like an embezzler."

"I've often thought 'twud be a good idee fr people to get together a week or two before Christmas an' say: 'If ye'll promise not to give me th' necktie that I see in yer eye I will promise not to give ye the pen-wiper I intend to give ye in self-defense.'"

"But both th' spirit of Christmas an' J. Felsenthal tell me this is wrong."

"They both say, 'Unbel! and they're right.'"

"Well, 'tis a grand peeryod, annyhow."

"I begin to see th' effects iv it already."

"Th' amount iv anyvayable grinnin' has already increased about fifty per cent."

"Th' stores are brightenin' up."

"I see me frinds goin' home with bundles under their overcoats."

"The Salvation Army Sandy Claus on th' corner with th' false whiskers is jinglin' his tambourine."

"Even old Grogan give me a pleasant bow this mornin'."

"He has sint wurrud to his depoytors that they can draw out their money if they'll promise to spend it on presents an' not on household expenses or other base luxuries."

"An' as fr th' childer, Christmas has been comin' fr about two months fr thim, an' comin' strong'er an' shinin' in their cheerful, hopeful, av'aricious little faces."

"No matter what kind iv a Christmas this is fr anybody else, it'll be a good wan fr th' kids."

"There niver was a bad wan fr thim."

"I cud enjye Christmas more if I was younger," said Mr. Hennessy.

"I'd like to mention a million or two other things, includin' me," said Mr. Dooley.

"Run out now before they're all gone an' buy that match-box."

"I have in th' drawer a necktie that I'd defy ye to wear to a ball iv th' Social Order iv th' Sons iv Ham."

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