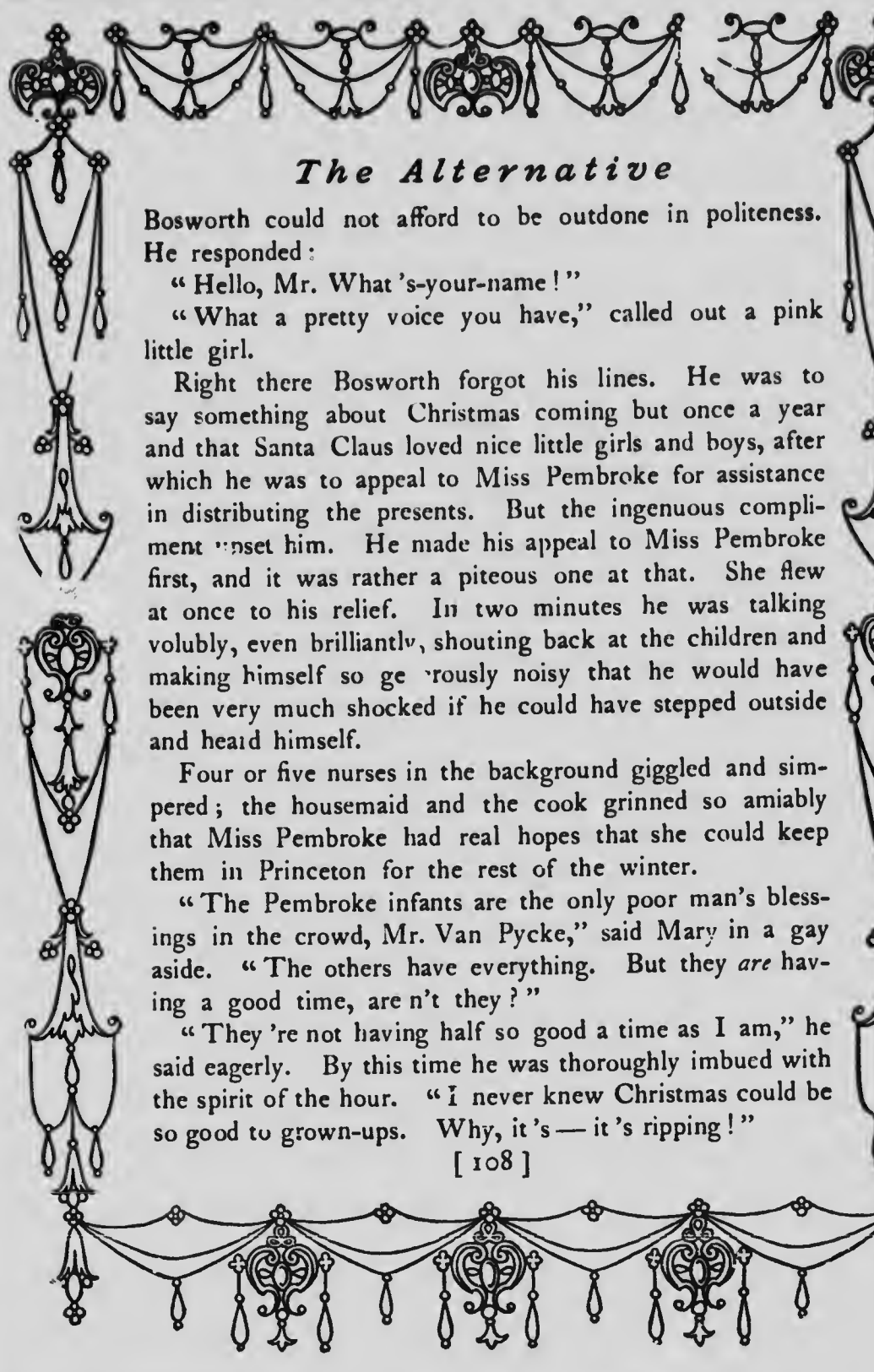




The Alternative

Bosworth could not afford to be outdone in politeness. He responded:

"Hello, Mr. What's-your-name!"

"What a pretty voice you have," called out a pink little girl.

Right there Bosworth forgot his lines. He was to say something about Christmas coming but once a year and that Santa Claus loved nice little girls and boys, after which he was to appeal to Miss Pembroke for assistance in distributing the presents. But the ingenuous compliment upset him. He made his appeal to Miss Pembroke first, and it was rather a piteous one at that. She flew at once to his relief. In two minutes he was talking volubly, even brilliantly, shouting back at the children and making himself so gloriously noisy that he would have been very much shocked if he could have stepped outside and heard himself.

Four or five nurses in the background giggled and simpered; the housemaid and the cook grinned so amiably that Miss Pembroke had real hopes that she could keep them in Princeton for the rest of the winter.

"The Pembroke infants are the only poor man's blessings in the crowd, Mr. Van Pycke," said Mary in a gay aside. "The others have everything. But they *are* having a good time, are n't they?"

"They're not having half so good a time as I am," he said eagerly. By this time he was thoroughly imbued with the spirit of the hour. "I never knew Christmas could be so good to grown-ups. Why, it's — it's ripping!"