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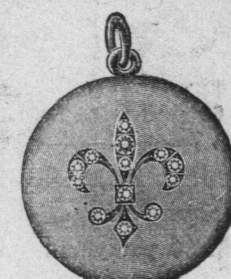


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The Angel of Peace.

By G. D. M.

"Peace!" sighed the Preacher, as he prepared his Xmas sermon. "Peace!" whispered the Mother, as she prayed for her soldier son. "Give us honorable peace, O Lord!"

"Peace! Not 'art,' says Tommy, knee-deep in his muddy trench. 'Not till we gets a better go at them blooming 'uns!'"

The question of Peace, however, was one that did not trouble the soul of the oldest toy-maker of Berlin as he sat before his bench, bending his small blinking eyes upon the ingenious forms of dolls and animals which his clever fingers had fashioned out of a block of wood. The war was but a name to him. The long lines of soldiers had marched down the street, the bugles had blown, the banners had flung their folds to the breeze, the women had come home, white-faced, grim-tipped, dull of eye; but the old toy-maker had only said: "War? Is there war?" and looked to his work again.

Years before, he had been a soldier; had marched with his regiment, had proudly borne his sword and fought through wars which had marked him by his scars as a hero—but when, for the last time, he came home, men looked pityingly at him and tapped their foreheads significantly. "The wars," said they. So that is why the oldest toy-maker sat contentedly at his bench and plied his tools. His mind could not grasp events outside, nor understand why Gretchen's face was sorrowful. He looked around the walls of his little room and smiled happily at the shelves piled high with toys. Smiling dolls, spruce soldiers, deck-hent peasants, child dolls, grown up dolls, horses whose legs could move, bears with red eyes, cats, dogs, birds—a place to make a child gasp with delight.

"Gretchen," he would say, "when the Xmas time comes, the little children will flock around our home and see my toys and be happy."

Two little ones were even then

standing outside the window, peering at the treasures within, and as an elephant, in all the glory of gray paint, and crimson and gold trappings, was placed on the bench, they raised a shout which brought to the spot a whole troop of children clamoring: "Let me see! Get out of my way, little one! Let me see the elephant. Oh! what a beauty! I must tell my mother about that elephant!"

His daughter Gretchen, in her anxiety as to her husband Heinrich, would sometimes come and stand in the door of the workshop, but at the sight of the bent figure working very patiently by the light of a flaming candle, she would stop, and look, and turn away, murmuring:

"The father would not understand. Why burden him by trying to make him feel my sorrow? Ah! the war! The cruel war! Oh Heinrich, my husband!"

From the dull mists that enshrouded the mind of the old man, one star shone forth, whose glory was never obscured. The festivity of Christmas was dear to his heart; all the year long he worked for that Christmas, and when the great day at last arrived, there was none more childishly happy than he. This year, as the winter drew near, the thought came into his mind that he would make, with his own hands, a Christmas gift for the Emperor. What should it be? A gift suitable for the season, skillfully carved, an object of beauty. Perhaps the Kaiser would thank him. He had heard that all men were as children; perhaps the Kaiser would not scorn his offering of wood. A Christmas angel! He could carve that. He would gild its wings and put a crown around its brow. "Peace and goodwill." That is what the chimera rang out year after year. The Angel of Peace—ah! yes. He would call his present by that name. The Angel of Peace, a gift to his great Emperor from the oldest toy-maker of Berlin.

So he selected a block of wood, and set to work. Very patiently, very carefully, he carved away, seeing always before him the beautiful form of the completed gift. Slowly he carved the outstretched arms, the light, poised form, the lying drapery, which was so fragile and delicate it scarcely seemed as if it could be of wood. The face was calm, the mouth half open with a tender, pitying expression.

Gretchen came from the kitchen to gaze: "Ah! the Holy Mother! how she loves."

The wings, very strong, very high, seemed to be lifting the angel form to Heaven. In sooth it was the masterpiece of the old toy-maker. It was his supreme work of love.

At last came the great day when it was finished. It stood in the workshop—a ray of sunlight glanced on the gilded wings and the crown, and flashed glory into the dim, dusty, crowded corners of the room. Brightness radiated from the Angel of Peace. Gretchen whispered:

"Ach, my father, but it is wonderful. To think that thine old hands have done this!"

And he answered, a faint trace of regret in his old voice: "But it must go from here, my daughter. It must go from here."

So in the afternoon he went to his bedroom and dressed himself carefully in his shabby best and tenderly wrapped the Angel of Peace in gilded paper. He let himself out into the cold, dusty street, and some children, who saw him standing there, cried out:

"See! It is the toy-maker. He carries a big—a wonderful toy wrapped up in gold! Let us see it, old man. Let us see it!"

"No, no, my children," spoke he, in his quavering tones. "No, no. This is for the Kaiser, our Emperor. You must not touch it. Take your hands from my coat. Nay, nay, little Minna," he repeated, gently detaching the clinging fingers of a rosy cheeked little maid, "thou canst not see this gift. But go, and ask Aunt Gretchen for the little wooden horse that stands on the tool-chest. That will please thee better than this."

But the children, their curiosity now aroused, followed the feeble old man at a distance. The wind whistled around the corners and tugged at the gilded paper. It blew his hat from his head, and he stopped helplessly till a passing boy ran for it and brought it to him. His arms ached, for the Angel of Peace was a heavy load for his feeble strength. He gazed vaguely at a squad of recruits as they marched down the square.

"Why are they marching?" he asked a bystander.

"They're training for the war, old man," replied the other, eyeing him curiously.

"Ah, yea! the war!" murmured the toy-maker, and pressed onward. Of no interest to him were the affairs of the great world. Even the biting wind did not chill him—his heart was aglow. Was he not going to the Emperor with his gift?

At last he saw the gates of the Palace before him, and he hurried

across the square to where the guard

"The Kaiser!" said he, eagerly. "Can I see the Kaiser? I have a gift, a beautiful gift that I myself made for him this Christmas time!"

"A gift!" exclaimed the guard for the Kaiser. Let me in where I think he would accept a gift from such as you? Let me see this beautiful offering!" He stretched out his hand towards the gift wrapping paper.

"No, no," said the toy-maker, shrinking back. "None can see it before the Kaiser. Let me in where I may ask for him. He would not scorn my gift. He is the Kaiser."

"Ho! Ho! Ho!" laughed the guard derisively. "Here, Hans! Here Johann! come and see the Kaiser's Christmas present!"

A group of laughing guards surrounded the trembling toy-maker.

"Come, old man, we must see the gift first, to find if it is suitable for the Kaiser. Here, now, no nonsense. Ah! the old fool, how he clings to his tawdry bundle!"

The old toy-maker looked into their faces. No pitying look met his eye. Scorn, derision, mockery, all were there.

"Kind sirs!" he exclaimed. "I am the oldest toy-maker of Berlin, and for long I have striven over this gift. I pray you, let me in to where I can present it to the Kaiser, so that—"

"A toy for the Kaiser! a toy for the Kaiser! Ho! Ho! Ho!" The guards gave a great shout of laughter. "What would the Kaiser do with a toy, stupid? A doll, is it? or a wooden horse that he might ride on to the wars?"

"No, no! it is not that," came from the old man in agonized tones. "No, no, I would not insult my Emperor thus. It is a beautiful gift, my angel. The wings are gilded so bravely—it has love in its face, my angel! Oh! I worked at it so, for days and days, making it worthy of the Emperor. Let me to him, kind sirs. I know he would accept my offering, my Angel of Peace, for the—"

"Angel of Peace? of Peace? Who says Peace?" thundered the guard. "Treason, treason! Let me see it!" and more determined than the others, he stretched forth his hand and tore away the gilded wrapping. But the old man swayed to and fro. Dizziness came over him. The world grew black.

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Still clutching the Angel of Peace to his breast, he fell headlong on the pavement.

"Father, my father," rang out a piercing scream, and Gretchen, all dishevelled, her hair flying and her cloak loosened, pushed with wild gesture into the midst of the little group, and threw herself on the pavement beside the old man.

"Father! my Heinrich is dead. Ah! so brave he was, but the war has killed him. My curses on the war! my curses on the war! Peace! what good is peace now, for my Heinrich is dead! Come home, father! oh! who will bring him home? Curses on those who made the war! Oh, the Angel of Peace, mocked and scorned!"

As she flung her arms to Heaven, one of the guards, seized her by the wrist, cried out: "Hush, woman, your words are wild. 'Is there one among you there,' he called to the little group who had gathered on hearing her screams, 'is there one who can take this woman and the old man away?'"

The figure of a neighbor pushed through the crowd. "I know the woman, and—Himmel! but it is the old toy-maker. He worked for days on his present for the Kaiser. What happened?"

"We were but having some sport with the old fool," answered one of the guards, "when he fainted away as you see him, and this mad creature of a woman broke upon us with cries and curses."

"Well, I will take them home," began the neighbor, when a sudden shout rang through the square.

"The Kaiser comes! The Kaiser comes! Clear the way! Open the gates!"

The guards sprang to swing wide the huge gates, the crowd shrunk back, the neighbor lifted the insensible old man in his arms and with Gretchen by his side hastened away. In through the gates swept the Kaiser and his attendants.

But the Angel of Peace lay on the pavement, the wrapping paper fluttering in the cold wind, its golden wings broken by the hoofs of the Kaiser's horses.



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