

A Peep Into Santa Claus's Home.

SANTA CLAUS sat in his easy-chair,
And thoughtfully rumbled his silver hair;
His face wore a look of sad unrest,
And he heaved a sigh from his inmost breast,
A woe that told that his heart was faint.
Pray, what had come over the jolly old saint?

Around him lay scattered a goodly store—
Such playthings as never were seen before,
New books emblazoned in red and gold,
And dolls too dainty almost to hold—
In heaps and heaps to the ceiling piled,
But he looked on them all and never smiled.

For close at his elbow sat his wife,
And she spoke, in a voice with discord rife,
Of how she never could go away,
But was forced like a prisoner at home to stay;

And when she ended the doleful strain,
She straightway began it all again.

"Ah, Santa, well may you be content,
As you think of the Christmas merriment,
Of the happy children, whose shining eyes
Will sparkle with joy and glad surprise.
From the lips of all will your praise be heard,
But of me they never speak a word.

"And yet you know through the whole long year

I plan and work for their Christmas cheer.
I knit the mittens and worsted balls,
The hoods and scarfs; I dress the dolls;
I choose for the children sick or lame
Some curious puzzle or charming game.

"Then, say, is it just that I should stay
At home all alone on Christmas-day,
With never a friendly word of cheer
To break the silence that reigneth here,
While you, close-wrapped in your cushioned sleigh,
With your reindeer fleet speed away and away?

"But I've borne it as long as I shall—so there!

And you needn't answer me. I declare
This year shall the end of my trials be:
I go with you, or you stay with me.
So you'd better resolve, without more strife,
To divide your honours with your wife."

I listened no longer, but easily
Could I guess from this what the end would be.

"When a woman will," so the proverb goes,

And the rest of the stanzas each one knows.
So you needn't wonder, next Christmas-day,
To see Santa appear in a double sleigh.

—Ella W. Ricker.

HOW CHRISTMAS CAME TO WOOD'S HOLLOW.

BY ELLA G. G. PAGE.

MARION RICHARDS shut the door of the little red school-house on Friday night with a sigh of relief. Two days' holiday—no more school until next Monday; and with a thankful feeling for her weekly rest, she went down the rough steps, worn by the feet of many generations, and at the foot was confronted by the snarled head and ungainly form of Joe Stone, the most ragged and unruly of her scholars.

He evidently had waited to speak to her.

"Well, Joe," said she wearily, "what is it now?"

He fumbled at the sleeve of his ragged jacket for a moment, and worked his clumsy feet uneasily in the tight snow. Then he broke forth,—

"Teacher, what is Christmas, anyhow? Nan Jones said it comes week after next, and Lu Green said she had seen a tree on Christmas full of presents for everybody, but I wa'n't green enough to believe that, you bet;" and he winked one eye and grimaced at his hearer. "I told 'em I'd ask you, and they said I dassen't do it. What is it, anyhow?" and he looked half defiantly, half sheepishly, into the lady's face.

"Do you mean to say no one has ever told you about Christmas—what it is—in all your life?" queried the astonished girl. "Did not ever your father and mother"—she stopped, for Joe had broken out into a chuckle.

"Well," drawled he, "seein' my mother died when I was a baby, and dad spends his time mostly in jail, you see they hadn't time to tell me; or mebbe I was so young I've forgot it," and he laughed again.

Marion looked at him—only twelve years old, no mother, and worse than no father! Somehow his rags and dirt, that before had only disgusted her, now moved her to pity.

"Where do you live?" she asked him in a softer tone than ever had fallen on Joe Stone's ears before.

"Oh, the old shanty on the hill belongs to me. Granddad left it to me because he said dad would spend it all, and I live there and do chores for my meals when I can get 'em to do, and go without eating when I can't."

"Walk down my way with me," said Marion, turning abruptly to hide a sudden tear, "and I'll tell you all about Christmas;" and for the first time Joe walked beside a nicely-dressed, lady-like woman, and heard, too, for the first time, the wonderful Christmas story, told, as Marion Richards had the gift of telling a story, with force and pathos.

At the close Marion bade the boy a kind "good-night" and went up the gravel walk to the little white cottage of the Widow Storrs, where she boarded, with a strange sort of pity stirring her heart for the boy who had never heard of Christmas.

"Mrs. Storrs," said she that evening, as the two lingered over their fragrant tea and smoking biscuit, "don't they ever keep Christmas here at Wood's Hollow?"

"Keep Christmas here!" said the widow with a strong emphasis on the last word. "Why, no! I used to when my Eddie was alive. He always hung up his stocking—oh, dear!" She wiped her eyes on her clean apron and began more briskly: "No; nobody here has any time or money to spend on Christmas. Why did you ask?"

"Oh, Joe Stone asked me about it; he knew nothing about it, nor any of them except Lucy Green, and she not much. Mrs. Storrs, why cannot we have a Christmas tree for them—the children, I mean?"

"How would you get your tree? And, Miss Richards, where would you

put it? And how would you get the presents?" Mrs. Storrs became an interrogation point all at once.

"Oh, somebody would get it in the woods. I'd have it at the school-house. The presents I'd make," said Marion rising and answering all these questions briefly, and she sat down in a brown study.

When the widow sat down to her knitting she resumed the subject.

"There are only twelve scholars, and you would help me, wouldn't you, Mrs. Storrs? We could make a horn of plenty for each one and fill it with candy, and a little present besides, couldn't we?" and a coaxing tone and smile accompanied the words.

"Yes, I'll help, but you'd better have 'em here, so I can help make them behave."

"May I really have them here? That is just splendid! There are two weeks to work in. Let me see—mittens for Annette and Cora, that's easy. Mattie will like a doll. I'll make a rag one, paint the face, and put on real hair. I can give Emma Jayne—oh, she wants everything—an apron, a pair of stockings, something to wear anyhow. What on earth shall I give Lu Green? She is my best scholar, too big for dolls, and she has mittens. A book for Will and Ted each. I've just the right books at home, and I'll write to mother to send them. And Joe! Oh, dear! I wish there was a hardware store in Wood's Hollow!"

"What for?" said Mrs. Storrs, interested but somewhat bewildered by the energy and enthusiasm of Miss Marion.

"Oh, I heard Joe tell one of the boys the other day that he'd rather have a jack-knife than anything else in the world. He said he had never had one, and he is twelve years old."

"A knife?" said the widow slowly. She sat silent a moment, then rose, and taking a lamp from the shelf, went into an adjoining room. In a few moments she returned, bringing a long flat box which she placed in Marion's hand silently, and sat down in her accustomed place. Inside the box, when it was opened by Marion's slender fingers, lay a pocket-knife, a perfect beauty—four-bladed, ivory-backed, sharp and bright.

"What do you mean by this?" queried Marion, her eyes aglow and her face kindling.

"It was bought for Eddie many years ago, a few weeks before Christmas, but he was brought home drowned before that day came, so he never saw it. It has been in my box ever since. You may have it for Joe. He is an orphan, and perhaps if his mother had lived, he would have been a better boy. She was a slimpy sort of a thing, but she was pious. His father is a hard one. Will that do?" she asked with a smothered sigh.

"It is just the thing! How can I thank you!" exclaimed the delighted teacher. "Now Joe is provided for, and I will give Lu Green a picture of

Evangeline that I have up in my trunk. She likes such pictures, and I have a lot of worsted, too, for the mittens and things. Mrs. Storrs, Wood's Hollow shall have one Christmas, anyhow!"

And as the clock struck nine, she rose, still holding the knife, and taking her lamp she bade the widow good night.

Upstairs she opened her trunk and took out the engraving of Evangeline, the poet's dream of matchless constancy, and soliloquized: "How shall I frame this?" Just then she caught the golden shine of a picture frame hanging over her head. "I might take that, but my precious mamma deserves a golden frame; and yet Lucy never had a picture in her life, and she loves them so. I'll tell the story to them all about Evangeline. Yes, I'll take you out of your frame, mamma dear, and you shall have another some day. That's just right. Then there's that tidy I was making for Aunt Dell. She has hosts of tidies. I'll give that to Ann Jones; she likes bright colour, and they have a parlour with the prettiest, homeliest old rocking-chair in it, I ever saw. I'll make it larger so as to hide as much of that horrid chair as possible. I must send to mother for coloured paper for my horns of plenty and some other little fixings."

And she closed the trunk with a satisfied smile, and after a blessed chapter of the Book and a heartfelt prayer, the little teacher slept, to dream of gigantic Christmas trees and eager faces.

It was hard to say which were the more astonished, scholars or their parents, at the reception by each scholar of a nicely-written invitation to spend Christmas evening with their teacher at Mrs. Storrs. There were great debates over the proper answer to these invitations, which ended by following the advice of Lucy Green. Twelve answers exactly alike were sent to Miss Richards in various handwriting, from Joe Stone's scrawl to Mattie Jones' large printing capitals. They ran as follows, with different names:—

"Miss Lucy Green will be glad to visit Miss Marion G. Richards at Mrs. Storrs on Christmas.

"Your obedient servant,
"LUCY GREEN."

The form of signing was a brilliant idea of Ann Jones, and was thought to give style and elegance to the whole composition.

None of the children ever forgot that evening. The parlour was trimmed with evergreens and hemlock boughs. Marion had enlisted the two clerks in the one small store of the place into her service, and they, showing a suspicious readiness to oblige her, had brought a large load of Christmas greens to the house early in the morning. So the room was a woodland bower.

One mysterious corner was enclosed with a curtain of sheets, above which