

Children

The Christ Child and the New Year Boy

IT was New Year's day and the bright afternoon sun was shining down into one of the pleasantest nurseries in the world; the room was full of pictures

and books and toys so many of them the very kind that children like best.

There was a rocking-horse, there were tin soldiers and guns and trumpets and drums and steam engines and games and paint-boxes and so many kinds of picture-books that one would think the

child who lived in this nursery would be quite as happy as anyone could wish to be.

It seems a pity that I should have to tell it, but at the time I am writing about, the owner of this lovely room, and all the nice things in it, was lying on his back on the couch in the corner, screaming with all his might, so that his face was quite red and ugly and not at all pleasing, as it should have been.

A few moments ago Nurse had brought

the little lord of this pleasant nursery-land into the room, and she had been obliged to carry him by one arm and one leg, because he had refused to come in any other fashion. She had laid him upon the couch because he did not know or care just then where he was, he was so very angry.

Nurse had taken him from the front hall floor, where he had thrown himself in the bitterness of his disappointment when papa and mama had kissed him good-by and gone away, to make a visit without him. He had been left at home because he was too young to go so far and stay up so late.

He had been having such a beautiful New Year's day, it was a shame for mama to go and leave him he thought. He had forgotten entirely how long she had been playing with him and reading to him, and he had forgotten too, that dear little New Year Boy, about whom she had been reading the very last thing before she had to stop.

This New Year Boy was said to go about and sit in children's nurseries and write down on his long New Year's scroll all the things they said and did; when the things were good, loving, happy ones they made the page all white and fair and beautiful, and when they were wrong, selfish ones they made the page dark and ugly, and the New Year Boy was said to weep very bitterly as he recorded them.

Little John and mama had had such a good talk together after she had finished this story, and before they were through John had determined not to give the New Year Boy one unpleasant thing to write down on his roll all this year for he was so good and cunning John couldn't bear the thought of making him cry. And then, after all, forgetting everything about him the very first time something not quite pleasant happened—this troublesome temper had had its way again, and he had kicked and screamed in that dreadful manner which he knew hurt mama so much and made her go away with the sad look in her eyes.

When Nurse laid him on the couch, he kicked so hard that one pillow went off on to the floor, and then another, and he screamed till he was tired and his throat hurt; and then he stopped and began to count the little circles and squares in the pattern of the paper on the ceiling. He counted them through his tears, as he lay there on his back, till he began to grow sleepy, and the circles began to change into other things, and the squares looked like something different, and then there began to be pictures on the ceiling, where the little figures had been before.

One picture seemed to be of his own nursery, and there was the little New Year Boy sitting right on the edge of the table writing, and as he wrote, he took out a little pocket-handkerchief from somewhere and began to wipe his eyes, and he wiped the again and again as though they were too full of tears for him to see to write. The angry boy on the couch knew that he must be writing about his anger, and oh, he was so sorry! He turned his head down among the pillows and his face burned!

After a little, the New Year Boy jumped down and walked very slowly and sadly away with the roll under his arm.

John never thought of speaking to him but while he lay there thinking there seemed to come another picture on the ceiling. He knew it very well, from the one mama had given him on Christmas-day, and which papa had hung over his bed right there in the nursery; that was of the Christ-Child in the manger, with the gentle Mother bending over him, and Joseph and the Wise Men and the cow. But this picture was different, because Mary and Joseph and the Wise Men were gone away and the Baby was lying alone in the manger with only the kind-faced cow over there keeping watch.

And while the boy on the couch was looking and wondering where they all had gone, there came walking into the stable the figure of the little New Year Boy. He looked tired and travel-stained as though he had come a very long way and his face was anxious and troubled. The roll was in his hand and he walked to the side of the manger and tried to climb up to where the Christ Child lay.

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