

Santa Claus' Sister.

BY JULIA ANNA WOLCOTT.

We stood at a crowded counter,
Little Geraldine and I;
There was only a day before Christmas
And hundreds were waiting to buy.

The shelves and the cases were covered,
And the counters were piled up high,
With the loveliest things for presents
Ever seen by a mortal eye.

There were books with most beautiful pictures,
And the strangest, most wonderful toys,
That were brought from over the ocean
On purpose for girls and boys.

There were dolls that could waltz and play tennis,
In dresses of satin and silk;
And horses to wind and set trotting,
And cows that you really could milk.

There were dogs that could bark like the live ones,
And birds of most brilliant wing,
With springs hid away 'neath their feathers,
That would make them fly upward and sing.

But the eyes of the child who stood by me
Had wandered away from all these,
And the sparkling Christmas angels
And the miniature Christmas trees,
And were scanning the faces about us—
The faces that huddled and pressed,
And looked weary and cross with the effort
Of getting in front of the rest—

When, grasping my hand, she whispered,
With eager, childish grace,
'Oh! that must be Santa Claus' sister,
She's got such a Christmas face!'

I looked where her eyes had lighted,
And, lo! in a threadbare gown,
Stood a queer, little, bent, old woman,
With a face that was wrinkled and brown.

But the eyes that beamed out from it
Were radiant with love and joy,
As, from 'mong all the beautiful objects,
She selected one poor, cheap toy.

And the worn, brown face was illumined
With a smile of good-will toward men,
That told, more plainly than words might,
She was keeping Christmas then.

I glanced at the forms about me;
There were women in rich attire
Whose unearned gold enabled
The purchase of each desire.

There were those of delicate feature,
Of gentle breeding and race;
But the queer, little, bent, old woman's
Was the only "Christmas face."

In shame, from my own I hastened
To smooth the impatience and frown,
As I looked at "Santa Claus' sister,"
In her faded, threadbare gown.

And I blessed both the child and the woman,
For their Christmas sermon sweet,
As I pressed through the throng of shoppers,
And on in the crowded street.

**HOW THE TREE SAVED THE TOWN.
CHRISTMAS IN HOLLAND.**

BY FRED. MYRON COLBY.

Holland, sunk below the sea-level, and defended by its dykes against the mad waves of the German Ocean, is the queerest little country in Europe; and Haarlem, on the river Spaarne, is one of the queerest and quaintest of Dutch cities. Its picturesque buildings and narrow streets still speak of the wars and tumults of the Middle Ages. Wars were frequent then, and each one seems to have left its scar or its heraldry on the city's livery. Three hundred and seventeen years ago this December, the city lay in leaguer. An army of thirty thousand Spaniards, led by the cruel Duke of Alva, besieged the place, which was defended by about four thousand men—Dutchmen and Germans. The Spaniards had inundated in blood the ruins of two cities—Zutphen and Naarden; but these horrors, instead of intimidating the courageous defenders of Haarlem, only inspired them with new ardour.

At the end of the first month's siege, the city still resisted firmly, and the thirty thousand men encamped beneath its walls began to doubt if they should ever win it by force, and resolved to resort to stratagem. Christmas eve, 1572, was chill and dark

and wintry. The snow lay to the depth of several inches; and the wind, which sweeps without obstacle over the plains of Holland, blew sharply. The Spanish camp lay silent and in darkness—not even the midnight mass seemed to put the people in motion. In the city, however, there were many houses lighted.

The German soldiers had brought from the fatherland the custom now generally observed throughout Christendom of lighting a tree in the evening, and hanging it full of gifts, to be distributed among the various members of the family; and as these auxiliaries were quartered in private houses, not a few of the citizens had introduced the novel feature in connection with the other Christmas rites.

One of these houses was situated near the gate called St. John, and a little behind the ramparts. It was owned and occupied by Arnold Van Merk, a citizen of note, and a prominent officer in the forces of the city. Domiciled under his roof was a German officer, Captain Karl, and several soldiers, besides his own family, which consisted of his wife and six children.

Van Merk's house was one of the highest in the city. From the upper story one could look out upon the ramparts, and above them over the camp of the Spaniards, and to the flat country beyond. The window of this room was of that large style which may still be seen in Dutch houses, and through which, by means of a pulley and cord, provisions and merchandise are raised to the roof chambers. Ordinarily it was secured by large and heavy shutters. Without this window the tree could not have saved the town.

Cold and cheerless as the night was out of doors, in the mansion of the Van Merks there were warmth and comfort. There was nothing present to remind one of the siege and its horrors save the armour and the arms hanging upon the walls, and the packages of lint scattered around. In almost every house in Haarlem the women made lint to bind the wounds of their brave brothers.

Van Merk and his guest, Captain Karl, came home very late. They were officers of the night, and had been the round of the city, finding everything in good order, and the enemy quiet. At their own door they were halted, and asked for the countersign.

"Holland, Orange and Liberty."

And with these words the two men entered the great house. It was one of Captain Karl's own German soldiers who was standing on guard; and several others were busying themselves in getting ready the mystic tree, which was placed in the upper chamber of the mansion. Although it was midnight, the Van Merk children were sitting up, impatiently waiting the summons which was to reveal to them the glories of this wonderful tree. Karl had promised them a grand surprise—and children never forget promises.

"All is ready," came the signal down the stairway.

"Follow me, then," cried Captain Karl. Up three flights of stairs they mounted, the older folks walking gravely behind; the younger ones, eager and impatient, in advance. What a marvellous sight it was to their wondering eyes! In the middle of the great room stood the tree, a lofty fir, blazing with light, and decorated with a glorious array of costly gifts. The illumination dazzled them. Never before had the star, the shepherds, the angels, and the Holy Child in the manger, seemed so real.

The children clapped their hands and cried for joy. They dared not approach the tree. It seemed a sacrilege to touch the branches, so brilliant, so mystic, so wonderful, with their load of precious things. Even the old soldiers were affected by the sight. To the joy of a festival was added that other joy still more sweet, of feeling themselves true brethren, united by a common peril and a common love.

Captain Karl led his young companions, one by one, to the tree, and took the gifts from the branches.

It was in the midst of this merriment that a terrible shout arose from the street below. Then fierce war-cries were heard, and the clashing of swords. They knew what it meant in a moment. Their blanched lips gave utterance to two words—"The Spaniards!" and then the men grasped their swords, and prepared to sell their lives dearly.

The enemy were indeed at hand. In the darkness and silence of the winter night they had scaled the wall, murdered two of the sentinels, and, before the third could give the alarm, hundreds of Spanish men-at-arms were on the ramparts, and other hundreds were following them. The city seemed lost. The atrocities of Zutphen and Naarden were to be repeated unless a miracle was interposed. It was at this moment that Captain

Karl, as if inspired, suddenly dashed open the shutters of the great window, and threw upon the crowded Spaniards the blaze from those hundred lighted candles on the Christmas-tree.

So suddenly and so unexpectedly did those fires burst out upon the darkness, that the Spaniards imagined they had fallen into a snare. This belief was strengthened by seeing the armed soldiers standing in the midst of the illuminated room, clad in armour, and with weapons glittering in the light.

A panic seized them, and without pausing to investigate, they drew back, and hastened down the ramparts in headlong confusion. The first arrived stumbled over the last, and numbers rolled, pell-mell, into the trenches. In a few seconds the wall was clear, the lighted tree shone upon a frightened multitude flying in disorder toward the camp.

Three hundred years have passed since that Christmas night, but the story of that first Christmas-tree is not forgotten. It lives in the nation's history; while at every frosid in Haarlem, when the Christmas-tide comes round, is the story told of how the city was saved in the olden time by Captain Karl's Christmas-tree. And if you were there to-day you would be told the story, and pointed to the city's arms and motto, which are these: A branching fir-tree, decorated and blazing with burning tapers, with the German legend, "Ein Feste Burg," the words with which Luther began his famous hymn—

"A mighty fortress is our God."

CHRISTMAS FEASTING IN OLD TIMES.

There are certain dishes which are peculiarly dedicated by custom and tradition to the Christmas feast. The plum pudding is almost the sole survivor of a long list of equally savoury ones. There was the boar's head, always the herald of the feast, and always seasoned with mustard. Next in importance was the peacock. The skin was carefully stripped off, with the plumage adhering; the bird was then roasted; when it was done and had cooled, it was served up again in its feathers, and, with gilded beak, was sent to the table. Sometimes the whole body was covered with gold leaf, and a piece of cotton, saturated with spirits, placed in its beak and lighted as it made its gorgeous entry. The noble bird was not served by common hands; that privilege was reserved for the ladies most distinguished by birth and beauty. Geese, capons, pheasants, and pies of carps' tongues also helped to set out the Christmas table in days gone by.

AFTER MANY DAYS.

From the New York Herald comes the following incident of genuine gratitude: A physician who recently moved up town took an evening paper from a small newsboy, and dived into his pocket for the change.

"That's all right, doctor," remarked the little fellow. "I won't take no money. Don't you remember Jimmie, that you cured last winter with the fever?"

Then the physician recognized in the tall and sturdy boy a little lad whom he had pulled through a fever without payment. "But that's all right, Jimmie," he said, "and you must certainly let me pay you for the paper."

"No," said the boy, "I won't. Where are you living up here, doctor? I want to come and see you."

He has not turned up yet to see the doctor, but every morning and evening he slips a paper under the door, and to have a proper understanding in the beginning, with the first paper he scribbled a little notice: "Please, doctor, except these papers allus from Jimmie."

THE CLOCK.

"Come, hurry up!" said the second-hand of a clock to the minute-hand; "you'll never get around in time if you don't. See how fast I'm going," continued the fussy little monitor as it fretted round on its pivot.

"Come, hurry up!" said the minute to the hour hand, utterly oblivious of being addressed by the second-hand. "If you don't be quick, you'll never be in at the stroke of one."

"Well, that's just what our young friend there has been saying to you."

At this point the clock pealed forth the hour as the hour-hand continued, "You see we're all in time—not one of us behind. You take my advice—do your own work in your own way, and leave others alone." Moral.—Mind your own business.

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