

Interviewing an Infant.

A Dream of New Year's Eve.

A curious thing happened the other night. It was after dinner, and I was sitting by the cheery fire in my lonely bachelor's room, when, overcome by the heat, or some of the good things I had been enjoying, I fell to nodding in my comfortable arm chair. How long I had been dozing, or sleeping, I don't know—it seemed but a moment or two—when my little handmaid Mary came into the room with the remark, "Please sir, there's a hamper as has just been left for you." "A hamper for me, Mary?" I said, in surprise, for I thought the old bachelor was forgotten by most of his friends. "Yes sir," said Mary, "and it be a big un, too."

Down stairs I went, and sure enough, there was the hamper addressed as plainly as it could be in a strange hand, to Mr. John Smith, which is my rather phibian name. It was an ordinary wicker work hamper, and beside the address label, carried a large label containing the figures "1883-4."

It was a "big un" as Mary said, but it was not very heavy; and Mary and I had not much trouble in getting it up to my room, where I placed it by the fire, opposite my old armchair. Then I sat down again, and gazed at it musingly, wondering, as people puzzle themselves about the superscription on an envelope, where it came from, who sent it, and what it contained. I must have dozed off again, when I was dimly conscious of a confused murmur in my ears as of the clanging of many bells, and very fully conscious of a clear, infantile voice, which came, apparently, from the fire place. What it said I could not exactly hear at first, but after a moment I heard the words, "I'm here." These came so unmistakably from the neighborhood of the hamper that I immediately got up, and commenced to open it. Hardly had I succeeded in doing so, when the lid of the hamper was suddenly raised, there was a cold icy blast—such as one feels about a mortuary—a faint, indistinct impalpable something, which gradually disappeared and then a chubby-faced infant sat up in the basket and said—as plainly as I could—"A Happy New Year."

There was nothing to distinguish this precocious infant from other infants except his precociousness. This, however, was so startling and unexpected that I could say nothing, think of nothing, but simply ask the question, "Who are you?"

"Please sir, I'm the new boy."

"The new boy? What do you mean?"

"Just what I say—I'm the new boy—come to take the place of the old boy—engaged for a year—time up a moment ago—cleared out as I came in—didn't you see him go?"

This was a poser. Here was I—John Smith, bachelor, old 50—holding a conversation with an infant who didn't appear to have been very long in the world. It was most extraordinary. I looked at the youngster, and the youngster looked at me—I could have sworn that once he actually winked, (but that would be preposterous) and I knew he laughed as I asked him, "What can you do?"

"Well, I haven't had a chance to do anything as yet. I'm a pretty small boy,

I am. But I'll grow, sir, I'll grow—and I hope you'll treat me well. You folks," he went on valuably, not giving me a chance to say a word,—"you folks generally treat us new boys well—at the beginning. You make all sorts of promises and forget all about them before we are with you three months. Last boy you had cut up pretty rough occasionally, didn't he? A smash, crash, blood and thunder sort of chap. You were rather glad to get rid of him, eh? You do tire of us, don't you, before you get through

with us, although you pretend to be sorry to part with us when our time's up. Well, I'm here now, make the most of me. Of course, as usual, you will make all sorts of promises, swear off, turn over a new leaf, and so forth and so on. I'm not going to make any promises. If you treat me well, I will serve you well. Wisely improve the present. The past is gone and done with, the future doesn't concern you. Wisely improve the present. Make what promises you like, but stick to them like a man. Never go back on your

word. Be just and generous. Help the weak and erring, relieve the poor and the sick, trust in God and do the right, and so shall your new year be in verity and truth a happy one in the best sense of the words."

The youngster stopped. There was a sudden bang as the lid of the hamper fell, and I started up rubbing my eyes to find the fire out, myself chilled to the marrow, the hamper still unopened, and all the bells in the city ringing the midnight hour.

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