

# DAVY GILCHRIST'S CHRISTMAS

By R. E. Knowles

Although a Scot, Davy Is Fond of Money and Mixes His Financial Proclivities With His Romance in a Way That Produces a Flock of Cynics Just at the Season of Universal Good Will and Cheer

THIS was how I happened to learn the story—which has its scene in a London club to which it was my honor to belong. The story concerns Davy Gilchrist, and it was told me by Major Hargrave, a war veteran, an author, and a first-class good fellow. The plaintive narrative was poured out to me one plaintive afternoon last November, the day, I think, of Bonar Law's funeral. For I recall that from the window of this Whitehall club we could see part of the vast and sorrowful crowd around the grey old Abbey.

Hargrave and I had been considerable by way of friends, and many a good talk we had over the billiard table—I used to owe him 80 in 100 up—and over our afternoon tea and in a weekly argument over the glory or decadence of Punch; while, in the most of the Englishmen, a sacred institution while I contended that a venerable momentum accounted for its still continued away.

So it came about that the secretary of the club dropped me a hint that I might try my hand on the gallant major in the matter of a testimonial to one of the female servants who was leaving to be married. (For our club, as you know, had retained upon its staff certain girls who had replaced the ancient men during the great struggle—one, a sort of superintendent, had been a benefactor to the club for

years before the war—but of her more anon.)

Hargrave was adamant in his refusal. "I pressed the matter a little, even to eloquence, once pleading that 'we should all help to burnish the auroral radiance of this maiden's wedding joy; who had found her prince in an untitled lover.' But Hargrave only turned on me a disdainful eye.

"Auroral be—d," he responded profanely. "I shan't give a shilling—and it's all on account of Davy Gilchrist and Christmas."

"Gilchrist," I echoed, "Gilchrist and Christmas—who in Christmas was Gilchrist?"

"Oh, I forgot," he answered, "you're only a new member of the club. Well, I'll tell you the story, though I don't know that I've ever done so before—it makes me so mad, even to think of it, that I can hardly see straight. He used to belong to our club—not that he was anything of an author, but he did get a book published—paid for it himself, I reckon—and he got one or two of the fellows to propose him one year about Christmas time when the club was deserted, you see; curse it, that's the worst of it, everything like this seems to be mixed up with Christmas, the very time you'd expect even a white-livered son of a sea cook to have some remains of a conscience. It beats me, I say, how they can choose a time like that for putting over their dirty tricks on decent Christians like myself that only—"

"But what's the story about this Gilchrist chap?" I broke in.

"A SCOT AND A BACHELOR."

"HE WAS a skunk," replied my friend with fine candor and succinctness, "and this is what he did." Whereupon he finally began his unhappy narrative, giving it to me in almost the very words which I shall reproduce as though he were telling it over again.

"This Gilchrist, sir, as you will suspect before I get through, was a Scotchman and a bachelor. But, although a Scot, he was fond of money. It grew on him, over him, into him. And yet he wasn't a bad sort of a chap, in some ways, only he simply wouldn't give as you people across the water say, as you were kind and sympathetic if the thing didn't go any farther than the thing itself. He was the sort of chap that would have proposed three cheers for

## Santa Will Find Quadruplets Celebrating Birthday



Two years ago Christmas Day these four youngsters came to the home of Mr. and Mrs. William T. Mahoney, Saint John. They are hearty youngsters. Santa will find a mantle full of stockings when he arrives. Left to right they are Edith May, Edna Louise, Lydia Christian and John Douglas.

the poor in Poplar, or, as Phepps said once you know Phepps, he's on Punch—he would have made a fine good Samaritan, except for the wine and the tuppence.

Then he was kind of eloquent, too—I suppose that's one way he put it over. When a Scotchman has the gift of the gab—thank the Lord, it isn't common with them—he's usually deeply generous with it. I remember how he used to rail against collections in church. "It disturbs the sacred spell," he used to say, standing right over there beside that fire. And when we used to appoint him for the Christmas fund for the employees, "No, sir," he'd answer, "I'll give nothing. Duty is its own rich reward. The joy of conscious rectitude is itself an endowment beyond the dreams of

avarice—let a man, high or low, but serve faithfully, even if he only stand and wait, and immortality will take his name out of time's careless keeping, into her own—that's the kind of stuff he loved to get off, used to think it out when he was coming across the park to the club, and then he'd deliver it as if he were travelling in birth with it before your very eyes. Anyhow, he wouldn't give anything, and he was death on Christmas.

And then, sir, came the change. We might have known, it came so sudden. Saul of Tarsus hadn't anything on Davy Gilchrist for a quick right-about face. I remember—that that was before we knew everything—Donna Doyle, the novelist, said he was going to write a story for the "Strand" on "The Regeneration of Davy Gil-

christ." It came about this way. Gilchrist's conversion, I mean. We had a wonderful woman in the employ of the club, and her name was Miss Browning. Most of the fellows thought, or said, that she was some connection of the immortal Robert. She had been here a good many years simply invaluable, was head push over the whole dining business, boss and inspector and general censor of the cooking department, too. Well, as you know, we Englishmen are inclined to do ourselves pretty well—and, partly for this, and partly because of her name, and partly because of her wonderfully sweet face and her dignified bearing, Miss Browning was persona grata with the whole club.

### MISS BROWNING'S TRAGEDY.

WELL, one day—I remember it well. It was about ten days before Christmas—Miss Browning, just after she had opened a letter, broke into the most violent flood of tears and sobs, and without a word, with her hands to her face she rushed back to her little private room; and, a few minutes later, her eyes red and swollen, and without a word to anybody, she passed silently out of the club, a bunch of eight or ten men seeing her as she went.

As you may imagine, there was a lot of speculation as to what was the matter—but no one knew. All they knew was that everybody was just full of sympathy and compassion for her. The real fact was, as we found out later, that Miss Browning had received a letter telling her that her favorite niece, a girl of 18, had run off with a no-good barber who worked down below in the court. But to get back to my story, nobody seemed more cut up or fuller of sympathy than Davy Gilchrist. And everybody was glad, because it seemed like a miracle. Often he lay down his paper, or even his knife and fork, which was much more remarkable, and when we'd ask him where his thoughts were, he'd say: "With that poor woman—I can't seem to get my mind off her sorrow. Oh, boys, I see my mistake, my cruel mistake, now. If you've got a chance to be kind, be kind while you have the chance, before it's too late," and then he'd jump up as if he wanted to hide his weakness, and go and stare out of the window at the Thames, and take his handkerchief out of his pocket and make a swift dab at his face as if he didn't want us to see, and then he'd come back and say: "You must excuse me, boys. I'm ashamed of myself," till pretty soon Gilchrist was a kind of strange pet amongst us, like a branch plucked from the burning, so to speak, and everybody felt we ought to cherish the new divine spark that had so suddenly appeared in the grim Scotch furnace of his soul.

And that, sir, was how Gilchrist put it over. (I like that American expression of yours—but I don't like the way Davy Gilchrist illustrated it.) About a week before the great festival of peace on earth and good-will to men, Gilchrist gathered a little bunch of us together in the card-room and shut the door. Then he began—and he might have been the Apostle John and St. Francis of Assisi rolled into one. "Gen-

lemen," he said, "I've found out all about it. About Miss Browning, I mean. I've found out the real tragedy—and, believe me, gentlemen, a real tragedy it is. That letter, which was followed by such a pathetic sequel, brought her the tidings, all too true, that her savings of a lifetime had been swept away by her over-confidence in a wretched uncle who got her to invest every sovereign of it in a company with offices on Holborn Viaduct. The company has vanished now—and so has Miss Browning's hard-earned money."

"This intimation, as you may imagine, sir, produced almost an outcry from all of us then present. But Gilchrist quelled it, raising his hand for silence. "Gentlemen," he resumed, "idle repining, even righteous wrath, is of no avail. The question now is: what are we going to do for this faithful but now broken-hearted woman? Perhaps you will retort that this kind of talk comes with but poor grace from me, for you all know my record and past attitude in this regard. But surely it makes it all the stronger, now that I have seen the light and acknowledge my miserable error. Judas himself would have been the greatest preacher of all time if he had only turned in time and shown what a really changed man he was. I am changed, and I am changed in Christmas time—and, to show what I think of Christmas now, I herewith start a testimonial for this woman, to whom we all owe so much, with a subscription of five guineas. You say you are sorry, gentlemen—how much are you sorry? I've told you I'm sorry five guineas' worth."

Well, sir, he put it over with a rush. Partly because of regard and sympathy for Miss Browning, and partly because of joy over one sinner that repented, the thing went like wildfire. And Gilchrist from the first refused to touch a penny of the money, ed on was the beaming face but down-cast eyes of Miss Browning. And Gilchrist was more eloquent than ever: "Gentlemen," he said, "what a beautiful Christmas is! I'm more and more converted to its gracious sway. What we want, gentlemen, is the Christmas spirit through all the year."

a little appeal to old members of the club, especially those in the provinces. This was done; and, to make a long story short, the aforesaid treasurer finally despatched to the destitute Miss Browning (whom everybody thought, and rightly enough, to have acquired quite a little bank-account through her modest and frugal years) a draft for the tidy sum of two hundred and fifty pounds—two hundred and fifty pounds, sir, not dollars, remember, was what was sent to her with a nice little note. Gilchrist said the only little privilege he would ask was that of writing the note, and I shall never forget how he sighed and swallowed his Adam's apple once or twice when he asked a few of us if we didn't think the following quatrain would be nice to close with:

"Tis the festive time of year,  
Time to make us all remember  
How-e'er could be life's December,  
Hearts can warm us, love can cheer."  
Well, I can't quite tell you how the whole thing was disclosed at last. It was generally understood that Miss Browning would come back at the beginning of the New Year, and everybody was glad and happy. But one day, somehow or other, one of the fellows found out that no trace could be found of any such "company" as the one Gilchrist had quoted as the savior for poor Miss Browning's feet. Interest deepened; so did investigation—but still no trace. Then one day the aforesaid treasurer telephoned Gilchrist, who had not lately been seen around the club, at his flat on Dover street. And Gilchrist replied that he would be glad to see him "tomorrow afternoon at my flat. I have an engagement, a very important engagement, in the morning—but I'll be delighted to see you about half after three."

And at half after three, three after Gilchrist, the treasurer, Halkeet, and myself turned up as arranged. Gilchrist let us in himself, a floral decoration conspicuous on the lapel of a legibly new morning coat. And as we passed in, the first thing our eyes rested on was the beaming face but down-cast eyes of Miss Browning. And Gilchrist was more eloquent than ever: "Gentlemen," he said, "what a beautiful Christmas is! I'm more and more converted to its gracious sway. What we want, gentlemen, is the Christmas spirit through all the year."

A chronic Christmas would rejuvenate, would regenerate the world. That is what it has done for me. Gentlemen, let me introduce you to Mrs. Marjory Hargrave stopped, turning a very red face in my direction. I really felt for the fellow, but all I could say was: "Well, old chap, it was tough enough. I'll admit. Everybody hates to be played for a sucker, but I'm afraid," smiling like an imbecile, "that there's nothing I can do to help."

"Don't be so sure," replied the gallant major. "You might just touch that bell and ask what I'll have. I'm feeling kind of weary."

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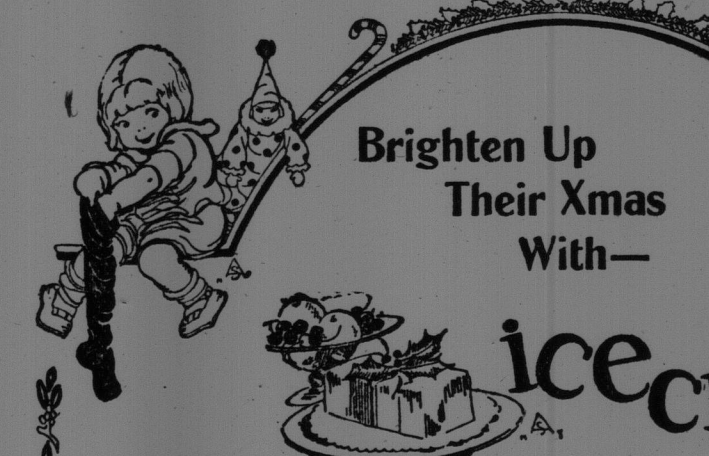


O little town of Bethlehem,  
How still we see thee lie!  
Above thy deep and dreamless sleep  
The silent stars go by,  
Yet in thy dark streets shineth  
The everlasting Light;  
The hopes and fears of all the years  
Are met in thee tonight.

How silently, how silently,  
The wondrous gift is given!  
So God imparts to human hearts  
The blessings of His heaven.  
No ear may hear His coming,  
But in this world of sin,  
Where meek souls will receive Him still,  
The dear Christ enters in.

O holy Child of Bethlehem!  
Descend to us, we pray;  
Cast out our sin, and enter in,  
Be born in us today.  
We hear the Christmas angels  
The great glad tidings tell;  
Oh, come to us, abide with us,  
Our Lord Emmanuel.

—Phillips Brooks.



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