



THE CLOWN'S BABY.

It was out on the Western frontier,  
The miners, rugged and brown,  
Were gathered around the posters,  
The circus had come to town!  
The great tent shone in the darkness  
Like a wonderful palace of light,  
And rough men crowded the entrance—  
Shows didn't come every night.

Not a woman's face among them;  
Many a face was bad,  
And some that were only vacant,  
And some that were very sad.  
And behind a canvas curtain,  
In a corner of the place,  
The clown, with chalk and vermillion,  
Was making up his face.

A weary-looking woman,  
With a smile that still was sweet,  
Sewed on a little garment,  
With a cradle at her feet.  
Pantaloons stood ready and waiting;  
It was time for the going on;  
But the clown in vain searched wildly.  
The "property" baby was gone.

He murmured, impatiently hunting,  
"It's strange that I cannot find;  
There! I've looked in every corner;  
It must have been left behind!"  
The miners were stamping and shouting,  
They were not very patient men;  
The clown bent over the cradle:  
"I must take you, little Ben!"

The mother started and shivered,  
But trouble and want were near;  
She lifted her baby gently:  
"You'll be very careful, dear?"  
"Careful? You foolish darling!"  
How tenderly it was said;  
While a smile shone through the chalk and paint:  
"I love each hair of his head."

The noise rose into an uproar.  
Misrule for the time was king;  
The clown, with a foolish chuckle,  
Bolted into the ring.  
But as, with a squeak and flourish,  
The fiddles closed their tune,  
"You'll hold him as if he was made of glass!"  
Said the clown to pantaloons.

The jovial fellow nodded;  
"I've a couple myself," he said:  
"I know how to handle 'em, bless you  
Old fellow, go ahead!"  
The fun grew fast and furious,  
And not one of all the crowd  
Had guessed that the baby was alive,  
When he suddenly laughed aloud.

Oh, that baby laugh! it was echoed  
From the benches with a ring,  
And the roughest customer there sprang up  
With "Boys, it's the real thing!"  
The ring was jammed in a minute,  
Not a man that did not strive  
For "a shot at holding the baby,"  
The baby that was alive!

He was thronged by kneeling suitors  
In the midst of the dusty ring,  
And he held his court right royally,  
The fair little baby king.  
Till one of the shouting courtiers,  
A man with a bold, hard face,  
The talk for miles of the country,  
And the terror of the place,

Raised the little king to his shoulder,  
And chuckled, "Look at that!"  
As the chubby fingers clutched his hair,  
Then "Boys, hand 'round the hat!"  
There never was such a hatful  
Of silver, and gold, and notes;  
People are not always penniless  
Because they don't wear coats.

And then, "Three cheers for the baby!"  
I tell you these cheers were meant,  
And the way in which they were given  
Was enough to raise the tent.  
And then there was sudden silence,  
And a gruff old miner said,  
"Come, boys, enough of this rumpus!  
It's time it was put to bed."

So, looking a little sheepish,  
But with faces strangely bright,  
The audience, somewhat lingering,  
Flocked out into the night.  
And the bold-faced leader chuckled:  
"He wasn't a bit afraid!  
He's as game as he's good-looking,  
Boys, that was a show that paid!"

—Margaret Vandegrift.

Origin of the Chrysanthemum.

It was Christman-eve. The night was very dark, and the snow was falling fast, as Hermann, charcoal burner, drew his cloak tightly around him, and the wind whistled fiercely through the trees of the Black Forest. He had been to carry a load to a castle near by, and he was now hastening home. Although he worked very hard, he was poor, gaining barely enough for the wants of his wife and his four little children. He was thinking of them when he heard a faint wailing. Guided by the sound, he groped about and found a little child, scantily clothed, shivering by itself in the snow.

"Why, little one, have they left thee all alone to face this cruel blast!"

The child answered nothing, but looked pitifully up into the charcoal-burner's face.

"Well, I cannot leave thee here. Thou wouldst be dead before the morning."

So saying, Hermann raised it in his arms, wrapping it in his cloak.

When he arrived at his hut he put down the child and knocked at the door, which was immediately thrown open, and the children rushed to meet him.

"Here, wife, is a guest to our Christmas-eve supper, leading the little one, who held timidly to his little finger with its tiny hand."

They then sat down to supper, each child contributing of its portion for the guest, looking with admiration at its clear, blue eyes and golden hair; and as they gazed two white wings appeared at his shoulders, and he seemed to grow larger and larger and larger, and then the beautiful vision vanished, spreading out his hands as in benediction over them.

Hermann and his wife fell on their knees, exclaiming, in awestruck voices, "The Holy Child Jesus."

The next morning, as Hermann passed by the place where he had found the fair child, he saw a cluster of lovely white flowers, with dark green leaves. Hermann picked some, and reverently carried them home to his wife and children, who tended them carefully, in remembrance of that Christmas-eve, calling them "Chrysanthemums;" and every year, as the time came round, they put aside a portion of their feast and gave it to some poor little child, according to the words of Christ: "Inasmuch as ye have done it to one of the least of my brethren, ye have done it unto me."

