



### THE ARMY OF HELPERS.

A TALE OF CHRISTMAS EVE.

He sat by the fireside reading,  
When the others had gone away  
To help in the festive decking,  
For to-morrow was Christmas Day.

They had asked him to come and help them,  
But Willie had cried, 'Oh, dear!  
Do leave me in peace to my reading;  
So they had left him there.

And off they had gone with laughter,  
To hang up the holly and bay,  
And glad were their hearts as their voices,  
For to-morrow was Christmas Day.

And alone with his book sat Willie,  
But somehow he could not read,  
For the words all ran together,  
Whenever he bent his head.

And a mist rose up before him,—  
He wondered what it meant,  
And wished he'd gone with the others,  
To join in their merriment.

Then out of the ruddy firelight  
He saw strange figures grow;  
A long procession winding,  
With robes like fallen snow.

And he heard a voice that called him,  
A voice that brought no fear,  
For it spoke in accents gentle:  
'Child! I am the dying Year.

'And I have brought my army  
To show you, this winter's night,  
The children that have helped me  
To make the world seem bright.

And at these words the footsteps  
Came marching all around:  
He saw their white robes flashing,  
He heard their joyous sound.

'This is my Army of Helpers,  
Each one has something to tell;  
The tall ones and the children,  
They all have served me well.'

'Tell me your tales,' said Willie:  
'Old Year, I am longing to hear  
How all this army has helped you:  
Do tell me, please, Old Year.

'For some are such tiny soldiers,  
I don't see how they could fight;  
And some are so bent and feeble,  
They could not make anything bright!'

'Will you watch their faces, Willie?  
Said the Old Year, with a smile,  
'And you will change your opinion,  
I think, in a little while!'

As Willie stood still, gazing  
At the figures clad in white,  
On each face, young or olden,  
There shone a strange, sweet light.

'Tell me the ways they've helped you:  
Tell me, this Christmas night,  
How all these people have served you,  
And made the world seem bright!'

The Old Year signed to his army,  
And a little girl stood there.  
'This is my latest helper,  
A child who is very dear.'

'Why, that's my baby sister,  
Who always makes such a row!  
I never thought you'd have chosen her  
For one of your helpers now!'



'She has made the world seem better  
By her smiles and her loving ways,  
She has brought a great deal of sunshine  
Into many cloudy days.

'She has got the badge of my army,  
And I shall keep her there;  
For she is a precious helper,  
And one that I could not spare.'

Then he summoned another soldier  
From the ranks of shining white,  
A cripple form that was sad to see,  
With a face that was strangely bright.

'This boy, with his morry patience,  
Has helped others along the road;  
He has stopped to think of their ills and woes,  
In spite of his own great load.

'Why, that,' said Will, 'is the hunchback,  
Who sits at the factory door!  
Fancy his being a soldier now—  
I always thought him so poor.'

'Now, wait,' said the Old Year, quietly,  
And I will show you a sight  
Which, I think, is the pleasantest sight of all,  
To see on a winter's night!'

'Twas only a workhouse matron,  
With her patient, homely face;  
But her smile was so glad and joyful,  
That it seemed to fill the place.

'She helps to brighten the region  
Where the poor spin out their days;  
She brightens many a dreary lot,  
By her thoughtful, kindly ways.'

Then he called a merry sailor  
From the back of his army bright:  
'He has fought a fight with stormy seas,  
On many a fearful night!

'He has lost an arm in the battle,  
With the dangers he had to brave;  
But he never thought of the loss of that,  
But the lives he had to save.'

So the tales of the cheerful helpers  
Were told on that Christmas night,  
And as Willie heard their stories,  
And looked at the stirring sight

Of their white and shining garments,  
And their faces fresh and gay,  
He wished he had been a helper  
Ere the Old Year passed away!

And perhaps the Old Year wondered  
Why his face so wistful grew,  
For he said, 'I've still a week to live;  
Will you be a Helper, too?'

### HOW FAR AWAY ARE THE STARS?

Of the hundred million or more stars which are visible with astronomical instruments, the distances from the earth of only a very few have been measured with even an approximation to accuracy. Most of the stars appear to be so far away that the change in their apparent place caused by viewing them from opposite sides of the earth's orbit—and that orbit is about one hundred and eighty-six million miles across—is so slight that it escapes certain detection. Only about fifty stars have thus far yielded definite results in the attempt to measure their distances, and even those results are too often exceedingly conflicting and uncertain. The nearest star thus far



discovered is one of the first magnitude, not visible from the United States or Europe. It is the star called Alpha in the constellation of the Centaur in the southern hemisphere of the heavens.

The distance of this star appears to be something like twenty trillions of miles, or about two hundred and fifteen thousand times as great as the distance of the sun from the earth.

The next nearest star, as far as known, is a little sixth-magnitude twinkler, barely visible to the naked eye, in the constellation of Cygnus, popularly called the Northern Cross. The distance of this star, which is known to astronomers as 61 Cygni, is variously estimated at from forty to sixty trillion miles, or two or three times that of the bright star in the Centaur.

The brightness of the stars, as we see them, is, then, no measure of their comparative distance. A very bright star may be much more distant than a very faint one, the difference in brilliance being due to the greater magnitude of the more dis-



tant star; Sirius, or the dog-star, for instance, which scintillates so splendidly in the winter sky, is more distant than the little star 61 Cygni, the latter being in fact a very much smaller sun than ours, while Sirius is a far larger one.

It thus appears that while the efforts to measure the distances of the stars have not been very successful, yet they have resulted in giving us a wonderful insight into the arrangement of the universe of suns in the midst of which we dwell. They have proved that large stars and small stars are scattered through space at various distances from one another and from us; that the dimensions of the blazing bodies which we call stars, or suns, vary to an enormous extent; and that our own sun, great, glorious and overpowering as it seems to us, really belongs to a quite inferior rank.

But it is possible that before many years our knowledge of the distances of the stars may be greatly extended. Spectroscopic investigation in the case of binary stars, as those are called which circle in pairs around their common centre of gravity, is beginning to help us a little in this direction.

Recently, for instance, Mr. G. W. Colles, jr., has calculated, from the results of such investigation, the mean distance of ninety-five stars situated in the northern hemisphere of the heavens, and he finds it equal to the distance which light would travel in about one hundred and fifty years. That distance is not less than eight hundred and seventy trillion miles, or more than forty-three times as great as the distance of the nearest known star, Alpha Centauri.

Yet enormous as such a distance is, it is nearly certain that the average distance of all the stars composing the visible universe is still greater. And here and there the starry heavens, even in their richest regions, present black and apparently empty spaces through which we seem to look out from the bounds of the visible universe into fathomless depths beyond.

But is there any thoughtful mind which can avoid asking itself the question, 'What lies beyond? When we come to the outermost star of the universe, what then? That is a question which even astronomy, with all its marvellous wealth of discovery and achievement, cannot answer—at least not yet.

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