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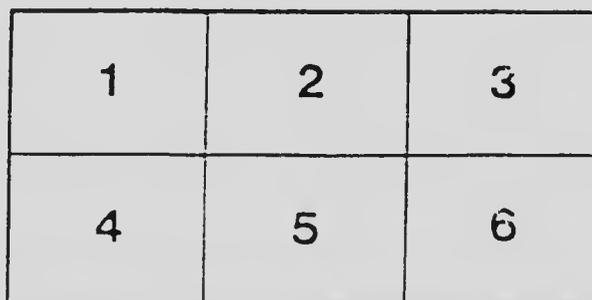
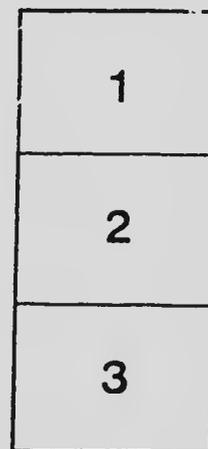
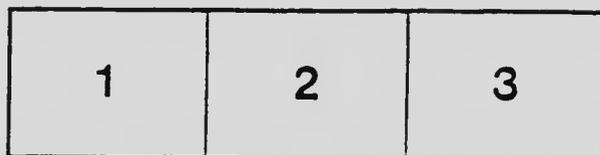
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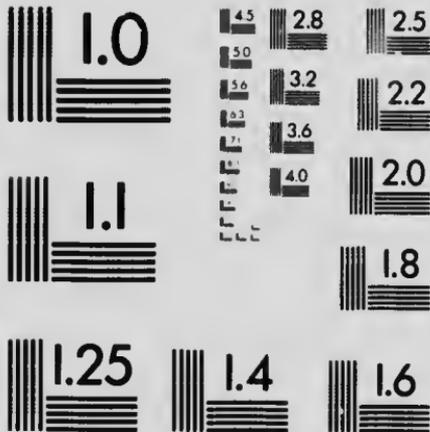
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THE
ANGEL OF CHRISTMAS



STELLA G. SPERRY





To Lillian Evans.

From Evelyn + Minnetta Miller

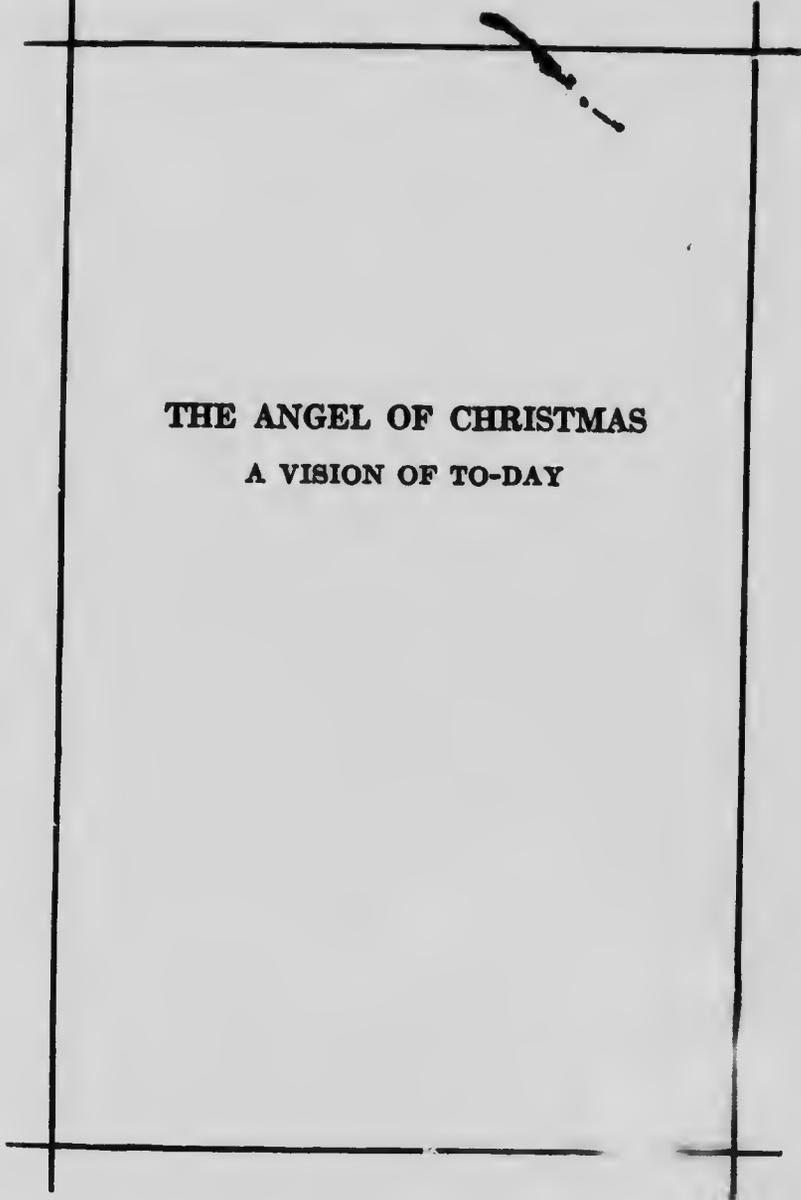


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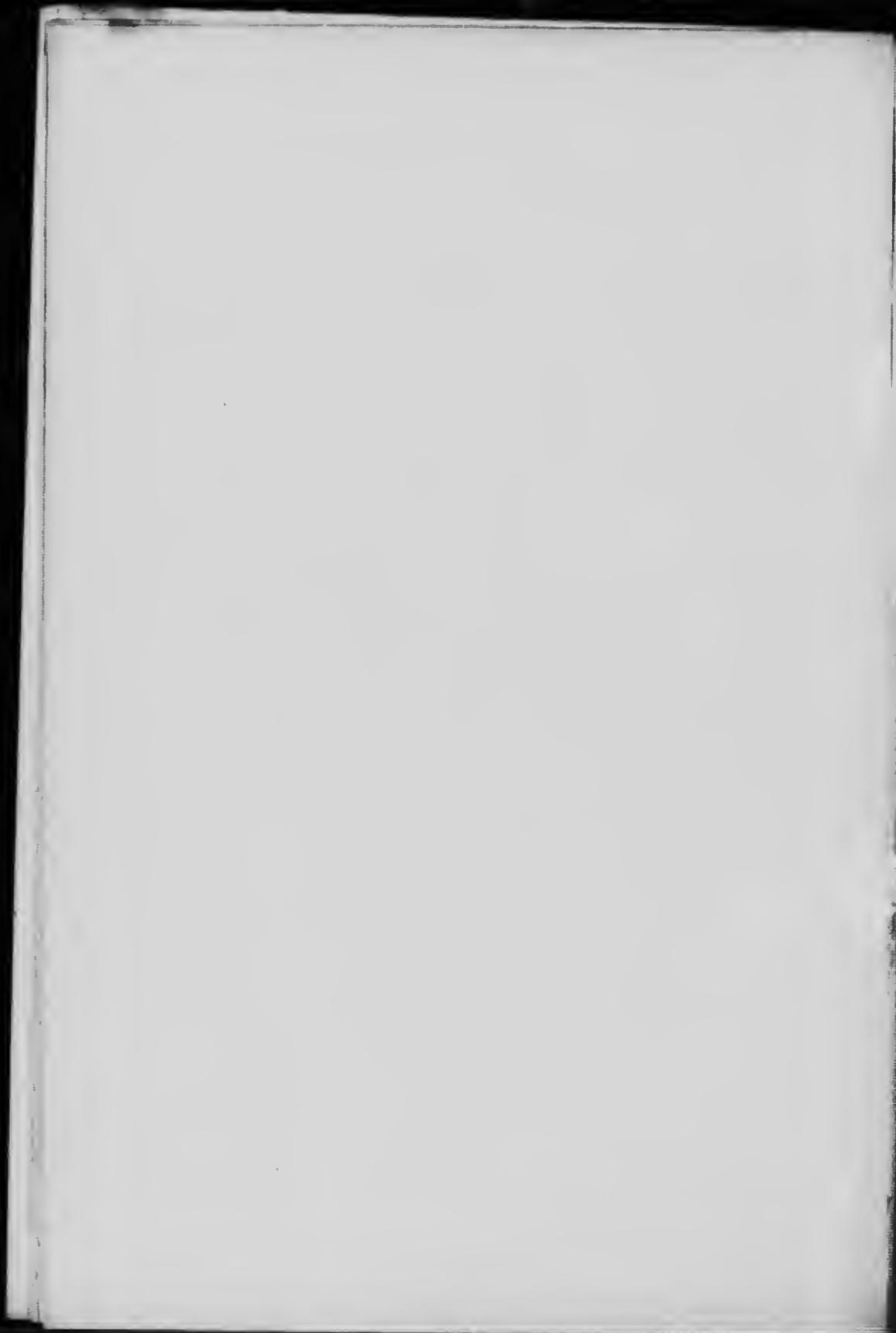
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THE ANGEL OF CHRISTMAS
A VISION OF TO-DAY







“In a flash he saw the Christmas children of every nation,
of every age.”—*Page 92*

THE ANGEL OF CHRISTMAS

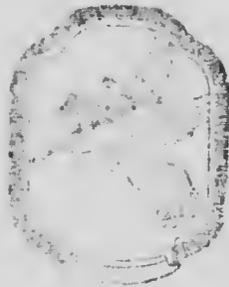
A VISION OF TO-DAY

BY
STELLA GEORGE STERN PERRY

AUTHOR OF "GOD'S CHILDREN"

WITH FOUR ILLUSTRATIONS IN COLOURS BY

MARIA L. FICK



TORONTO

W. W. BRIDGE



'In a Dash he saw the Christmas children of every nation
of every age.' Page 9.

THE ANGEL OF CHRISTMAS

A VISION OF TO-DAY

BY
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AUTHOR OF "GO TO SLEEP STORIES"

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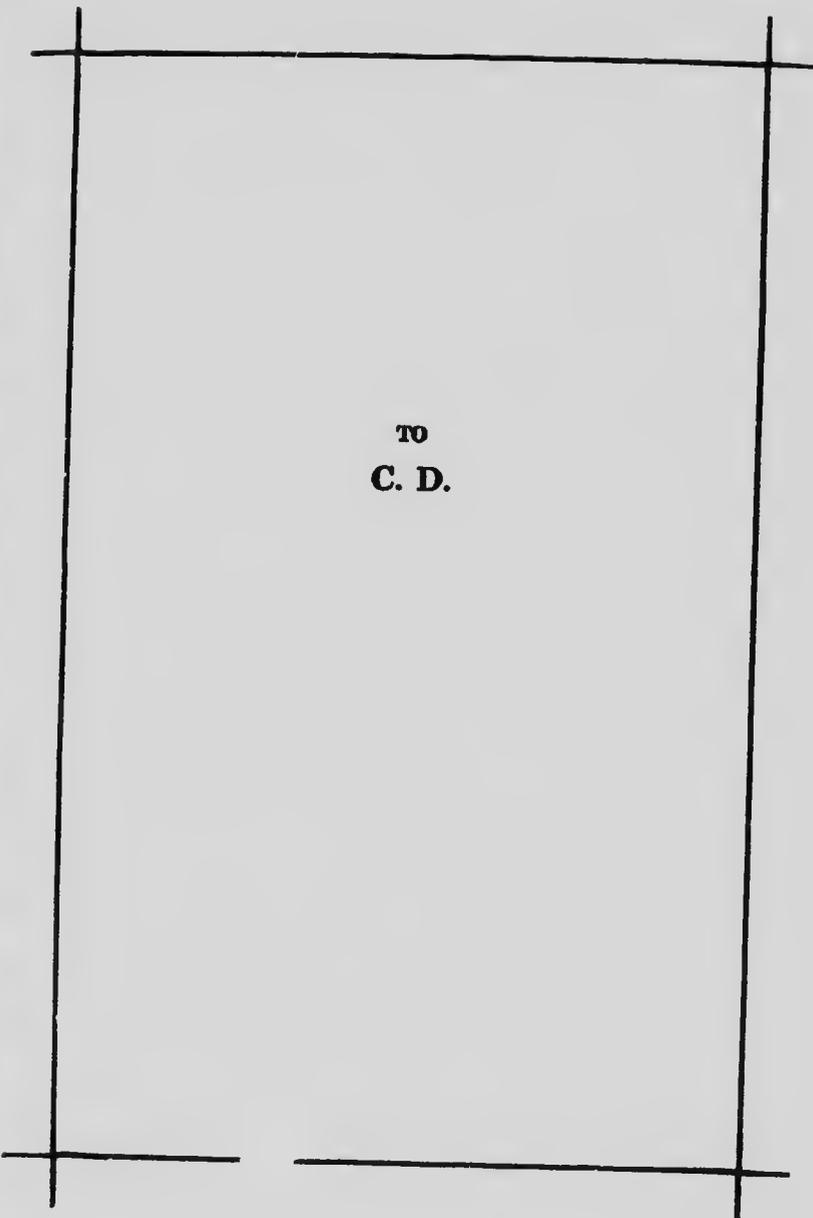
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TO
C. D.



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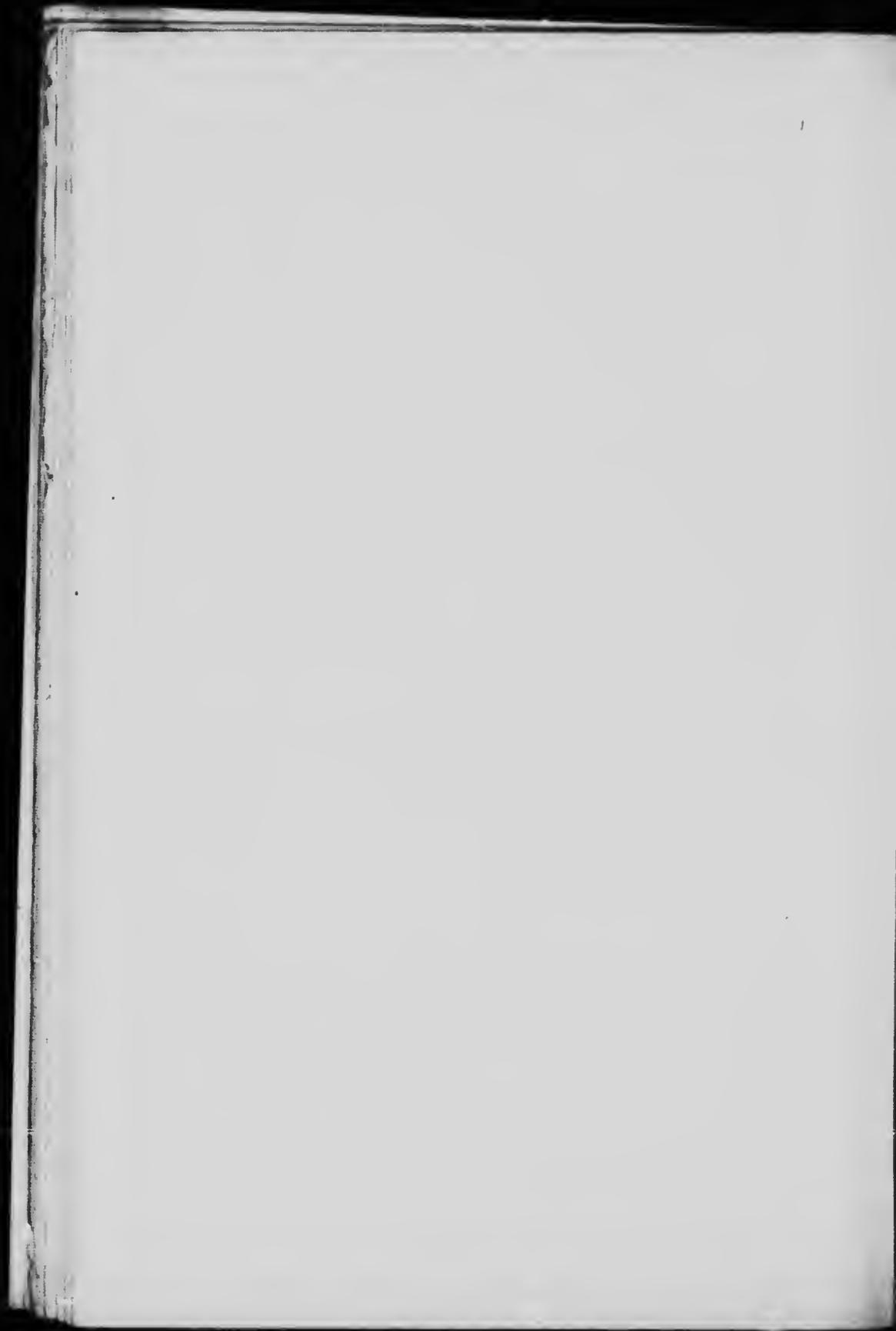
"In a flash he saw the Christmas children
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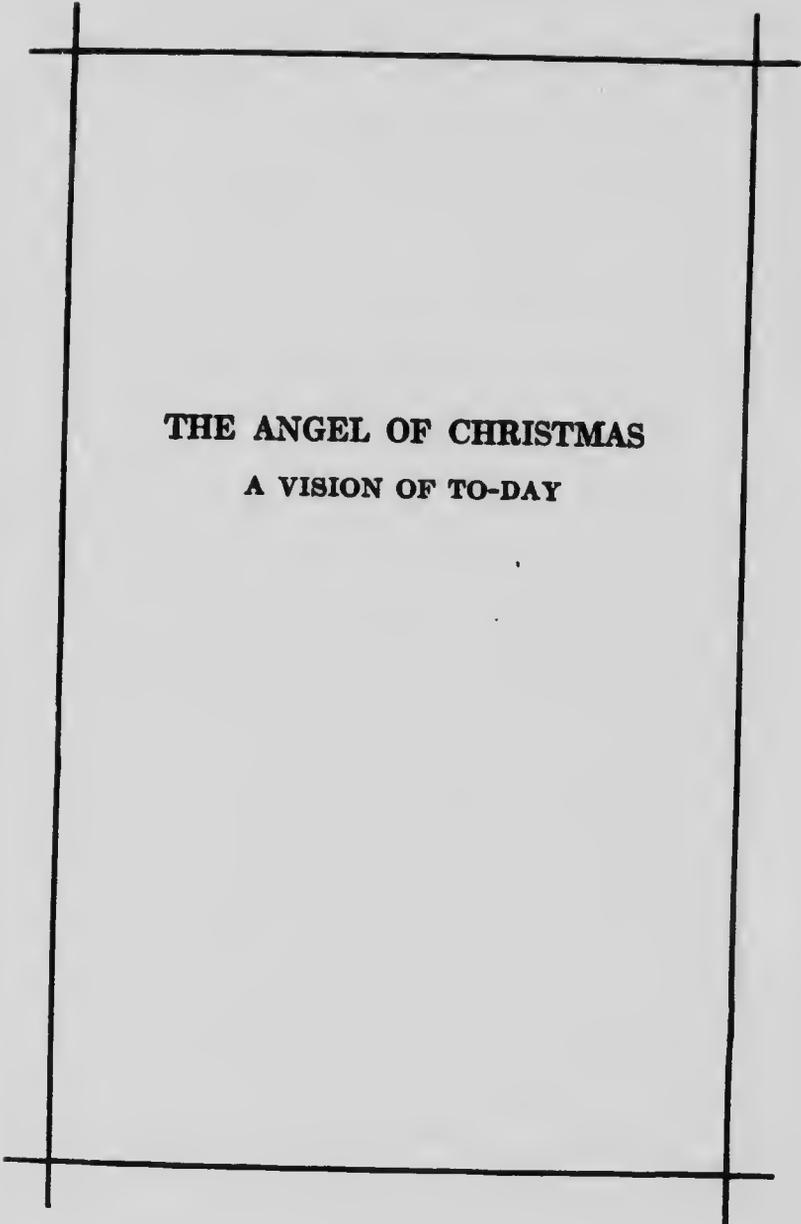
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THE ANGEL OF CHRISTMAS
A VISION OF TO-DAY

MR. BRIGGS PLANS FOR CHRISTMAS

MR. JONATHAN BRIGGS had made himself and done a good job of it. He felt that he could not do better, and everything about him testified to the fact.

There he stood, with his back to the fire,—his successful, self-assertive back to his successful, self-assertive fire with its big, shiny andirons seeming to cry out, "See how massive we are! The andirons, Sir or Madam, of a substantial man!"

The best was not too good for his family and for Mr. Jonathan Briggs. He admitted that, too. He had earned the best there was in the world and he knew that he had, and saw that he got it. Those paintings that old nations had

THE ANGEL OF CHRISTMAS

been proud of for ages, the visible souls of long-dead masters; those rugs and tapestries in which ancient peoples had symbolized by painstaking, life-long labor their belief that work is prayer; books written by inspiration and bound with sublime reverence; tiny carvings cut with monumental devotion to beauty,—Mr. Jonathan Briggs had had the sense and the gumption and the business genius to win them, and now they were his, he would say, as they ought to be.

He was a plain American, though, rich as he was, and prided himself upon his simple, sturdy patriotism. He scorned wealthy people who went to live abroad or passed all of their leisure in other countries. America was the best land on earth, he held, and therefore America was good enough for Mr. Jonathan Briggs. Everything de-

MR. BRIGGS PLANS FOR CHRISTMAS

sirable could be bought in America or brought to America. He had bought whatever he wanted and whatever his family wanted; not only mines, factories, the money market, mansions, baubles, works of art, but also social position for them, college degrees and public honor for himself. Nothing had been denied him.

With good cause, then, he expanded his chest on this Christmas Eve and felt satisfied that the world was as it should be.

Satisfaction glowed in the bald top of his head, in the generous expanse of his shining white waistcoat, in the forward arch of his well-fed waist-line, in the faultless high polish on his shoes, as Mr. Jonathan Briggs stood regally on his hearth-stone, a substantial man, and listened to the happy voices of his family.

THE ANGEL OF CHRISTMAS

His wife and children, in an adjoining room, were decorating their Christmas tree; not leaving it to servants, but decorating it themselves, as a plain American family, however rich, should do on Christmas Eve.

Pleasant sounds! Laughter and gay conflicting directions and the scrape of the moving ladder and the occasional tinkling crash of a tree ornament that fell to the floor; his daughter's laugh, sweet as a bird's call; his wife's deep, quiet tones that always altered his heart and stirred it; his son's booming bass telling college yarns, and the wild treble squeals of the youngsters. A very agreeable commingling of sounds,—one that might well make a man content with his life.

A delicious whiff of balsam came to him now and then and caused him to sniff with pleasure.

MR. BRIGGS PLANS FOR CHRISTMAS

Mr. Jonathan Briggs shined the glasses of his pince-nez with his snowy handkerchief and looked upon his world and called it good.

The curtains in the back of the room opened softly and a trim young woman in a gray walking suit came in, a very business-like young woman in appearance and in fact. She came forward rapidly, directly and with an air of going straight to the matter in mind,—Mr. Briggs' competent secretary.

"Ah! Miss Peabody!" Mr. Briggs lowered his voice. "Has everything come?"

"All here, Mr. Briggs. James has put them in your study. The jeweled set for Mrs. Briggs. The pearls for Miss Ruth. The snake-skin wallet for Mr. Junior's check. The toys and candy for the children."

"Ver-y good. Ver-y good. I be-

lieve in keeping up old traditions, Miss Peabody, good, simple old American traditions. That is why I think it is my duty, as it is my practice, not to leave quite all of the Christmas making to Mrs. Briggs, but to put some time and thought on it myself."

Miss Peabody nodded, but she held the corners of her twitching lips very firmly as she mentally estimated the amount of time and thought that Mr. Briggs had put upon his gifts, beyond directing her to find them for him.

"I hope the pearls are the best possible," he said. "I don't want that young fiancé of Ruth's to make her overlook her father's present this year. A little jealousy, eh? Well,—he ought to have trouble beating those pearls!—Did you have any difficulty getting the things?" he asked graciously.

"None at all. There was a little de-

lay in having Mr. Junior's wallet re-lined in his college colors, as you wished it."

"H'm. I suppose the draft will be the lining that interests him most,—the extravagant young rascal!" interrupted his father complacently.

"And the particular sort of bonbons that you have always ordered——"

"Didn't you go to the department store,—to Bain and Bradley's?"

"Oh, yes! I always do since you bought a controlling interest there,—to report to you if anything seems wrong. But those bonbons were not in evidence this season, and the little red-haired girl who always served us and knew about them is not there any more."

"Ah! Mrs. Briggs' discovery, the red-haired girl who is always so gay. Mrs. Briggs speaks of her often." The slight condescension in his tone implied

that this was really very kind of Mrs. Briggs, though it was plain that he was proud of his wife's kindness and admired it. "Not there? Too bad, too bad! Mrs. Briggs will regret it."

"She has gone. I must ask my friend in the advertising department to find out about her. That was all, I believe?"

"That was all. Very good, Miss Peabody. We have much to be thankful for this year. Every one has much to be thankful for. The country is in an excellent condition on the whole. It is pleasant, at Christmas, to think of that. By the way, your summary of the reports from the mines and the mills and from the street was very well made,—excellent, excellent!" It pleased Mr. Briggs to speak with this apparent frankness to his young secretary. It gave him a delightful feeling of gra-

ciousness. He deceived himself that it delighted Miss Peabody, too, to feel herself so recognized by greatness. He believed in happy, contented people; there was no room on earth, he thought, for the discontented or disgruntled. Miss Peabody should be made even happier by a good round gift in the morning.

He nodded a kindly dismissal to her, but she remained, waiting.

He looked inquiringly. "Anything more, Miss Peabody?"

"Why,—yes, Mr. Briggs. Your check to your niece, Miss Margaret,—it has been returned."

"Returned? What's the matter with it? Not good,—eh?" Mr. Jonathan Briggs would have his little joke. "Wrong middle name? Forgot to sign it?" He went on more seriously.

"Why, no. But—Miss Margaret

says her father does not care to have her accept it.”

“What’s that? Brother Tom doesn’t want her to have the money? Blasted independence! That’s carrying it too far. There he lives on his salary as a clergyman in the little dead New England town where we were born and tries to make himself believe he’s contented with it. I always knew *he’d* never accept anything for himself. But the girl is coming on,—she’s just the age of our Ruth,—must be a lot of things she’d like to buy. What do you think of the man?—What do you—— Not let me give the child a Christmas present! How does he explain himself? What does he say?”

Miss Peabody hesitated. A pink flush deepened in her cheek. It was evident that she was trying to frame her answer tactfully.

“Out with it! I won’t be injured. I’m accustomed to Tom’s independent notions. Doesn’t want anything he didn’t earn, eh? Well, that’s a Briggs characteristic. *I* can’t quarrel with that.”

“It isn’t that, sir,—his reason.”

“No? What then?”

“He objects,—the trouble in the mines, and the children who work in the mills, and the recent failures due to our activities in the market. He says,—I beg your pardon, Mr. Briggs,—that your money is not good enough for Miss Margaret to handle.”

If Miss Peabody expected an explosion from her employer, she was pleasantly astonished. He laughed heartily. “Poor old Tom! He doesn’t change. He never would accept the world as it is,—an open game where we play by the rules and can’t expect the

rules to be changed because we don't like 'em or aren't smart enough to succeed by 'em. Of *course*, the rules are in favor of the smartest. And he blames me for having brains!" He chuckled. "Poor old Tom! I bet he cried over that letter. What else does he say?"

"He asks you to remember that it is Christmas."

"Pretty good, that! Upon returning my Christmas present! Well, I *do* remember it. Make out another check instead of Margaret's—same size—to some charity. You choose the charity. But a charity, mind! Not some care-head reforming scheme."

"Poor Tom!" he muttered again, as Miss Peabody left him. He was annoyed, although he had not seemed so. It was too bad of Tom not to appreciate him. Tom never had realized that his younger brother was some pump-

kins in the world. Not good enough, eh?

He pulled up a chair and settled comfortably in it.

But what could you expect, he thought, of a man buried in a little town, reading all the folderol of new political cults and Improvers of This and That Condition? Life was a battle to the strong, always was, always would be,—the victory to the strong. Asking him to remember it was Christmas! Whatever did he mean by that——

THE ANGEL OF CHRISTMAS

"AND on Christmas Day," a gentle voice was reading aloud somewhere very near him, "the Angel of Christmas is supposed to enter little children's homes and examine their gifts to one another, to see if they are made and given with true affection and kindness——"

"Why, *Mother!*" exclaimed Mr. Jonathan Briggs in astonishment.

He stood up, turned about quickly and found himself in a square white room with a white-beamed ceiling, a worn rag-carpet on the floor and small-paned casement windows. Wintry breezes, leaking in through the window-frames, blew the muslin curtains gently, but a roaring log fire did its best to give

the cold air a warming welcome. Plain, shining mahogany furniture glimmered back to the blaze that glowed and twinkled in its smooth surfaces and clear glass knobs. Hyacinths, forced into Christmas bloom, stood on the broad window-ledges.

On a low rocker before the fireplace sat a little lady in gray, reading aloud from a book. The smiling rosy face of the little lady, her tininess, her grace, were like the small, fresh beauty of the trailing arbutus and brought a feeling of perpetual spring into the winter scene.

A boy, a soft-eyed, pensive, beautiful boy with laughing lips and healthy cheeks, sat on the floor at her feet.

"Why, here's Jonathan, Mother!" this boy cried out. "Come in, Johnny Boy. We're so glad to see you, Brother."

"Johnny's remembered it is Christmas," said the little lady, in great joy, bouncing up and running to meet him. "How tall you have grown, my son! And how splendid,—with your great silk hat and those funny, shiny shoes!" And she laughed as she stood on tiptoe to kiss him.

"But Tom, here,—he's grown up, too," began Mr. Jonathan Briggs in an injured tone. "He's really a minister and has a grown daughter. I don't see how he seems like a boy to-day. He's really older than I am, you know, Mother."

"Sh! Sh! Not here, Johnny! Don't say that here," she warned him. "Tom is always a boy when he is with his little long-passed-away mother. Because he never forgets Christmas, you see; he remembers it every day in the year. That is the charm that keeps him

a boy. You are my eldest son now, Johnny."

"Go on with the reading, Mother. Do go on. Don't you want her to, Johnny?"

"I will, dears, pretty soon. I'll have to tell the first part over again, because Johnny did not hear it. Is the wood-box full, Tom? Yes? Then put another log on the fire, won't you, please."

Mr. Jonathan Briggs was thinking how softly her gray hair waved back over her ears and how tiny his mother was and how much out of place Mrs. Jonathan Briggs' new ruby set would look upon her kerchief and how thin and frail and hard her little hands appeared and how lightly she walked as she went to the cupboard and returned with two tempting apples.

He held out an eager hand for his

apple. His mouth watered in anticipation.

None of your bland, juicy, flaky, modern, painted-up-looking, pink and yellow apples, these! Good, honest, old-fashioned, tough-skinned, round red apples that looked like apples and tasted like them, too! Apples so solid that it was hard to get the first bite out of them; apples that oozed juice over your chin; sweet as cider and cool as well water! Real apples!

Mr. Jonathan Briggs sat on a stool beside his brother; both munched heartily, exchanging sympathetic glances of conscious enjoyment. The little mother took her seat again in the low rocker by the fire.

"I was reading, Johnny dear," she exclaimed, "what this wise author says about Christmas presents. He thinks that the Angel of Christmas cares more

about having Christmas gifts made with honesty and kindness and given with loving self-sacrifice than he does about their value. I think so, too; don't you? And the author has a pretty fancy that this Christmas Angel comes into homes on Christmas Eve to examine little boys' gifts to their friends and to put his approval on them if they deserve it. That's the way the story begins. Come, Thomas, help me bring in some doughnuts, and then I'll read the rest."

The little mother went through the door into the kitchen and the soft-eyed boy followed her, dancing a merry step and crying, "O—oh! Doughnuts, Johnny!"

Mr. Jonathan Briggs was rather offended at being treated as a guest. He rose hurriedly in protest, to follow his mother and brother into the kitchen, the warm, ginger-cooky smell of which in-

vited him. But some one knocked at the door and Mr. Jonathan Briggs went to open it instead.

There was the old latch in the same place,—even the same little scratches, “J. B.,” “J. B.,” “J. B.” that he had broken his jack-knife making. And there were the old finger-marks on the white paint,—Tom’s, of course; Tom was always forgetting.

Mr. Jonathan Briggs opened the door.

The Angel of Christmas stood there in the snow.

Snow was no longer falling, but when the Angel moved great clouds of it floated from his garments.

These were very gorgeous robes of green and gold and he wore a wreath of holly in his golden hair. Large wings of downy gray were folded on his shoulders as the soft gray clouds of winter

lie folded on the shoulders of the world.

"Come!" said the Angel.

But Mr. Jonathan Briggs was not in the habit of obeying orders without investigation.

"Come where? Who are you?" he began.

"The Christmas Angel, here to test your gifts. Come, follow me!" commandingly.

And urged by something stronger than his will, Mr. Jonathan Briggs obeyed.

THE GIFT OF WIFELY DEVOTION

MR. JONATHAN BRIGGS found himself floating through space, high in the air bright with deepening sunset. Sleeping hills, covered by snow and glow as with cloth of gold and swansdown; lively villages with their little church-spires glistening and their streets full of gentle Christmas stir; roads blooming with laughing children like snow-flowers, their arms laden with green and holly-berries; lonelier stretches blessed by young lovers in jingling sleighs; vast forest silences and mountains of gray rock, royal in dignity, their snowy ermine mantles jeweled with the emeralds of evergreens and the sparkling diamonds of icicles; large cities that



“The Christmas Angel, here to test your gifts. Come, follow me!”—Page 21

seemed at once blurs of light and blots of darkness, glided beneath them.

At last they descended to the ground and stood in a little black town that marred the white and lovely landscape like a smudge upon the face of Nature. Scores of blackened, huddled houses were heaped together there, more like a huge junk-pile than a cluster of homes. And all these huts were black, each black as night.

What was it that blackened them so, that peppered the snow like a fine powder, that protruded through it like black rock and made a thin veil of black in the very air? What gave a Plutonian threat of darkness to those black holes in the mountainside?

Coal. The dark heart that pumps life-blood and cheer through desolate winters. Coal. The dark power that turns the wheels of the world. Coal.

The dark friend by whose side family peace and comfort are made, in whose glowing companionship dreams are nurtured, under whose influence young love is born and older loves remembered. Coal. The dark genius by whose magic our food is changed into forms that nourish and cheer us. Coal, for the want of which little children die and men and women weaken. Coal, so necessary to all, so impossible for many!

Up and down like larger flecks of blackness against the snow or like grim, dark shadows on its whiteness marched a line of men with guns upon their shoulders.

This was plainly no parade. Mr. Jonathan Briggs could see that guns and bearing carried threats.

He looked about him and saw what these grave soldiers menaced,—a thick mass of shabby men as menacing as

they. The early moonlight fell upon them through the dusk,—an ugly sight, each face quivering with rage, and stones in every hand.

A growl like the growl of beasts shuddered upward to the heavens.

“What is that awful sound?” asked Mr. Jonathan Briggs.

“Hunger,” replied the Angel.

A big fellow in front, one who seemed to be leading the others, lifted his strong hand to hurl a stone. The crowd behind him muttered applause, but, before he could act, a young mother with her baby held close in her arm darted out of one of the cottages and threw herself upon him.

“Oh, Jim! Don’t! Don’t, dear Jim!” she cried out. “They will shoot. Don’t start anything to-day. It is Christmas Eve!” she begged.

Her dress was thin and she had given

all the shawl to the baby. The wind swept about her worn shoulders.

"Go back in, Mary," said the man, not unkindly. "Go on back."

"Christmas!" growled another, speaking to her but for the ears of all. "A pretty Christmas,—starving here after working our hands raw and our backs crooked for the company, and them sending soldiers to shoot at us if we try to keep a lot of hoboes from takin' our jobs away until they can starve us out. And why? 'Cause we ain't content to work and starve, too. 'Cause we want to be treated like men and have our wives and children live like men's wives and children. Christmas! A hell of a Christmas! Damn Christmas and them, too!"

The snarling sound increased. Up and down in front of them marched the silent soldiers.

"Oh, listen, boys!" the woman cried, lifting her voice, a worried, earnest voice of depth and sweetness. "Listen to me. What good'll it do to spoil Christmas for us women and children for ever and ever? What good'll it do to have us remember nothin' about Christmas except it was the day when our men came home to us dyin' and dead—and nothin' for the children to eat at home—and no hope — and lonely — and — all? For God's sake leave us what little we've got of Christmas. *Don't* let's have a fight to-day. Let's go home and make what Christmas we can for the poor kids. Come, boys,—I know there's been reason enough,—and I ain't askin' you to be cowards and not show fight. You know I ain't. But it's *Christmas* to-night. Remember Christmas."

The men dropped their stones. "Aw-right," "Mary's right, "It is Christ-

mas," they said. And the crowd slowly scattered.

Women and children stood in the doorways waiting for their men, relieved and thankful. One more day's respite had been given them.

Mr. Jonathan Briggs and the Angel of Christmas walked unseen next to Mary, the woman who had spoken. Her husband walked with her, too, his face grim, but pride of her in his eyes. He put his arm around her.

The child at her breast plucked feverishly at the shawl. Mary kept bending over it as she walked homeward, a look of tender anguish on her face.

"Oh, Jim!" she said. "I'm afraid we can't save her, Jim. She keeps losing and losing. But what can you expect, —with me bothered all the time? I'd wean her if there was milk."

"Damn 'em!" said the man. "It's

bad enough *us* having to suffer to get our rights,—but we got to expect that. But when it comes to the kids! While *their* babies are having everything in the world for Christmas——”

“Now, Jim! We’re glad of that, ain’t we?” cried Mary in gentle reproach. “Don’t we want as many babies to be happy as can be on Christmas? Sure, we do. Please, Jim!—— We’re near there. Please don’t let Bill hear you going on so. He’s excited enough already; he’s been bad to-day. And I want to make a little Christmas to-night.”

The man kissed her hair with rough kindness. “You’re a good girl, Mary,” he said. “God knows where you get your patience.”

Hut after hut they had passed, all alike, all dismal, most of them overcrowded, many permeated with an odor

THE ANGEL OF CHRISTMAS

of bad sanitation and of refuse; huts much too close together, though there was room enough and to spare on the blessed hills around them.

Over some doorways pathetic little evergreen sprigs were hung. Here and there in some little window stood a flickering candle and an image of the Virgin.

"Look! How my glory is spent!" sighed the Angel of Christmas. Mr. Jonathan Briggs turned toward him. His glory was spent indeed; the gorgeous robe of green and gold had changed to brown sack-cloth and only the wreath of holly recalled the splendor of his first appearance.

At last they reached the hut of John and Mary. A little girl and boy ran out of it toward them. The children were gaunt and pale and their steps that started forward quickly to greet their

parents flagged wearily before they reached them.

There was a sprig of green in this doorway, too.

"That was your doing, little Mary," said the mother, pointing to it as they entered the bare room, their unseen guests beside them. "That was real sweet of you; it was."

"Jim helped, too," said little Mary. "Didn't you, Buddy?"

Little Jim looked up sheepishly for his mead of praise.

"Did he? Then it was mighty sweet of Jimmy, too."

"Well, there's so many foreigners around here keepin' Christmas in spite of the strike," said little Jim. "We wanted to show 'em that us Americans was keepin' it, too."

Mary gave the baby to little Mary, who danced it up and down and turned

it over and bobbed it on her knee and patted it, with an accustomed matronly air. But the drooping baby responded so feebly to this entertainment that little Mary shook her head with womanly solicitude and laid the infant in a little bunk against the wall.

"How's Bill?" asked her mother. The little Mary sighed.

"Bill!" called the mother tenderly, bending over a cot in the corner.

"Breaker boy, I am. I can't lie here like the kids. I've got to get out and on the job, Doc," answered a feverish voice. "Breaker boy. I was the strongest of all, Mother. Doc said so. I'd 'a' been bigger than Dad. Doc said so. But they got me too young; Doc said so. Better not let the company hear Doc say so. You look out, Doc! And now I'm broke up; Doc said so. Maybe I'll never be no good to work,—no more,

for good. He did tell you so, Mother. Yes, he did! I heard him. Never be no good to do nothin' for you and work any more. The strongest of all,—got me too young,—and no more medicine in the bottle!”

“Still the fever!” whispered the poor mother to her husband. “And he’s right about no more medicine. He must have heard that, too. And I tried to speak so low! I wonder if they’ll trust us again, Jim? Anyway, you turn in, children,” she said aloud, as cheerily as she could. “Maybe Santa’ll come to-night.”

“Oh! Will he?”

“You see if he don’t.”

“Mother,” little Mary ventured timidly, “won’t there be any supper *at all*?”

The mother turned her head away and Jim, the father, strode from the room.

“Not to-night, dear,” said Mary. “But Christmas breakfast in the morning!”

The children dutifully, pitifully dragged themselves to bed, trying to forget the pain of present hunger in the hope of coming joys.

The mother, left alone, took from a drawer a little new rag-doll and began to dress it.

“She will not recognize the cloth,” she said to her husband as he returned. “My dress is so faded, she will not know this was the same. And now for sails for little Jim’s boat. Oh, Jim, you made it beautifully!”

She smiled at her husband,—smiled! While her baby pined in its bunk, while her children went hungry to bed, while her sick son raved with the fever!

“Never mind, old man, stick it out,—the strike,” she said to him. “It must

end soon. It must be Christmas Eve in Heaven, too,—and God can't go on forgetting mothers always; can He, Jim?"

Mr. Jonathan Briggs was a practical man. "How much would it cost a year to give the men what they're striking for? How much would my share be?" he questioned the Angel.

"The price of your wife's new jewels," the Angel of Christmas replied.

THE GIFT OF YOUTHFUL PROMISE

"LET us go on!" said the Angel.

"To something pleasant, then," urged Mr. Jonathan Briggs. "Why must there be sorrow at Christmas time? And anger that darkens the earth?"

"Because life is a battle, the victory to the strong. Because life is a game that it takes cleverness to win, by the rules as they are made. John and Mary are not clever, but we cannot change the rules for pity," chanted the Angel.

Mr. Jonathan Briggs hung his head at this echo of the words he had so lately spoken. The Spirit touched him comfortingly on the shoulder and a strange, warm glow surged through him from the angelic hand. There came a faint

sound of childish laughter in the air as if the heavens had opened and the cherubim were gay. Mr. Jonathan Briggs remembered a little girl who had bound up his foot when he fell from his sled many winters ago, a little boy who had refused to tell on him at school, the janitor's baby in the apartment house where he had lived before he grew so rich,—the baby had always smiled when he passed it. A flash of heavenly laughter, a sweep of little memories as of wings thrilled through his heart while the Angel's touch remained.

"Come!" the Angel commanded.

"Show me something cheerful, then," begged Mr. Jonathan Briggs. "Let us see some joyous thing. There are surely many happy people at Christmas."

The Angel said, "So be it!" His voice was young and light.

His robe had deepened to scarlet, the color of gay youth, and shortened to a youthful tunic. His wings, now golden, were covered with bay leaves and laurel branches and with both his hands he scattered red roses in the snow. As he danced along merrily the wintry wind seemed to whistle a blith tune and the snow crunched a brisk accompaniment beneath the Angel's energetic tread.

Mr. Jonathan Briggs felt young, vigorous and active, too. It seemed as if many years had dropped from his shoulders as he lightly followed the Angel of Christmas through the brilliant moonlight.

The silver sheen of the moon glistened on the snow and gave out jeweled flashes where the street lamps gleamed upon it.

They were traversing the streets of



"He scattered red roses in the snow as he danced along
merrily."—*Page 38*



a pretty town. They could see the bare branches of elm trees making Gothic arches, and many imposing buildings and venerable towers.

Automobiles decorated with holly wreaths and crowded with shouting, singing youths whirled by,—jolly youths, well-dressed, husky, gay American youths, the kind that Mr. Jonathan Briggs liked to think about. Through lighted windows they caught glimpses of more happy young fellows, filling bright-colored chambers with gaiety and life. The air was vibrant with the sounds of banjos, pianos, mandolins, guitars and singing, shouting voices, unmusical but yet melodious with the harmony of youth and pleasure.

“Hurry!” shouted the Angel of Christmas, running lightly ahead.

“Hurry! The clans are gathering. We shall be late.”

The unseen visitors entered one of the bright chambers, a handsome sitting room furnished in deep red leather; there were many pictures upon the walls and rows of books in richly carved cases. Streaming pennants hung about and a line of silver cups flaunted themselves upon the mantel shelf. Mr. Jonathan Briggs looked proudly upon this place; he knew it well, thought of it often. It was the college apartment of his son, the Sophomore.

The big central table was piled high with food and drink, massed in the courageous miscellaneous grouping of solid and too solid and light and very light, sweet and sour, practical and ephemeral, dear to the dauntless palate of youth.

With a whoop, a party of young men

burst from neighboring rooms and hallways and fell upon the fare.

Young Jonathan Briggs, Junior, was their merry host. His hearty bass boomed out with the other voices in hilarious tales and jests, innocent of malice, usually, indeed, as innocent of humor, but always received with howls of appreciation. Often the lads burst suddenly into song, for sheer joy of living, their arms about one another, clapping on shoulders and roughly caressing.

"Why doesn't Pete come?" asked John Briggs, Junior. "Hasn't he finished that paper yet? Go get him, somebody. Tell him its the last feed before the holidays and he's *got* to come. By gad, he's the only grind I ever loved. O, Peter the Hermit! Peter the Hermit!"

"Coming, coming!" answered a voice,

and soon a youth appeared,—*the* youth, one might well say; for this lad was Youth incarnate. Slender and strong and beautiful was he, with intellect high-crowned upon his brow, simple goodness, humor and kind-fellowship upon his lips, fires eager for service in his eyes; graceful, hearty, friendly, young; and through all something more,—something of grave promise, something that made the alert observer assure himself, “This boy will be a *man!*”

It was evident that his mates felt this of him. With the generosity of youth, they greeted him as henchmen do their leader. Cheers went up at his appearance, word went round of some new honor he had won, with claps and banging of the table and most unselfish rejoicing.

“Golly! Football and dramatics and ‘litterchoor’ and honor grades besides.

You are sure some wizard, Pete!" Mr. Jonathan Briggs' son put his arm possessively about the other's shoulders,—his chum, his young hero, his inspiration and his pal! Oh, nothing like it in life afterwards, nothing ever again!

"Our strong band shall ne'er be broken!" rang the voices high. They meant it, too, these young hearts, and believed it. *Ne'er be broken*,—well!

"Angel," said Mr. Jonathan Briggs, joyfully recognizing the power and promise of his son's chosen comrade. "Tell me,—if you have vision of the future! What shall become of this young man when he concludes his brilliant course at college and goes forth into the world?"

"If he concludes his course——"

"When——"

"If he concludes his brilliant course
——"

"If, then! Will all this glory of youth come to anything,—anything practical, I mean? What good will it be, in real life, you know? What is he going to do with himself?"

"Let us away!" said the Angel. "Let us away, and I will give to you what never mortal had before, two glimpses beyond the Veil of Time, two aspects of The Future That May Be."

The Angel waved his wings.

Again they walked along the snowy streets of this well-loved college town; but it was midday now, a crisp, cold, luminous, sunny noon that set the heart beating high and the frosty breath rising and the cheeks tingling and the feet beating time.

The town was decorated as for a great occasion. It was draped with bright bunting and evergreens; flags hung in the windows of college halls and of

dwelling and shops, the pennants of the college and the banners of all the nations of the earth. Children waving flags raced along the white pavements; crowds carrying flags gathered quickly, lining curbs, crowding doorways and porches, grouping in windows, climbing trees and posts, alert and expectant.

"So appropriate to have his triumph here at Christmas time!" they heard a woman exclaim. "Just the season for it! Just the time for a Triumph of Peace!"

"Yes," agreed another. "And all his college mates have come back, too; come from all over the world. Isn't it splendid? Oh! I wish the parade would come. I'm simply wild with excitement. I've always been wild about him. I remember him so well—years ago, when he was at college here—everybody said even then——"

"Little hero-worshiper! But listen! Don't you hear the music?"

"Oh! Yes! Here they come!"

Here they came, music and flying banners and soldiers marching. Soldiers, were they? No; not soldiers,—and yet they marched like soldiers, too. And surely no army of civilians was ever in such superb condition, surely no men without training could advance in such beautiful, disciplined lines as these! Civilians never had the alert, smart precision of these marchers as they stepped in unison; no civilians that Mr. Jonathan Briggs had ever seen were so gracefully erect, with such snappy, buoyant bearing. But still he could see no military trappings, no swords or guns, and he felt that there was something free, something unmilitary, individual in their dashing movement.

"Handsome men! Soldiers — or what?" he asked the Angel.

The Angel's eyes were shining.

"They are Soldiers of the Daily Service, Soldiers of the Common Task," he answered. "These are the men who struggle not for territory or for pride of conquest or to settle the quarrels of rulers, but for the comfort, health, homes and spiritual treasures of the land. Behold, they carry neither swords nor guns, but chisels and T-squares and spades and pens and palettes and hods and paint and brushes and picks and shovels and plowshares,—all the weapons of the nobler battles for the common good, fighting the obstacles of life and nature to make a better world for children yet unborn. Soldiers of the Better Days to Come are these, once ignorantly left to the chances of life, but now valued as they deserve to be,

by a people grown wiser. Now these are trained, honored, cheered, applauded, kept in condition for their useful labors as soldiers of old were kept in health for the once-valued labors of destruction."

"And this Peter,—my son's comrade—what has he to do with all of this?"

The Angel glowed with ecstasy. "It is he who made it possible. He is the statesman who has banished warfare from the earth."

Then Peter came. He walked along simply, his countenance alight with happiness, accepting the great cheers that greeted his approach with the same unaffected gladness he had shown to the plaudits of his classmates.

A beautiful young woman walked beside him and shared in his great hour.

"Why, I know her, too," cried Mr. Jonathan Briggs, highly pleased. "I

saw her at the dance at college. My son likes her pretty well. I tease him about her."

"Peter's wife, a fitting mate for him," explained the Angel.

"Here come all the lads,—older now!" Mr. Jonathan Briggs cried out; he was sharing the crowd's excitement. "They're prouder of him than ever. There's Junior,—there's my boy,—there, just behind him,—the one nearest Peter!"

Indeed they came with the old joy, the old pride in him, still banded about their leader. "Our strong band shall ne'er be broken!" Hear them sing! They passed. The cheering people followed.

Mr. Jonathan Briggs and the Angel stood again, alone, in the moonlight. The day had faded. The vision of triumph had vanished.

“My boy chooses his friends well,” exulted Mr. Jonathan Briggs. “He always says, ‘Pete’ll make ’em sit up some day.’ Will Peter really do all that? Will he?” he demanded eagerly.

The Angel of Christmas moaned and hung his head.

“But I thought you meant—— *Why* will he not?” expostulated Mr. Jonathan Briggs.

The Angel answered solemnly, “Once more gaze now behind the Veil of Time, into the Future That May Be.”

Again he waved his wings. The laurel and the bay had dropped from them. The brilliant tunic was a dull, drab robe again.

They stood invisible upon the little balcony before the windows of a small apartment in a great city. Within, an elderly woman, wearing mourning, was setting the table. A pair of little girls,

pretty twins, helped in the homely task. A young boy was studying his lessons at a desk in a corner. A simple home—a pleasant picture!

“Hurry, my dears,” said the mother. “Brother will soon be here. Ah! there’s his key in the door now.”

They were all glad he was coming. The little girls darted forward to greet him, the boy put down his book and hurried after them, the mother hastened to the door.

“Brother” entered and kissed them—a little older but not old enough for that gray about his temples, thinner, a slight stoop in his shoulders, something of buoyancy vanished, some of the soul-stirring glory departed—Peter the Hermit.

He was tired to-night and could not eat. He was coughing badly, ominously.

His mother followed him into his own small room; the watchers on the balcony moved to its window.

"Peter dear, you are weary and depressed," she said anxiously. "Something on your mind, my son?"

"Nothing to fret about, Motherkin. Nothing I didn't expect. Only—Elizabeth. She's announced her engagement to Jonathan Briggs, Junior, to-day."

"My poor Peter!"

"Why, it's all right, Mother. I could have looked for nothing else."

"But Jonathan Briggs!" The mother's cheek flamed with injury. "The son of the man who ruined your father—killed him—— Yes, I *will* say it!" For Peter had raised a restraining hand. "Killed him! For that's what it came to. And made you leave college and undertake our support instead—and Father's obligations! The man who

has cost you so much already—all your splendid dreams! *His* son to marry your sweetheart, too—it is too much!”

“Oh, come, dear! Johnny’s a good sort. It wasn’t his fault. Any man would take her who could. It isn’t just losing Elizabeth—I had to expect that—and I kept away—had to, of course. Nobody could expect a girl—— But—oh! I hate to think of her just settling down into a rich man’s wife. They’ll kill all the splendor of her there. And of course I——” His head drooped on his mother’s shoulder for a moment, but he soon lifted it again. “That’s all right, honey,” he said cheerily. “It’s a shame to whimper, and on Christmas, too! Especially when things are going so well. I calculated to-day that we ought to have all Father’s debts paid up in five years more, and that’s one year

less than we thought, you see. And that is what we want most; isn't it? And as for finishing college—Elizabeth—and the other things, why, they just were not to be. And if my big dreams about the world are right, maybe some of them will come true yet. I'm young, dear. We must take life as it comes—and take it standing."

But the mother's bitterness was not so easily appeased.

"Yes, it *was* to be. It *was* intended. You can't tell me your talents were not meant for bigger things than this," she insisted. "And it would be, too, but for him, grasping, avaricious, cruel——"

"Oh, no; he's not!" Peter protested quickly, though in tired tones. "We must be just; mustn't we? Old Briggs isn't a bad fellow at all. I used to see him at college, you know. Rather a kindly duffer. He just doesn't see

what he does, that's all—doesn't understand. If Father had——”

“Yes! If your father could have believed that men as rich as he would stoop to crush out little rivals less than nothing in their path—your father who would not hurt even an enemy. Oh! when I read their name in the paper nearly every day, Peter, and think what he has cost us, cost you, my brilliant son, I forget to be a Christian.”

“Now, now, Mother! And it's Christmas Eve and the barrel of holly in the kitchen and the toys and things hidden in my closet! Come, come! We have one another. And it's not all ended yet by any means. As for Jonathan Briggs—let's just forget him. He knew not what he did.” Peter coughed hard and a look of fear hovered in his brave eyes for a moment.

Mr. Jonathan Briggs touched the

Angel of Christmas on the shoulder and whispered to him, chokingly, "O, Spirit, will this be,—this instead of that other, this disappointment instead of the Triumph of Peace?" His eyes were wet with stinging tears.

"Ah, that depends!" replied the Christmas Angel, with a look of hope.

"Depends? Upon what? Oh! Upon what?"

The Angel faced him full.

"Upon you!" he said.

The rich man hung his head.

"Why be distressed?" said the Angel of Christmas. "Some must win and some must lose. It is the way the game is played. We cannot change the rules."

"Oh! Spare me!" cried Mr. Jonathan Briggs. Peter the Hermit was coughing hard. "Spirit, take me away!"

"Wait!" commanded the Angel.

“Wait for your Christmas gift. Look here,—behold a gift to you, a gift from Peter the Hermit.”

The Angel reached into the folds of his mantle and, while his accusing gaze looked deep into the startled eyes of Mr. Jonathan Briggs, put into his hands a snakeskin wallet, lined with silk in college colors and containing a draft,—the Christmas present destined for his son, the Sophomore.

THE GIFT OF ROMANTIC LOVE

"ON!" commanded the Angel.

Mr. Jonathan Briggs had grown humbler and feared what he might see. "Where, now?" he asked, and smiled in relief when the Angel of Christmas answered, "Back to the present hour. Back to the brisk Christmas throngs in the city streets."

The streets of the city were in bright carnival. This was the pageant of just-before-Christmas, showing every character of the festive hour, every changing form,—crowded streets from curb to curb, a vast torrent of varied figures, pushing, moving, hurrying.

It was a tired throng, but of a

happy weariness, uttering good-natured sounds and greetings promiscuous of the morrow. There were fathers and mothers laden down with presents to be sneaked into little flats after their children were asleep. The true Santa Claus these,—how brightly purple with the rich wine of life grew the Angel's robe as he saw them! There were workers who had no time to shop by day, and poor folks who thought they could make their pennies go the farther at this eleventh hour, and careless people who had neglected to finish their Christmas shopping earlier. Old and young, weary but merry, brisk with the winter air, laughing and joking, coming and going quickly through the streets, now stopping at congested corners pushing and fretting, now moving merrily forward! Some wore sprigs of holly; some carried wreaths of it upon their arms and

bunches in their hands. The crowd on Christmas Eve!

The streets were ablaze with lights from the shop windows and the windows themselves were ablaze with tempting beauty; toys and trinkets and Santa Claus, in person and in images, and candy and fruit and great trees full of twinkling glory and papier mâché scenes in motion, to the joy of the simple-hearted. In some windows were jewels that cost a fortune, valued little more by this night's crowd than the sparkling paste in others.

How high the Angel grew in stature and how robust he looked as he cried out, "Look! It is a night for love and lovers! Behold the young lovers holding close, arm in arm, in the crowd! Behold the young married comrades in a still sweeter bond of understanding! And the parents with the light of many

a happy Christmas past still shining in their eyes! Behold the lovers!"

Could it be that he did not see other figures too, dark figures slinking in the shadows, bent backs, torn shoes, ragged garments, eyes hopeless, lips bitter or despairing? But, perhaps, though seeing them, he heard the tinkle of coins that fell many and fast into the tambourines held out by The Army of Mercy and knew that to-night at least the poor of earth were less forgotten.

Mr. Jonathan Briggs and the Angel of Christmas traversed the slippery crossing with the groups who were dodging automobiles and cars and wagons or were led through the din and danger by burly, good-tempered policemen. They crossed the bright, noisy, bustling street and stopped, at the Angel's command, before a florist's window.

This large glass case, like a conservatory, was filled with floating orchids; they seemed a flock of purple, white, and yellow butterflies that had sought refuge from the cold.

Three young men stood before this window, fashionable young men in evening dress, delightful to behold.

"For the love of Mike, cut it short, Roger. This is no fun for us, you know. *We* haven't won the Princess," laughed one of them. "Just go in and order orchids. The florist will fix 'em up. You don't have to pick 'em out one by one. By Jove, any one would think you'd never ordered flowers for a girl before!"

"I never before ordered flowers for my *betrothed*, sir," replied another, lightly but with glowing eyes. "This is a serious matter, Ed. I *want* to choose

them one by one for her. Grin if you like. I know I've got it bad."

"I don't blame you," drawled a third. "She's some pippin,—besides getting Jonathan Briggs for your Daddy. Some folks have all the luck!"

"Second the motion," said he who had first spoken. "And always fellows who don't need it, like Roger. Now if it had happened to *me*, poor devil——"

The affianced youth broke away from them impatiently and went into the shop. Mr. Jonathan Briggs could see him, pointing out the orchids to the florist, one by one, with the air of a man performing an act of worship.

Mr. Jonathan Briggs felt a warm glow of pride in this. His daughter had been very wise in her choice, as it befitted his daughter to be. He had taught her to judge men; he was being

rewarded for that now, he thought. He liked sentiment and believed in it. He was glad the young people were so fond of each other; that was the way good American marriages are made. No titled reprobate for his sensible daughter, and no romantic beggar, either. The youngsters were well-matched. And they loved each other. That was right. That was a proper example. That was the way to build good American families. That was the way his own had been built.

All the same, he was glad he had bought those pearls for his girl. Engaged or not, she could not overlook her father's gift, he thought with fond complacency.

The Angel urged him forward.

They stood before the great department store of Bain and Bradley, the firm in which Mr. Jonathan Briggs had

recently become a silent partner. It was a magnificent establishment; it gave him pride to know that his money controlled it and owned the brains of the men who directed its policy.

Like a grand Temple to the God of Trade, it reared its massive walls into the wintry night. Its great façades were hung with evergreens and banners as the Greek temples had been hung with votary oars and shields. Every window, brilliant enough from the glow within, was made more brilliant still by outlining ropes of lights.

The Angel led him across the giant threshold into a blaze of light and luster. Glow from stacks of glimmering silks, glow from cases of flashing jewels, glow from tinsel embroideries, glow from polished leathers, from shining silver, from sparkling glass, from gorgeous hangings, from rubbed mahogany and



MICROCOPY RESOLUTION TEST CHART

(ANSI and ISO TEST CHART No. 2)



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1.50

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from masses of swinging lights dazzled the sight.

And there was bewildering motion everywhere; crowds pushing inward in a solid sea opposing another sea pushing outward, crowds mounting up on moving stairways, crowds hoisted up in bronze cages, crowds crossing, twisting, turning, pressing.

And behind the counters, serving the crowds, stood pale young girls with deep shadows under their over-bright, heavy-lidded eyes, serving, serving, serving, their hands moving like automations, their eyes lifted from their task only to throw occasional hungry glances at the big clock that said their long fortnight of serving this swaying, dizzying, demanding, pushing mass was blessedly near its end.

The Christmas Angel and Mr. Jonathan Briggs, pressing into the crowd,

soon reached the beautiful candy department, bedecked like an immense box of bonbons. The press here seemed thickest, but in the midst of it Mr. Jonathan Briggs could see his secretary, Miss Peabody, walking arm in arm with another business-like young woman.

"Here,—she used to stand right here," Miss Peabody was saying as they reached her. "A very pretty red-haired girl. Always smiling. Hair like fire."

"Ah!" thought Mr. Jonathan Briggs, well satisfied, "Miss Peabody is asking her friend in the advertising department about the red-haired girl whom Mrs. Briggs liked so well. Just like Miss Peabody to remember even a little thing like that and do it at the first opportunity. Very good. Very. An ideal secretary!"

The angelic guide and Mr. Jonath an Briggs followed the two girls, who sat down at a table in a secluded corner and ordered ices.

The advertising girl was speaking:

“Oh! You mean Brick Sweeney. Do you remember her too? Everybody who bought candy here seems to remember Brick. There was something about her! The girl with the blistering red hair and the tips of her white teeth always showing in a broad smile and the dimple in her cheek grown permanent by use. Yes,—that’s the one,—behind the caramels. Remember how her golden brown eyes always crinkled up into little crescents? And the things she said were worth hearing.

“I used to go out of my way, when I went about the store digging up copy for the next day’s ad, to pass by Brick and hear her perform.”

"Why did she leave?" asked Miss Peabody.

"Wait, and I'll tell you. So many have asked about her! It was her Irish wit that took them as much as her beauty. One day I heard a very flossy gentleman, well-dressed and showy as a gold front tooth, try to put one over on Brick.

"Can you guess why I like to come here for candy?" he asked her with a dying-trout expression. Brick came back like a flash, 'Sure! Because it's fresh every hour.' She didn't blush or turn a hair, but I could see his neck crimson ruddily and he took off his hat when he left.

"Good for you!" I said to her. She gave me a whimsical one-sided smile. 'Oh, yes!' she sighed, with her funny grin, 'Many a good opportunity goes to waste for the sake of dignity. I'm

both Irish and red-headed, too, and this politeness comes hard sometimes.'

"But usually she was the sweetest thing at the candy counter; always a face full of dimples." The ad girl sighed.

"Mrs. Briggs always noticed her and spoke of her," said Miss Peabody. "And Mr. Briggs asked about her particularly. Where is she now?"

"Where is she now?" repeated the advertising girl. "And you're going to bring the answer back to Jonathan Briggs? Then you bet I'll tell you the whole story, every bit of it!"

Mr. Jonathan Briggs, invisible behind her, leaned forward to hear.

"It was in the midst of the Christmas rush last year that I began to notice that Brick was looking dragged and pale. But everybody in the store looks tired at the merry Christmas season and

back of the candy counter is no rest-cure or beauty parlor. Besides, red-haired people are always so white it's hard to tell when they become pallid. So I didn't worry about Brick. I only said to myself, 'Brick's looking tired' and let it go at that.

"So I was dismayed to find her sitting on the steps outside of the girls' lunch-room one day, with her head in her hands. There was no mistaking Brick Sweeney's head. I recognized it from afar and came running and cried out, 'Why, Brick, old girl! What is it?'

"She looked up with a shadow of her broad smile. 'It's got me, Esther,' she said. 'Feet. Fallen arches. Both feet. Gee! If it was anything but feet I could stand it. But it's the devil standing on 'em all day; they're too sore now for supports to help, even. My soles try to crumple up and my heels come

right on up through my shoulders. Except for that, I'm well!

"I asked her if she had had her lunch and she shuddered and said, 'Oh! I can't eat!'

"I said, 'Come on outside with me for lunch. It's enough to give anybody blues, staying in this packed place all day. Fresh air will fix you. Let's not eat in the lunch-room. Come on out, Brick.'

"But she shook her head. 'Haven't time. We're so awful busy. Gee! I should think I'd sold enough caramels this morning to destroy every tooth in this town.'

"I expostulated, 'No time? Why, you're supposed to take an hour for your lunch.'

"Brick laughed scornfully and said, '*Supposed* is right. We're too busy this time of year. The quicker I get

THE GIFT OF ROMANTIC LOVE

back, the better for me. You know that as well as I do. Haven't you heard the little heads falling off thumpety-thumpety-thump on Christmas Eve and New Year's when the knife goes round to reduce expenses? The first to fall belong to the colleens that take the privileges they're supposed to. We're supposed to have seats behind the counters, too; but I defy anybody to sit on 'em these busy days. Ain't the sight of 'em a tantalization, though? Nenni! My pay envelope looks too good to me, such as it is. But I'll go in here and try to eat, if you want me to. Selling candy sort of takes your appetite away sometimes.'

"Brick was limping badly. We turned down the first empty chairs we came to and went to the counter for our food.

"You ought to see the lunch-room

this time of year," the ad girl pursued. "All the girls in a hurry, rushing to get their lunch-checks from the cashier's window, rushing to get their sandwiches and coffee from the long counter and steaming urns, rushing to their seats, rushing through their food when they've got it. I don't see how they stand the unending hurry every day for two or three weeks. But they do. Some were laughing and chatting. Some,—of the strong peasant type,—were even trying to dance. But most of them were all in and ate their food as if it choked them."

"Mr. Briggs is very proud of the lunch-room," said Miss Peabody.

"Oh, the *room's* all right," said the ad girl cynically. "Well, Brick had spoken rather bitterly for her, but she soon got back her usual gaiety; for the girls called out, as she hobbled to our

table, 'Brick's here!' and 'Hello, Sweeney!' as if the mere sight of her were good news to them. Funny thing how one personality can sort of tonic things up like that!

"I wish you could have heard her shouting back, 'Hello, yourself, Muslin Underwear!—You look fresh as a daisy, Peggy. How dare you?—Cheer up, children, New Year's is coming; and then there'll be another year of it!—How's things with John, Susie? Don't leave us unprepared.'

"'How are things with *your* John, Brick?' I teased.

"I'll never forget the expression that came over Brick's face when you spoke of John Murphy, her 'steady.' Not one of these squashy, love-sick, giggly, self-conscious expressions, but something high and fine and beautiful. Made you think of dreams of maidenhood and the

strength and sacrifice and desire of woman; all the tenderness of a proud heart, all the resolute patience of perfect hope were in Brick's face. Yes'm; I'm waxing poetic. Well, it *was* poetry, too. And, besides, I want you to see exactly how things were with Brick."

The invisible, unheard listeners pressed closer to the speaker.

"A romance like your daughter's," suggested the Angel of Christmas.

Mr. Jonathan Briggs admitted it, with mental reservations, of course. "Very like. They are married now probably," said he, well pleased.

"Brick couldn't talk about him without lighting up like a Christmas tree," the advertising girl was saying. "But she only answered, 'John's all right. Come along.'"

"She blanched when she tried to rise and I had to give her a hand. 'It had

to be feet,' she said. 'And I could always bear anything better than feet.'

"I asked if she had seen a doctor.

"She chuckled. 'Um-hum. At the clinic. He quite surprised me. He said I stand on my feet too much. Who'd 'a' thought it? He advised me to sit down at least half the time, but I don't think the floorwalker would agree with him. Well, let me try to walk straight now. I've just got to keep walking as if they didn't hurt, when I'm on the floor. Our floor manager sees everything with his lovely squint eyes. And I don't want to lose my job just now, believe me. Dad hasn't found anything yet. So long, Esther. Forget it. I'm all right.'"

"Brave," said Miss Peabody.

"Brave? You wait for the rest of the yarn. My good little Brick! A brick she was in more than the color of her

hair, as she crossed the floor with a firm, light step, wincing and smiling.

“I had been to her home and I knew what the poor child was up against. There were four girls and her father; the mother was dead. Brick was the oldest; the others were just children. The one next to Brick—May—kept house, after a fashion, after school,—canned things to eat and dust swept under the bed, you know. Brick did the washing, nights.

“Pat Sweeney, a good soul, had lost the position he had held for years in a bank. No, he hadn't done anything to lose it,—only grown a little older than their age limit. He wasn't feeble, just as able as ever to do the quiet, sitting-down labor of his banking job; never had been a very big job. But he was technically too old, so they dismissed him for not being able to countermand

the order of the universe. Nobody loves an old man!

"It was one of *your* precious banks, by the way, Miss Jonathan Briggs. Oh! I know you can't help it; and I suppose I'm taking his money nowadays myself, since he bought the big interest in this joint. Well!"

"Oh, come! He's not an ogre when you know him, Esther," Mr. Briggs' secretary interrupted loyally. "You mustn't judge——"

But the ad girl dismissed Mr. Briggs with a smile and shrug and pursued her story, "Brick's poor old Dad had tried everything, addressed envelopes, delivered circulars, just everything! And looked for work! He'd walked more miles than Weston, following false hopes. And always turned away because he was too old. The experience didn't make him any younger, either.

I believe Brick's cheeriness was all that kept him from the river.

"Any wonder Brick wanted to protect her pay envelope? It was all they had, and there were only nine dollars a week in it."

"Pretty small," said Miss Peabody.

"Oh, no. That's pretty fair for us. Our directors say the small salaries are not significant because they only employ girls who live at home and don't have to pay room-rent. Brick lived at home and had to pay *house*-rent, as many others do.

"Brick *had* found one job for Pat and he had at last consented to see about it. Poor old codger! It was a job as an errand boy for a prosperous butcher in the neighborhood; I don't wonder Pat put it off as long as he had any other hope. It was a surrender—in his own neighborhood—for a man who had

worked in a bank. Maybe poor old men shouldn't have pride, though, I dunno.

"Pat wouldn't have had *that offer*, only the butcher was soft on Brick. He was also soft in general,—one of those fat, baggy, pouchy, stupid, elderly, maudlin, moist, flabby persons. He opened his mouth when he was love-lorn. But he had been kind to the Sweeneys. He proposed to Brick every Sunday and watched at his door as she passed, night and morning. Young John Murphy said he would punch his face some day.

"Anybody would have thought that John had nothing to fear from him. Brick certainly loved her boy,—a clean, honest lad. It looked as though they'd have to wait some time, though. John had a small position and his mother to support.

“Sometimes when things were very uncondusive to romance, Brick used to say with a grimace, ‘Who knows? If the girls wear out many more shoes and Dad gets more wearyin’ and forlorn, I may marry poor old Bauer yet.’ But then she’d laugh and say, ‘Not on your life! I’m afraid I’m not a miser. Coosandwiches,—two kisses with a pet-name in the middle,—for mine!’

“A perfect dear!” said Miss Peabody. “I hope she’s married now. If this tale doesn’t end happily, beware.”

“Wait,” said the ad girl. “Last year on Christmas Eve,—a year ago to-night,” she paused, “Brick’s feet gave out. She fell in a little heap of pain, behind the candy counter.

“‘If it hadn’t been feet,’ she said, as they lifted her up, ‘I know I could have stood it.’

"They got her away quickly, so that few customers knew what had happened. The floor manager bragged about it afterwards. He said it was pretty slick work, getting her out without any commotion, in a crowd like that.

"The management sent her home in a cab, and I went with her. All the way she kept saying, 'Do you think my feet are gone? Will it be crutches and lay-off like Nell Rainey? Lord! What would become of us? Maybe they'll be all right soon; I'm such a tough. But feet,—*Merry* Christmas! If it was only anything but feet!'

"The cabby and I carried her up the stairs, but at the door of the Sweeney flat Brick insisted upon standing and dismissed the man,—so as not to scare her father. She leaned on me and I dragged her in.

“We heard the youngsters wailing because there’d be no Santa Claus. Little Bridget cried out, ‘Oh! *Isn’t* he never coming, May? *Isn’t* he never coming? I’m been such a good girl, May.’

“May and Pat rushed forward in alarm and helped Brick to a chair.

“‘It’s nothing,’ Brick reassured them. ‘Only my feet. Always was a fool about feet. Just had to come home and rest ’em. Who’s been telling the kids there’ll be no Santa?’

“That started them again, ‘Oh, won’t there, Brick? Why won’t he come when I’m been so good?’

“‘We’ll see, we’ll see,’ she said. ‘I guess he’ll come somehow. Did the rent man come, May? Wouldn’t he wait until the first this time, being it’s Christmas?’

“‘No. He said it was Christmas for

them too and they needed their money. Your this-week's salary will just make it up, Brick. You got paid to-day; didn't you?

"Brick nodded. She was wondering when there'd be another week's salary if her feet didn't mend. 'What's the *good* news?' she asked brightly. 'Got your job, Dad?'

"'Why—no,' poor Pat stammered in a benumbed, apologetic manner. 'You see, daughter, Rooney,—over at the news stand,—he told me this morning he knew for a certainty of a place for me, —in an office, you see, daughter. So I told Bauer I couldn't come and he got another boy,—got a boy, I mean. And,—Rooney was mistaken. I'm very sorry, daughter. I trusted Rooney's statement,—I——'

"Brick bucked him up. 'Cheery, cheery, Dad! When it can't get worse

it must get better. What's *your* word, May? School closed?"

"Yes. But the truant officer was here, because I've stayed home on account of Bridget's cold. He says I can't another time. And she's too little to be left alone. What'll I tell him?"

"Meanwhile Bridget had taken up her plaint again, 'O, Brick, won't he come for sure, if you hang up our stockings? He always came when Mother hanged them up.'

"Yes, yes. He will come for sure, Biddie,—somehow,' said poor, worried Brick. 'And I guess you'd better stop at the doctor's if you will, Esther. He's a dear; *he* won't mind waiting till after Christmas. Ask him to come right away. My feet are in flames. Dad can't go. He has to go *shopping*. For it's going to be Santa before the land-

lord,—and the Lord help fools and the Irish!

“I never wanted money as I did that night,” sighed the ad girl. “Well, I stopped at the doctor’s on my way home and he went to Brick immediately.

“He told her it meant crutches for many a day, perhaps forever.”

“No!” cried Miss Peabody, dismayed.

And “No!” cried Mr. Jonathan Briggs in the ear of the Angel of Christmas. He felt that he could not bear to have it true.

“Yes’m,” the ad girl pursued relentlessly. “So the day after Christmas she sent for her butcher,—and she married him. So much for love’s young dream!

“I got a note from her. It didn’t say much,—just, ‘I’m Mrs. Bauer, Esther. Santa Claus came,—and the landlord did, too. B. is good to me and I’ll be

good to him. It was feet. I had to.' Not a word about John,—poor Brick!

“When the head of the candy department heard about Brick’s marriage, he complained feelingly. He said it was always the way; the minute you got these girls trained to know their business they went off and got married. He said it was all they thought about.

“Brick made her butcher happy for a little while,—he told me so. She made him happy, as Brick would do. For the little while she lived!”

“She is—dead?” whispered Miss Peobody, tears in her eyes.

“Of heart-ache. It is a mistake to think that merry-hearted people can best bear the great heart-burdens. They are soonest crushed to pieces, I think, because they are all resistance. Yes. Our clean, romantic, conscientious, loving little Brick couldn’t stand her love-

less marriage. And she died. They called it nerves,—Brick never knew she had a nerve in all her life! Well, poor old Bauer's very good to her folks."

"And—John?" asked Miss Peabody.

"Her young John Murphy seems much older than a year should have made him. He cannot bear to look at me when we meet. He remembers that I know how Brick loved him, and what a little thing kept her loyal heart from waiting. Feet! Just feet."

The advertising girl looked off toward the corner where Brick Sweeney used to stand. Miss Peabody took her hand in silence.

"Come on," said the ad girl. They rose and went into the crowd.

Mr. Jonathan Briggs, a catch in his throat, turned angrily to the Angel of Christmas.

"Can this be true?" he asked.

Solemnly the Angel answered him.

"True as the tears she shed through all the bitter year,—this loving child. The tears she shed,—pearls, my friend, priceless pearls of youth, more costly far than those that are to grace your daughter's breast and there outshine the tribute of her happy lover!"

"God! And it is too late!" mourned Mr. Jonathan Briggs.

"Too late?" exclaimed the Angel. "Are there no others here whose youth is being drained away like hers? No other Patrick Sweeneys in your banks?"

Mr. Jonathan Briggs, his pride departed, answered humbly, "I will try. I'll try to do my part."

THE GIFT OF CHILDHOOD

INSTANTLY he felt a renewed rush of youth. The Angel of Christmas bent before him and bore him upward on his wings. Upon the spreading wings of the Angel he was borne high through the winter night. The bustling city had vanished far beneath them. On they sped. Again the air was sweet with children's voices singing carols, garlanding voices, circling and swinging in the heavens.

Faster they flew. Milder and softer grew the wind. Odors of roses saluted them from the earth. The warm breath of the South, tender and fragrant, encompassed them. The caroling voices of the children came closer and closer.

Mr. Jonathan Briggs looked eagerly

about him, striving to see their faces. In a flash of ethereal light he saw them, the Christmas children: children of every nation, of every age, singing and dancing in the starry heavens, hurling roses and holly and shouting "Merry Christmas!" in the intervals of song; children of a long ago Christmas singing of Yule log and coming minstrels; children of to-day exulting in modern joys of the happy season; richly clad children and children in poorer garments; warm-eyed Italian bambini, flaxen Teutons, sturdy Saxons, graceful babes of France,—all the Christmas baby world, visible innocence and happiness and youngest joy. He saw round arms and dimpled hands and kicking, dancing, rosy legs, bobbing curls and clapping palms,—a merry Christmas sight.

Mr. Jonathan Briggs beheld his own

children among these floating babes, and even his brother Tom and his own baby self in their lost infancy, seemingly as young as all the others. Every happy child whom he had ever known was there, still there in childhood, whether grown or dead in the commonplace world of mortal time. And every happy child whom he had heard of in song, or read about in story, or looked upon in pictures,—all were there, as real as children of the flesh. The vast nursery of the universe was full of laughing babes. The Angel of Christmas was abroad in the air.

Ripples of mirth floated down through space like ripples on the surface of the sea. The children swung about him, holding hands, wreaths and garlands of children.

Little by little the laughter ceased. Little by little the songs were stilled.

Little by little the wreaths of children swung away from him. The silence was brooding, sad.

Then delicate wailing noises awoke about him, little sobs and moans, complainings as of waking children who wanted to sleep, as of hungry children who wanted to eat, as of weary children who wanted to rest, as of shut-in children who cried for the sunshine.

Mr. Jonathan Briggs could not determine whether the sad sounds came from the air or sky or earth. He looked anxiously about him. The heavenly, floating children had gone. But as he gazed toward the earth that he was now fast approaching on the descending wings of the Angel, he saw other children walking upon it.

Little human children were slowly crossing the lanes of a dingy town.

“Why do the children, down there

upon the earth, moan so and wail?" he asked the Angel, pointing downward.

"They do not. They are silent. But the angel children are weeping for them. It is they that you hear," the Angel answered him.

Veiling draperies now covered the Christmas Angel like a mist; they were blue, the deep Virginal blue that stands for grieving mothers, sad as a mist of tears. His face was hidden in deep azure scarfs like clouds. In his whole figure, but especially in the sorrowful drooping of his head, there was something womanly; something in his yearning aspect as he bent above the earth that recalled to Mr. Jonathan Briggs the statue of Niobe, the poignant memory of his wife as she had bent above the dying form of their first-born child, something of the Madonna.

Softly descending, the Angel of Christmas and Mr. Jonathan Briggs stood now upon the ground.

It seemed to be early morning. Plain buildings, like enormous barns, were before them. Smoke curled upward from the chimneys and there came from within the noise of whirring wheels.

Like strands of a spider-web leading to its center, long lines of men, women and children trailed through all the streets into the great doors of the mills. The early sunlight flashed upon the pails they carried and sought in vain to warm their sallow cheeks into a semblance of health and beauty. The children walked as soberly, as plodding and steady of gait, as did the men.

The door closed on the last worker, a little child limping along, a little lame child who lagged behind the others. He looked tiny, indeed, as he passed in



"Like strands of a spider-web leading to its center, long lines of men, women and children trailed into the great doors of the mills."—Page 96

through the dark doorway, and the whirr of the machinery sounded triumphant, malicious, like giant teeth, grinding him alive.

Mr. Jonathan Briggs read the name of the mill, on a post beside the door, and gave a start. "Ah!" said he. "It is one of the mills we are backing. I have an interest here."

"Ay, that you have," the Angel answered with a groan. "An interest that should make you tremble!"

A lumbering wagon, a heavy float, drawn by mules and laden with bolts of cloth, rolled by.

"Why do the wagon wheels drip red paint as they go?" Mr. Jonathan Briggs asked his guide. A strange proceeding; he must look into this.

"Look again," replied the Angel. "Touch it. Smell of it. It is not paint. It is the life-blood of children."

“What!” cried Mr. Jonathan Briggs, recoiling in horror. “It cannot be!”

The Angel made no answer but knocked upon the factory door. No one came to open it. He raised his hands hopelessly and turned to Mr. Jonathan Briggs.

“Do you knock, Rich Man,” he commanded. “These doors will not open to me.”

Mr. Jonathan Briggs obeyed and the door swung open. The deafening whirl of machinery struck him like a blow. At first he could distinguish nothing; only the general glittering movement of wheels and spindles to the eye, only the boom and crackle and rumble to the ear. But as the big machines took form to his more accustomed vision, he saw the men and women at their tasks.

And then he saw the children.

As the metal arms went back and

forth with relentless monotony, so went the little human arms and hands, back and forth, back and forth, a part of the machine.

"My eyes grow tired of the swinging, dizzying motion," said Mr. Jonathan Briggs.

"It has made the eyes of the children dazed and dull," the Angel of Christmas said.

"My ears are pounding with the din," cried Mr. Jonathan Briggs.

"Their ears are stupefied and numb."

"How small she is, that pretty golden-haired girl!" said Mr. Jonathan Briggs. He was a natural lover of children; his heart went out to little beings.

"Almost a baby," added the Angel. "She stands upon a box to reach her work and must hold her hands up higher than her shoulders."

“It’s not easy to hold your hands up higher than your shoulders for long,” said Mr. Jonathan Briggs. “What is she doing, Angel?”

“Threading a needle, threading a needle, threading a needle, eleven hours a day, hands above her shoulders, threading a needle, threading a needle, threading, threading a needle,—childhood—all her childhood,—threading a needle, threading a needle——” His reiterating voice kept chorus with the machine until Mr. Jonathan Briggs, his nerves a-quiver, called out for him to cease.

“She will not thread many needles more,” said the Angel of Christmas. “But why do you sorrow for her? She is only an orphan,—a poor orphan, little and delicate,—and can be well spared in a life that is a battle to the strong.”

Relentlessly the machines kept up their even, throbbing labors. Many little fingers, many sunken eyes, many narrow shoulders moved with the machines.

A foreman approached the golden-haired child. She did not look at him with the wide stare of timid childhood. She did not look at him at all. She watched her needle.

"They must be careful," said the Angel. "Watch that boy,—he is a careless child,—a minute more,—you shall see his tender fingers crushed. A moment more! Look! *Now!*"

"No! No! Stop him!" shouted Mr. Jonathan Briggs. And the wail of the injured child rose with his protest.

The other children did not stop or look around, though some blanched fearfully. They watched their work.

They did not see the Angel of Christ-

mas. But here and there as he passed it, a child would lift its head, with a sudden new life in its torpid eyes, as if it heard a distant echo of child-song and gladness, a call to its dead child-life.

Yet only one of them, a narrow-chested, brown-eyed girl, turned, saw and recognized the Angel. She alone left the machine as if she were free. Seeing him, she seemed to forget the factory, ceased to care about her task or to fear the consequence of deserting it.

She ran lightly to the Angel of Christmas and took his hand as if he were a friend.

"Dearest Hope," she said pleadingly, "when will you come for me?"

The Angel put his arm about her.

"To-day," he promised.

"Oh! Thank you, thank you! It has been so long!"

Mr. Jonathan Briggs shut his brimming eyes. He thought of Tom's call out of their long-past youth, "Oh, Johnny, doughnuts! Take some in your pockets and come coasting!" He thought of the toys piled high in his study for the Christmas happiness of his already happy children. He remembered the wail of the child whose fingers had been crushed. And he knew there were other factories in other States like this.

"O, Angel, Angel of Christmas! Help me! Help us all!" he cried appealingly.

But the Angel was gone.

A terrible loneliness fell upon his heart; up and down the whirring aisles Mr. Jonathan Briggs searched wildly for the Angel. He felt that he must find him; his eager dependence upon finding him was pitiful to see. He hur-

ried to the factory door and hunted in the barren yard.

The Angel of Christmas was not there.

A foreman came towards him. "Looking for some one, sir?" he asked politely. Mr. Jonathan Briggs was astonished that he was visible to the foreman; for no one had been able to see him while the Angel of Christmas was with him.

"I'm looking for my Guide," he said.

"Not here, sir."

"But he *must* have gone this way," Mr. Jonathan Briggs insisted. "You could not have missed him. A striking figure,—in a long blue robe."

"No stranger went through here, except a workman just now. Couldn't have been the man you mean. A little queer,—not quite right in his head. A carpenter, he was. A young Jew. We

had to put him out, because he was crying over the children."

Mr. Jonathan Briggs groaned and dropped his head in his hands.

"What's the matter?" cried the foreman.

"I weep for them, too. I do! I do!" Mr. Jonathan Briggs protested as one who pleads his cause.

He held his hands up high.

"Mother! Tommy! Let me come home!" he called.

THE VISION FADES

THE snow was flying in big, soft, heavy, swansdown flakes as Mr. Jonathan Briggs stood again at the door of the little New England cottage. The latch-string was out.

He entered the room, the same, well-known, remembered white-walled room. The same winter-forced flowers, or others like them, bloomed in the window. The same firelight, or one that might easily have been the same, twinkled on the polished mahogany surfaces and glass knobs of the old furniture.

His mother and little Tom were no longer in the room. But a gray-haired man, who looked like a taller, slimmer, cleaner-cut copy of Mr. Jonathan Briggs himself, stood before the fire.

He was in better condition than Mr. Jonathan Briggs and had a slimmer waist, more hair, better teeth, and brighter, clearer eyes and skin.

A fair young girl who looked as his mother must have looked in her youth sat in his mother's chair, a hamper of evergreens before her, making garlands. She had his mother's tiny grace and her sturdy, though exquisite, wholesome beauty. Again the thought of the arbutus crossed his mind as he gazed upon her.

They did not see him. They did not hear him, though he called to them.

"Dear Margaret," the gray-haired man was saying. "It was a little hard on you, I fear. You might have got many a gimcrack that young girls love, with all that money,—lots of things that do not often come to a poor parson's daughter."

"Father!" exclaimed the girl, reproachfully. "As if I could! A fine daughter of yours I'd be to accept for 'gimcracks' money that you wouldn't take even for the repairs in the church or to build the new Young People's Club that you want so much! I'm having a mighty good Christmas, thank you. I have already received so many simple tokens of love and am sure of so many more,—all the money in the world couldn't buy them!"

"Not to mention those you are giving to others, my dear! I think you get more joy out of giving than any one I know, Margaret. Ah! If my little mother were here now, she would say that the Christmas Angel approved your gifts, daughter mia; for, if any were ever blessed with loving thoughtfulness, your handiwork for others has surely been so."

The young girl rose and stood beside him, still working on her long green rope. "And yours, Father," she said.

Your mother and the Angel would love your gift the best of all. For you give *yourself* every day, and keep Christmas all the year around."

"Nonsense, child! I only do what must be.—Poor old Jonathan! I'm afraid my letter hurt him. He's so pleased with himself and his great success. Besides, he loves me, I think, as I do him, though he does believe me to be a mad apostle of the impossible, a benevolent maniac. We were very close once. Very." The gray man sighed. "You cannot imagine, Margaret, what a fine lad he was, with what promise of unselfishness and service! Oh, Mammon! Mammon! But he doesn't understand, my dear. He doesn't *know*; that is all. If Johnny

ever came close enough to those whose misery makes his wealth to *see* that suffering,—why, there's our mother in him, Margaret. He'd *have* to make it right. I know it. I believe in him. I believe he'll make good yet."

Mr. Jonathan Briggs heard this, looked on in bitter shame.

Across the room a door glided open, gently.

Unseen to all but him, his little mother stood before him. She held out her arms to him. In her smile were hope and comfort. With a sob he ran towards her and dropped upon his knees.

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Mr. Jonathan Briggs sat by his fire-side on Christmas Eve, where the blaze had turned to a crimson smoulder. His hands were clenched in his lap and he

leaned forward, deep in thought. There were tears upon his cheeks.

The voices in the next room had ceased. The tree was ready for the morrow.

His wife called to him from the doorway. "Come, see the tree!" she invited.

"Not now, my dear. I have some work to do."

"Work! On Christmas Eve?"

"Yes, dear. Important business."

"Business! On Christmas Eve?"

"Yes, dear. It's Christmas business. I have to begin giving back some Christmas presents."

"You're joking," said Mrs. Briggs.

"But if you really must work, do telephone for somebody to help you."

"I shall," he said. "I shall telegraph for my brother Thomas."

"Glad to see him. But what does Tom know about business?"

THE ANGEL OF CHRISTMAS

“Christmas business! Why, everything. Everything.”

And in his thought he added, as she left him, “He sees Mother every day and keeps Christmas all the year and the Angel approves his gifts,—as hereafter he shall mine,—please God!”

