

CHRISTMAS

1895



UNDER THE MISTLETOE.

A NIGHT'S TRAGEDY.



HE is seeking Him now, so they tell me; All children she loves in His name. In some child still hoping to find Him, Though 'twas ages ago that He came."

Natalie sang this verse of the old Christmas song over and over again, as she sat one evening in the long gallery surrounded by her beloved dolls. This gallery led to her father's suite of rooms in the Hermitage, the addition the Empress Catherine had built to the winter palace, and the reason that Natalie's father lived so near the palace, under the same roof, indeed, was that he was private secretary to the empress. Natalie was a little Russian girl, and the verses she sang were for the benefit of her last new doll, who had lately come from Paris with a great many French airs and fashions. The dainty creature seemed so different from the other homely, clumsy dolls, that Natalie felt she must be constantly explaining or apologizing for something that might not be just what mademoiselle was accustomed to. In France, for instance, perhaps they had never heard of Baboushka, the old woman who personifies Santa Claus to Russian children. She wanders eternally over the earth, looking into every cradle, and is always doomed to be disappointed, because she refused long ago to show the Magi the way when they were journeying from Persia to Bethlehem through Russia. The song told also how Baboushka is dressed like an old, old woman, with a pack on her back full of gifts for good boys and girls, and how she always carries a broom, because she was sweeping when the Wise Men knocked at her door. Natalie became quite excited as she went on, for the Russian girls and boys think almost as highly of Baboushka as we do here of Santa Claus. Perhaps, though, they stand a

leave to Baboushka's care those countries through which he could so easily travel with his sled and reindeer; but, perhaps, that is the very reason he allows her to attend to his work there, for in a country like Russia, covered all the winter with ice and snow, where a traveler can use a reindeer sledge whenever



"Why did you come to St. Petersburg?" he likes, there is not half the novelty about that way of going around that there is here, where Santa Claus is the only one who ever tries it.

This beautiful palace, resplendent with white and gold decorations, was brilliantly illuminated every night, and the rooms in which Natalie's family lived were filled with bronzes, medallions and costly marbles. So Mademoiselle Parichkin, the new French doll, was very fortunate to have found so grand a residence. Indeed, she seemed more at her ease there than some of the older dolls, who never got over their awkward ways and appearances. Some of them had been brought from Lapland and the far-away provinces, and no doubt it was the way they were wrapped up from head to foot in fur and heavy cloth that made them seem so clumsy and unwieldy.

But Natalie loved them all as friends, and often they were her only audience as she repeated the fairy pantomimes and plays she had seen performed at the empress' private theater in the Hermitage. She made them all—large and small dolls—act in their turn, and they did very well in pantomime. Of course, in the dialogues and plays, she had to make all the speeches herself, except when her cousin Saché, or Alexander, who was about her own age, joined in her play, and when he did, he made things go on very briskly. He thought the pantomimes rather slow, and preferred the evenings when they

had illuminations in the gallery. These were imitations of the grand displays made at the winter palace when the emperor held his court there, and the anniversary of every important event was an excuse for a general illumination of the palace. On this particular evening, Saché came racing down the long gallery like the blustering north wind blowing over the steppes, calling to Natalie:

"Come on, I say, let us illuminate the gallery to-night!"

"What do we want to celebrate to-day?" asked Natalie.

"Oh, anything. I don't care what!" was the reply. "The taking of the bastille, if you like."

"Oh, no, Saché," returned Natalie. "You surely remember that we had that anniversary only a short time ago, high as they designed, cut out and painted the transparencies that, with hundreds of little candles shining behind them, were to surprise her father on the evening of his birthday, when he should open the door of the long gallery leading to his library. But she did not remind Saché of the fact that the day before the birthday he told her that was the day the bastille was taken, and friends of liberty should not let the anniversary pass without a sign. She had let him try the effect of the illumination that night, and in his eagerness to make experiments, he had set fire to the decorations she had arranged on the white marble chimney piece. Saché remembered it, too, and was almost ashamed to remember how he had enjoyed the excitement of seeing those decorations burn more than he would a half dozen pantomimes. He said nothing more about celebrating anniversaries, but suddenly turning, he saw Mademoiselle Parichkin leaning in a very coquettish way against one of the long windows.



"Why, who is this you've got here?" he said.

"That's my new doll, Mademoiselle Parichkin. Isn't she imperial?"

"She looks as if she thought she might be the mother herself!" (So the Russians call their empress.) "She needs watching," continued Saché. "I and then, you know, you made a mistake about the date."

She remembered how her heart beat think you should let me train her; she might get you and herself into trouble. Do you know now, Natalie, I think she looks like a French spy?"

"Oh, no, indeed!" exclaimed Natalie. "I am sure she is not. Why, the Princess Laminski brought her to me from Paris."

"You would never know a spy even when you saw one," said Saché. "I'll tell you what we will do. We will try studying French history. Of course, if she is not a spy that will end all the fun, but if we find out that she is, I know how to take it out of her."

"Yes, but—Saché, she has on such a beautiful dress. Please don't spoil it."

"Oh, it won't hurt a bit to try her as a spy. Of course, if she is convicted, she will have to take off that one and put on a convict's dress before she goes to Siberia. Now, I'll be the little father (the emperor). You know could send her right off into exile, but I will try her first in a court of Peers. Stand those fellows up in a row, Natalie. Now you answer for her. Why did you come to St. Petersburg?" he asked, looking very sternly at Parichkin.

oline and papers, and over a shirt of white tulle she wore a lovely crimson satia polonaise with long ribbon streamers of the same shade, and stockings and slippers to match.

"Well, then, she will have to go to Siberia," said Saché, "and I will hang her by one of those red strings outside the schoolroom window, where she can see the Neva frozen over. That will be Siberia, and when she comes back she will be a different creature."

Natalie consented, but only because she feared something worse might be done to the unfortunate prisoner. She showed Saché which of the ribbon loops would be the safest to bear the doll's her according to the laws of her own country in a court of justice, and see if she isn't a spy." (Alexander had been weight when he suspended her outside the window.

And there, in that perilous situation, poor Mademoiselle Parichkin passed the night—for they forgot all about her, and in the morning she fulfilled Alexander's prophecy of the night before. The snow and ice that fell during the night formed a thick coating all over her, and when she was carried to the large porcelain stove in the schoolroom to thaw, the red dye in her satin polonaise, her slippers and hose, stained her all over from head to foot, and she had indeed become a "different creature!"

IN 1620.

The First Christmas Celebration on This Continent.

It was in the year 1620 that the Puritans passed their first Christmas in America. By referring to a copy of the old Bradford manuscript it will be found that the early settlers evidently determined not to celebrate their first Christmas in a new land except by hard work. William Bradford writes of it in this manner: "Ye 16 day ye winde came faire, and they arrived safe in this harbor. And afterward took better view of ye place, and resolved wher to pitch their dwelling; and ye 25 day begins to erect ye first house for common use to receive them and their goods." To look back upon those early days, when our forefathers by hard labor toiled for a house for all, makes one realize in some degree the advancement of our country. Bradford continues as follows: "Monday, the 25 day, we went on shore, some to fell timber, some to saw, some to rise and some to carry, so no man rested all that day; but towards night some, as they were at worke, heard a noyse of some Indians, which caused us all to goe to our Muskets, but we heard no further, so we came aboard again and left some twentie to keep the court of guard; that night we had a sore storme of winde and rayne. Monday, the 25 day, being Christmas Day, we began to drinke water aboard, but at night the Master caused us to have some Beere, and so on board we had diverse times new and then some Beere, but on shore none at all."

Christmas Customs.

One custom that has come to us from across the sea is that of hanging up stockings on Christmas Eve. Little children are taught that St. Nicholas brings in gifts to them through closed windows, and it is supposed this custom started from a tradition that St. Nicholas used to throw purses of money in through the windows of poor maidens, so that they might have marriage portions.

Hewison, in his sketches of Upper Canada, says that he met once at midnight on a beautiful moonlight Christmas Eve an Indian, who was softly creeping along on the ground. Upon being questioned, the Indian motioned to him to be silent, and said: "We watch to see the deer kneed; this is Christmas night, and all the deer fall upon their knees to the Great Spirit and look up."

The Mistletoe.



A score of intelligent and well-informed persons, assembled in a drawing-room one evening, were asked to give the habits and peculiarities of the mistletoe. Without exception they described it as a parasitic plant growing upon the oak. This almost universal belief comes, no doubt, from associating the plant with the oak which the Druids venerated. It is, however, regarded as exceptional when a mistletoe flourishes on an oak-tree. An eminent authority declares that there were a few years ago less than a score of oaks in all England on which this parasite was found.

It may be stated as a business fact that Cupid doesn't always pay the debts he contracts.



"She made them all, large and small, little in awe of her, for besides the rewards she has for good children, I believe the bad ones sometimes tremble at the thought of the punishment she could bring to those who deserve it. It seems queer that Santa Claus should