

Christmas Eve in New France

In the little town of "New France," a few miles from Quebec, there lived an old man by the name of Perry Fanchon. He was about sixty years of age, a wealthy old bachelor, who, with the exception of a housekeeper, lived alone in a great weather-beaten old mansion on the river bank. He lived a very secluded kind of life, was seldom seen upon the streets of the town, and attracted very little attention when he was seen. There were hardly any people in the place that knew the man or anything concerning his life.

Yet there had been a time in the life of Perry Fanchon when he had attracted a great deal of attention, and won the sympathy and pity of the whole town. That had been over forty years ago, and in the meantime the town had changed from a village into a city. The old families had died out and the younger generation had forgotten the history of Perry Fanchon.

It was Christmas eve night and bitterly cold. Sleet and snow drove with incessant fury against the great French windows. The heavy old oak doors rattled and shook, while the wind whistled mournfully among the many old-fashioned gables and chimneys.

Perry sat gazing into the fire. His hair was snow-white, his eyes were dark, and tonight they had a tragic, gloomy look.

On the old colonial furniture the sinister faces carved there grinned horribly and the iron claws seemed to



"Well, Well—I Hope the Children Are All in Bed."

grip the floor hard, as though they were repressing some dark emotion or evil thought.

Forty years ago this night Perry was a happy man, for tomorrow he was to marry the beautiful Miss Nelly Leroy, daughter of the rector of St. Agnes.

But that great factor in the events of a man's career, fate, willed otherwise, for only a few days before the wedding was to take place the bride-to-be was stricken with a fatal illness and less than a week later was laid away in the village graveyard.

After the funeral Perry Fanchon shut himself up, almost alone, in the great house. Time moved on and people forgot! One by one his friends left him, until at last he stood alone, a stranger in a stranger world!

About this time the poorer people, the destitute of the city, became aware of the fact that they had a friend, a very good, mysterious friend, mysterious because, try as they might (and did) they never could discover his identity.

One time when a severe laundress was about to turn a poor family out of the home they lived in, because they were not able to pay the rent, that family found the required amount and a short note asking them to accept the money as a gift, by the fire-place. Several times incidents like this occurred among the unfortunate, but as to where these mysterious presents came from, or by whom presented, none could ever tell. But the children suspected Santa Claus of having a hand in the matter.

Tonight as Perry sat by the fire he was very sad and very, very lonesome. The town clock struck ten. Perry arose, donned a huge fur coat to play his little act bravely. A worn, tired smile played around his usually grim mouth as he thought of the scenes of joy and poverty he would witness this night. He crossed the town with rapid, nervous strides and entered a little family burying ground. He was gone for thirty minutes and when he returned his face showed traces of deep emotion.

"Good-night, sweetheart, I have waited forty years; surely the end cannot be far distant!" he murmured as he softly closed the gate.

There came a jingling of sleigh bells—a sleigh drove up, he entered and was whirled away over the snow.

In a tiny little hovel on the edge of the city five little curly-headed children, dressed in old and ragged but clean clothes were grouped around a small fire trying to keep warm. Their

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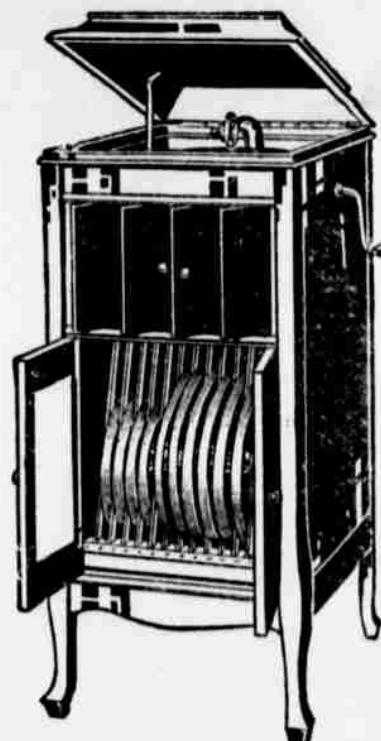
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mother was sewing for a living, her husband having died several years ago, leaving the children to her to provide for and being a woman of good education, she was trying to rear her children as best she might. She was having a desperate struggle and day by day she saw with despair the light growing harder and harder.

"Mother, when is Santa Claus coming?" inquired little Billy.

For a while mother didn't seem to want to say anything. A large tear fell silently on her work. With a hasty movement, almost angrily, she brushed it aside.

"Perhaps he won't come at all!" she replied with a little catch in her voice. "Noooo-o!" came a chorus of unbelieving voices from the fire.

"He is coming!"

Suddenly there came a jingling of bells and a sleigh drew up in front of the house.

"Whoop!" yelled Johnny. "Come on kids—Santa Claus! My eye!"

Instantly the fire was deserted and five little heads were peering eagerly out of the door.

"Oo-williams! Look at the toys!"

"Well, well!" said Santa in a loud voice, pretending not to see the little ones. "I hope the children are all in bed tonight, for if they are not, I will not come again."

Five curly heads vanished in a second, and when the old gentleman entered the room all were tucked snug-

ly in bed—that is all but Billy, who in his excitement and hurry pulled all the cover up over his head and left his feet and body uncovered.

Santa Claus laughed and dumped the contents of his pack near the hearth. There were drums, dolls, tin soldiers, books, candy, nuts and fireworks.

Just at this moment Billy's toe rubbed up a splinter, and there came a sudden grunt from the bed which changed to a fitful sobbing kind of cough as the "old fellow" turned around. The snoring redoubled in volume. Old Santa hurriedly snatched a sealed envelope and departed before she could sufficiently recover from her confusion and surprise to thank him. It was addressed to her, so she broke the seal. The sum and substance of it was: that the house and property of Fanchon and something like five hundred dollars were to be hers upon the death of Perry Fanchon.

So at last the identity of the mysterious Santa Claus and the friend of the poor and unfortunate was disclosed.

Her home was only one of the many to which he had been that night. Tomorrow they would honor him. They would come one and all to thank him, to praise him, to bless him—perhaps to beg for more as the case might be.

The sleigh stopped at the Fanchon house and out Santa Claus paid the driver and entered the house.

Perry was weary and as he walked

down the dark, gloomy hall he almost dropped with fatigue. Fatigue of the body, weariness of the soul, the soreness of a broken heart, all conspired against him! Wearily he slid out of the disguise. His eyes wandered with a pitiful expression over the empty, dark room. None came to welcome him. No one to love or care for him. She had gone on before. Perhaps she was waiting for him up there now. He didn't know. The blood-chilling faces grinned and the cruel claws gripped.

He drew one of the heavy old chairs up before the dying embers and cast down, bowing his head far over into the grate. Colder he huddled. What was this dreadful chill that seemed to be taking possession of his body? His great sorrow preyed upon him.

"Oh, God!" he murmured; "I can stand it no longer."

Something gentle and soft stroked his hair! his hair that was white as snow. Two arms encircled him lovingly.

He looked up, at first unbelievingly, and then a wonderful smile lit up his face.

"Nelly!" he exclaimed, joyously. "At last you have come for me. I knew you would! I thank Thee O—"

His voice trailed away in the distance.

The fire died out and the faces no longer grinned, but seemed to smile

in the darkness, far off, just as the dawn was breaking, the chiming rang out their message. Was it fancy or did a soul far out in space echo: "Glory to God in the highest and on earth peace, good will toward men." Perry was at rest!

A CHRISTMAS CAROL

In the stillness of the midnight,
In the silence of the Star,
In the number of the white lambs,
On the hillside, near and far,
Came the Christ Child to his mother;
To the humble oxen's stall,
He, the Babe of Paradise, sweet,
Lord of Christmas, King of all.

Hush, let not a word be spoken
Of his sacrifice for men,
Sleeping from his world of glory,
To be woman-born, a pen,
Of sweet straw to be his cradle,
He is ours, just ours, today,
Mark that mortal smile, that shining
Of the halo in the bay!

While the palm trees rustle softly,
While his lullaby, the breeze,
Crooms amid the angels' anthem,
Which the star-lit heaven cleaves,
We will claim him ours, our treasure,
Christmas Babe, and Babe divine,
Hail, thrice hail, O mystic stranger,
Nesting in thy straw-filled shrine!
—Helen Chase, in Brooklyn Eagle.

DON'T

Handle Your Candle-Lighted Christmas Trees Recklessly

HERE are a few warnings that all Christmas celebrants will do well to observe:

Use electric lights instead of candles wherever possible.

Never leave the children alone with lighted candles.

Remove the curtains when candles are used in windows.

Use asbestos fiber instead of cotton to represent snow.

Use metallic tinsel and not paper on your trees.

Fasten your tree securely, so it will not tip over.

Remove the tree from the house when the needles become dry.