

CHRISTMAS THROUGH THE YEAR

by W.D. PENNYPACKER, JR.

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THE night is still,
Save for the clinking of the frozen snow,
As a lone wagon coming from the town,
Laden with produce and a host of toys,
Wends its way slowly o'er the silent hill.
The moon is creeping from behind the trees
That skirt the pond and make a border wide
And beautiful and strong about its edge
As through the fluttering branches of the fir
That hang in garlands, spangled with their cones,
Its shimmering beams in streams as of a web
Spun by a spider, spread them to the west.
And lighter, lighter ever grows the night,
And ever brighter grows that plain of white,
Scarce broken in its high piled, ample drifts.
Now and again from out some gabled roof
A chimney points its capping toward the skies
And soft gray smoke in mystic circlets pours,
Soon to be lost in the evasive night.



Snug in his wagon, drowsy with the spell
Of the unusual stillness of the night,
Wrapped in his furs and wearing heavy gloves,
A young man drives old Dobbin with loose rein.
He enters, ere the clock strikes twelve, the gate
Of the paternal homestead, there to stay,
Close by the fireside, till the dawn of day,
When, at the first flush of the rising sun,
He will assume the role of Santa Claus.



The morning breaks—the first sound in the house
A baby's prattle and her wild delight
When, going to the fireside where had hung
The night before five empty stockings, lo,
Groaning with good things, burdened with their toys,
Full to overflowing with the Christmas joys!
Then wild delights! John, Mary, Tom and Lou,
Just from their beds, come hurrying to see
What good St. Nick had left them ere he passed
Up through the chimney to his ample sleigh
And his six reindeers hurried him away
Across the housetops, burdened with their snow,
To other hearthstones whence he had to go.



Brighter the day grows. Richer are the joys
For the adults, who watch the children romp,
While merriment and laughter, peal on peal,
Ring through the house and gladness unconfin'd
Proclaims the presence of the Christmas day,
When glad good will and peace possess the mind
And man to man, his brother, is most kind.
The angel message heard on Juda's plain
Centuries gone is heard and heard again.
"Glory to God, peace and good will"—the song
In ceaseless rhythm age to age goes on.



The sun is setting ruddy in the west,
The purple shades supplant the gold of day,
And childish faces, heavy with their sleep,
And limb and body, tired out with their play,
Turn into bed to drift away in dream
To lands far distant, to a fairy realm
Where play and kindness rule and reign supreme.
The older folk sit late beside the fire
Strange anecdote and story to relate,
And ruddy embers seem to conjure up
Stories of fun and valor long gone by.
Then, one by one, retiring, they depart
And leave the big log burning on the hearth.
The smoke curls upward with a mystic spell
Which in its language says that all is well.
The night is still. The silver gleaming snow
Is heaped in drifts by breezes as they blow.
The midnight strikes; the bell rings sweet and clear,
"Christmas shall linger with us through the year."



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