A CHRISTMAS TELEPHONE

(By Alice E. Allen.)

Dorothy left her playthings in a heap on the floor. She pulled her chair to the telephone on the desk. She climbed into it. Her curly head reached the mouthpiece. She unhooked the receiver and put it to her ear, just as father did.

"Number?" said a voice so quickly that Dorothy jumped.

"Two-two-nine-six," she said clearly. That was what father said.

In a minute, close to Dorothy's ear, it seemed, another voice spoke.

"Hello!" it said spleasantly.

"Is this Santa Claus?" asked Dorothy as much like her father as possible.

"Yes," said the voice, sweetly. "What is it?"

Dorothy hesitated.

"You don't sound just like Santa Claus," she said.

"Well, I am," the voice laughed. "But who is that—some little girl?"

"I'm Dorothy Grant."

"Dorothy Grant?" The voice seemed surprised. Dorothy hastened to explain.

"Dorothy Grant, 234 Park place," she said. "Don't you know me?"

"Oh," cried the voice, "of course I do now! But I've never seen you, have I? You are Mr. John Grant's little girl, are you not, Dorothy?"

"Yes," said Dorothy. "But, you see, he isn't home. He isn't ever, 'cept Sundays and Christmases and Thanksgivings and such days. That's why I had to call you. There isn't any one in the house 'cept Rhoda and Sofia. Sofia's so old she's deaf. You aren't deaf yet, are you, Santa Claus?"

"Not yet," laughed the voice. "I can hear you quite well. Go on."

"Sofia takes care of the house and father, and Rhoda takes care of me. But they don't understand about Evelyn, and to-morrow, when father'll be here, it will be too late, 'cause to-morrow's Christmas. And you must give Christmas gifts on Christmas, mustn't you?"

"Yes," said the voice. "What is it you want, Dorothy?"

"It's about Evelyn. I didn't hear it myself till Rhoda told me to-day when she dressed me—that is. I didn't hear all of it. You don't know Evelyn, do you?"

"Why no; I think not."

"I was just about sure you didn't, 'cause, you see, you've never given her single thing, she says. And she's lder'n me—a little. She's always been e, but she's never been sick till y. Think of being sick at Christ- time! And the doctor says she have fruit and nice things to eat. she can't, you see, because Rhoda it took every cent there was ed to pay up the doctor."

"Where does Evelyn live?"

there with Rhoda. And it's up ever and ever so many stairs. I don't know how you'll ever get there. Are you so very stout?"

"Not so very. I climb stairs yet quite easily."

"I knew you'd help me if you only knew about it!" cried Dorothy.

"What does Evelyn need most besides the nice things to eat?"

"She needs most everything,' said Dorothy. "I bought her a Teddy bear with my own money. She just had to have him. But a dolly is quite necessary, too. Don't you think so?"

"Very. And some picture books?"

"Oh! And a chair that won't hurt her back—a soft, comfy one."

"A pretty gown"—

"And some slippers"—

"And flowers"—

"Most anything you have left over!" cried Dorothy, in great excitement. "Evelyn'd like anything, 'cause she hasn't anything, to begin with."

"I see," said the voice, gently. "We'll have a lovely Christmas for Evelyn. Now, isn't there something you'd like for yourself, Dorothy?"

Dorothy hesitated.

"There is—one thing," she said, slowly. "I've never even told father. But I do want it dreadfully."

"What is it?" encouraged the voice.

"I want—a—mother all my very own," said Dorothy. "Barbara has one and Connie. And Maude has one and two grandmothers besides. Why, even Evelyn has a mother—a sick one. Mine died, you know, when I came. And I would like another one."

"Yes," said the voice.

"I'd like a pretty little one, with dimples, like Connie's mother. She isn't hardly ever real cross, even when Connie tears her gown. And she kisses Connie real often, and puts her to bed every single night, and tells her stories. But most any kind would do if father ked her. She'd have to stay here, you now."

A mischievous little laugh sounded Dorothy's ear. But in a minute the voice said:

"Is that all, Dorothy?"

"Yes, thank you," said Dorothy, as father had taught her.

"You dear, quaint little thing!" cried the voice. "May I come to see you soon?"

"Why, of course, Santa Claus," said Dorothy.

* * * * * *

"But wasn't Santa Claus funny to ask that, father?" asked Dorothy. Father had surprised her by coming home before her bedtime, and she was telling him al that happened. "Of course, he's coming. Doesn't he always? Why should he ask if he could?"

Father chuckled.

"What number did you ask for, Dolly?" he said.

"Two-two-nine-six," said Dorothy, "the one you always say."

Father gave a long, low whistle. Then he asked:

"Was Santa's voice deep and gruff?"

Dorothy shook her head.

"It was low and sweet, and every little way it had laughs in it," she said.

After Dorothy had gone her happy way to dreamland Mr. John Grant went to the telephone.

"Two-two-nine-six," he said.

In a moment there came to him a voice, low and sweet, with laughs in it.

"Is this Miss Annie Claus?" he asked.

"Yes. And this is Mr. Grant?"

"Yes. You had a conversation with my little daughter this morning, Miss Claus?"

"Yes—bless the child How did she know me and my number?"

"She didn't, but—bless the child—she tried the only number she remembered and found you. She was trying to get Santa Claus."

"Santa Claus?"

"Yes."

Annie Claus laughed.

"I understand now," she cried. "That was why she asked if I were deaf yet—and stout. How funny and sweet and dear of her! Well, thanks to her and to Evelyn, I've played Santa's part and had the loveliest Christmas I ever had so far."

"It was good of you, Annie," said John Grant.

"Good?" Annie Claus questioned. "One would do anything for Dorothy."

"Would one?"

"Anything one could," amended Annie in suspicious haste.

"You have Evelyn's gifts ready?" asked Mr. Grant.

"All ready. You should see—"

"And Dorothy's?"

"Dorothy's?"

"The one thing she wants—she told me, Annie. Is it ready?"

"Not quite."

"But, Annie, to-morrow is Christmas, and Christmas gifts must be given on Christmas."

A mischievous little laugh rippled over the wire.

"Dorothy stipulated that in the selection of her gifts her father must be pleased," said Annie Claus.

"That needn't bother you. You have shown his preference for a year and more, haven't you?"

"Ye-es, unless he has changed his mind."

"He hasn't, Annie, and never will. Don't you believe that?"

"Ye-es."

"Well?"

"Come over to my Christmas tree to-morrow night, you and Dorothy. Evelyn will be here. Well talk things over."

"Thank you; we'll come without fail. But Dorothy—and Dorothy's father—will be sadly disappointed if Dorothy's gift isn't ready."

"Perhaps it will be."

"Annie—really?"

But Annie Claus had rung off.

CHRISTMAS SERMON.

Aged Wayfarer Taught a Curate Contentment.

An English clergyman declares that the best Christmas sermon he ever heard was preached by a woman—and in three words!

"In my little parish, under the sweep of the Sussex downs," he says, "I was walking swiftly home one night buffeted about by the gray clouds of driving rain that the fierce sou'wester swept landward from the sea when a poor, helpless, aged woman asked me for a trifle for a night's lodging.

"Curates are supposed always to be poor. It was Christmas time, and I had just parted with my last sixpence at a lonely hamlet where work was scarce. Still I could not leave my stranger in the street, so I asked her to come with me to my lodgings.

"She shambled along through the mud with her streaming clothes and clouted boots, and we entered my little room. My thoughtful landlady had made my table ready. A plate of hot toast was standing in the fender; the kettle sang vociferously, as if impatient to be used; in front of the fire stood my slippers and an easy chair.

"To my surprise, my poor, worn, haggard companion raised her dripping hands and burst into tears with the words, 'O, what luxury!'

"That was the best Christmas sermon I ever heard, and the only one I have never forgotten."—Youth's Companion.

THE OTHER STOCKING.

Once Santa Claus, as in he came,
Loaded with toys and many a game,
Saw two little stockings hung side by side,
Close to a fireplace, broad and wide.
"Ho! Ho!" said he, with a laugh of fun,
"I'll have no cheating, my pretty one.
I know who lies in this house, my dear,
There's only one little girl lives here!"
But just as he spoke he saw pinned to the toe
Of the one, a note, and he cried "Hallo!"
"Dear me, what's this?" For he saw with surprise,
As he pushed up his spectacles close to his eyes,
That the queer little note was addressed to him;
So he read by the light of the moonbeams dim—
"Dear Santa Claus:—I want you to know
Who the other stocking is for, that so
She may share in your gift, it's Clara's, you know.
She's a poor little girl, but as good as could be,
So I hope you will fill up her stocking to-night
And help to make her Christmas bright.
If you haven't enough for both stockings there,
Please put all in Clara's I shall not care."
"God bless you," he cried, and then, as he spoke,
He drew from a bag beneath his great cloak,
A lot of warm clothes, and he tucked them in
To Clara's stocking, and then with a pin
Some more useful clothing he fastened on there,
Then he filled up the other to make a pair,
With some of the loviest toys you could find,
For he said, as he hurried away, "I don't mind
Whatever I give to those who delight
To be loving and gentle, and try to do right,
And to those who have always a kind word to say
To others, who are not so happy as they."

Santa Claus is just as real as many other chaps.

His Christmas Gift

John Semple's steps became slower as he toiled up the hill to the familiar farmhouse gate.

The curtains had not been drawn, and the family was intent on decorating the Christmas tree.

"By Jove," he muttered to himself, "I'd forgotten it was Christmas eve." He leaned beside the big elm just inside the gate, and he reached his hand up with almost a caressing movement against its gnarled old trunk. His fingers touched a smooth place on the bark, and long-forgotten thoughts curled his hard mouth into a boyish smile. Quickly he struck a match and held it to the tree. Yes, there it was—J. S. and M. R. enclosed in a rude heart. "I wonder where Mary is to-night" he said to himself.

As if in answer to his question, the great door opened and a girl came running down the path, followed by a stalwart lad, who called: "Mary, Mary, stop a minute!" But she did not stop. On she came to the old elm tree.

John Semple stepped hurriedly just outside the gate where one of the great square posts hid him from view.

As the girl reached the tree she put both her hands up to the carved letters and a sob rose in her throat.

The man who had followed gently put his arms around her and said: "Don't cry, Mary, darling. I am sure if Jack could know he would be glad that I love you and am going to take care of you. I know I can't be as splendid as dear old Jack was, but you do love me a little, don't you, Mary?" he asked wistfully.

The girl put both her hands on the boy's shoulders. "Yes, dear, I do love you, but I want to be loyal to poor Jack. He loved me so much, you know, and when I think of him dying 'way up there in the Philippines, with no one near it seems treason for us to talk of love."

"But I loved you before Jack did, dearie, and stepped aside when I saw how it was between you. Now Jack is gone forever, but I am here alive and I love you."

Solemnly the girl looked into her lover's eyes, and then her face was raised to his. He bent and kissed her, and, with his arm about her, they went back to the house.

"How pretty Mary has grown," John Semple murmured as he stood again by the elm. "When I turn up I am afraid Tom's chances will be poor," he said, cynically, "even if he is the better man."

Then he squared his shoulders and walked up the path briskly. At the door, just as he raised his hand to knock, he caught a glimpse through the window of a white-haired old lady, walking with feeble steps across the room. For a moment she unconsciously stopped under the mistletoe that hung under the centre light, and a splendid old gentleman stepped up with a courtly bow and kissed her amid the shouts of approval of a number of younger men who crowded 'round to "kiss mother under the mistletoe." Slowly she walked to the window and John Semple, who stood just outside, heard the old man say: "Don't grieve, mother. Remember our son died an honorable death, fighting for his country."

"But, father," she said, "if I only knew where my boy was lying I think it would be easier to bear. Only the meagre words: 'John Semple missing,' in the report after that awful skirmish at Dagupan," and her lip quivered with the tearless griet of old age.

There was a quick sound outside the window and all faces were turned toward it. Someone came to the door, but the man outside slunk into the shadow as a dog bolted growling down the path.

The dog came back suspiciously, but as he reached the man on the porch he began to whimper. "Quiet, old fellow," he said, as he fairly hugged him in his anxiety to keep him from making his joy known to those inside. "Dear old boy, you know me, don't you" he whispered.

Just then a voice, old and quivering, inside the room, began: "Children, I have something to say to you. Tom here has told me that Mary has promised to be his wife. We all have loved Mary ever since the time we thought she would be John's wife; but I know, could John speak, he would say he was glad that Mary will find happiness with Tom. Mother still grieves for her first-born, but" (and the old man drew himself up proudly) "I know that he did not shirk his duty, even though he knew it meant death."

The man outside seemed to stagger a little as he repeated, "He did not shirk, even though he knew it meant death." That far-off morning at Dagupan, when fear clutched him by the throat and he left his comrades to carry on the sortie, came up before him.

Once more he looked inside. Everybody was clustered about Tom and Mary, and even mother's mouth wore a smile, which, however, did not reach her grief-stricken eyes.

John Semple bent down over the dog. "It's up to me, old fellow," he said, "to deliver my Christmas gift now."

Once more he patted the dog, and quietly, with head erect, walked toward the gate. After a moment the dog followed and when they both passed the elm tree he was at his master's heels. "I am sorry, old fellow," said John Semple, "but it won't do. You must go back. I have to put you, also, into the package I am leaving them. Go back to the house, old chap. I know you'll keep my secret. It isn't for me to spoil their merry Christmas," he said as he turned and walked out into the darkness.

A Song of Epiphany

High in the azure come of night
The Star hung over Bethlehem—
O little Christ! so sweet and warm,
With helpless head on Mary's arm,
What can You know of wrong or harm,
Or sorrow, like the sons of men.

Three kings knelt by the manger-bed,
His sign had drawn them from afar,
Their silent camels knelt without,
They sought the spot with many a doubt,
But now was shed them round about
The radiance of the Star.

Rich gifts they laid at Mary's feet,
Frankincense, gold and fragrant myrrh—
The little Christ looked down and smiled,
Held closely by His mother mild,
He touched with soft hands of a child
The three kings as they knelt to her.

But Gaspar held one tiny foot
A moment in his hand,
Whispered and wept with lowered head—
"I see a path this foot must tread,
Yea! but sharp stones it shall be bled,
For God doth so command."

And Melchior raised to bearded lips
One straying hand, so rosy white;
Pleading, "O Thou in heaven above,
Who even the hearts of men may move,
Save from the scar this hand of love,
Protect it by Thy might!"

Then sadly touched the downyhead
Balthasar, grave and stately there;
With tears he said: "O cruel thorn
By which this mild brow must be torn!
O robes of mockery! Crown of scorn!
Which the Lord of all must wear!"

But Mary smiled and gently said
To the sorrowing sages kneeling there:
"In love, through pain. He came to me,
So, too, His path on earth must be
To paradise through Gethsemane,
In love His cross to bear."
—Elizabeth G. Reynolds, in Woman's World for December.

SHELTER FOR SANTA CLAUS

(By Hollis Carter.)

A subdued "Oh!" echoed from all sides as Santa Claus slipped down the chimney and made his jovial bow to the children. They had been told that they must keep very quiet or the Christmas saint would go away without leaving any presents, so the involuntary "Oh!" was hushed almost as quickly as it was formed.

The children of the streets glanced about apprehensively. Perhaps even this would result in their being turned into the street by the fat policeman who had been detailed by the captain to see that no piratical youth led a raid on the tree ahead of time.

But nothing so untoward happened. Officer Cassidy still beamed upon their pleasure, and at the other end of the room Santa Claus in a funny falsetto voice was making a speech of welcome, and telling them how glad he was that the young ladies of the guild could give such good reports of every child.

"There are some present here," he concluded, "one for every child, and candy and an orange, too."

He approached the tree, and Bess Fairley stepped forward to assist. In some fashion she stumbled, and the great tree with its twinkling lights went crashing toward the side of the platform. There was a flare of light as the candles caught the resinous needles, and in an instant the flames had communicated with the long streamers of evergreen that festooned the room.

Cassidy was all action.

"Turn in an alarm on the corner," he commanded the janitor, who had stolen in to see the fun, then, raising his voice, he continued, "Come on out uv this, every blessed wan of yez or I'll run eyz all in."

Up front the young girls of the guild were pleading with the guests to be quiet, but Cassidy's stentorian voice had a better effect. The children, who had huddled in little groups in the aisle, uncertain which way to turn, now made a rush for the door, steadied by Cassidy's admonitions into avoiding a panic. Then the members of the guild hurried after them as the firemen rushed up the stairs.

Amy Vaughan in her Santa Claus costume huddled in a doorway on the opposite side of the street and watched the progress of the fire, unconscious of the biting cold. The December dusk had fallen and no one noticed the shivering figure, or, if they did, they supposed her to be one of the mock Santa Clauses, set up on the street corners by the Salvation Army to solicit contributions for the army's Christmas dinner to the poor. Only Cuthbert Bonner, turning in at his own doorway opposite the burned building, noticed the shaking figure.

"How now, Sir Santa?" he greeted. "Is the street corner too cold or have you deserted your post of watchfulness for the fascinations of a fire?"

Amy shrank back into the shadow. Of all persons, Cuthbert was the last she wished to see in her present plight. The heavy white beard and the full wig were ample disguise and she had only to disguise her voice.

"I'll go on in a moment," she promised. There was little need of vocal disguise. Her teeth chattered so that she could scarcely make herself understood. Something in the tone attracted Bonner's attention and he looked more closely. The costume was more laborate than those provided by the army. The long, loose coat was of thin cotton flannel, as were the others he had seen, but the cut was not the same, and the wig and beard were expensively made. In a flash he remembered there was to have been a Christmas tree in the burning hall. This was some lad whom they had impressed to play Santa Claus.

"Burned out and your reindeer team ran away, eh?" he said, with a chuckle. "Come up to my rooms, my boy, and shed those absurd garments while I have a cab called for you."

Amy shuddered. "Shed those garments indeed!" She was glad that Cuthbert thought her a boy, but the mistake might be embarrassing and she muttered some excuse about going on presently.

"Nonsense," was the reply. "You'll freeze to death in ten minutes more. Come on."

He held open the door, but Amy shrank back into the vestibule. Without more ado Bonner caught her by the arms and led her inside. His rooms were on the first floor and presently she was standing in his sitting room wherein an open fire diffused a grateful warmth.

"Now warm up and tell me all about it," commanded Bonner as he deposited his burden in front of the fire. "I bet I can tell you. Your clothes are burned up and you are afraid to go home in these. That right?"

Amy nodded hed head. Her teeth had stopped chattering now, and she was afraid to speak. Bonner did not appear to notice the omission, for he ran on.

"Let me give you a piece of advice, my boy," and he said half seriously. "No matter how you trick yourself out, you hold on to your money after this. It's a good plan to follow. My man's making you a cup of hot coffee, then I'll lend you one of my overcoats and you can go home in a cab. It's not often that I have opportunity to offer shelter to his highness of Christmas Land, and I want to do it up brown. I'd offer you my something stronger, but it's not good for boys. Feet wet?"

Amy shook her head, though the thin slippers she wore under the oilcloth boot top were soaking wet. A sneeze betrayed her and Bonner gave a shout.

"You little Ananias," he cried, 'they are wet. Take them off while I get dry ones."

He vanished through the doorway, but was back in a moment with a pair of fur-lined slippers.

"They are a trifle long for a boy like you, but they're dry and warm," he said, as he came toward the girl. "Slip off those things and get into these. "Come," he added, as Amy made no move to obey. "You've at least been foolish in a good cause."

He knelt to take of the wet footgear, but as he raised one unwilling foot and saw the dainty slipper which the oilcloth hid he rose to his feet and stepped back.

"I beg your pardon," he said in slight confusion, 'though it is your own fault for letting me continue in the belief that you were a boy. I remember now, a girls' guild hired that hall."

"You were not to blame,' said Amy. "It was your own kindness. If you don't mind I will put these on. I will call you when I am done."

When she did call Bonner entered with a trap. "Here is the coffee,' he said, briskly, and when you are ready to go there is a cab at the door. This coat will give you protection from the cold. You can send it back by the cabman. He will be paid for the round trip, so you need not worry about that."

Amy smiled as she saw that he had provided a moustache cup for the coffee. It was like his thoughtfulness. She need not even remove the mask-like beard.

"I've a maiden aunt who sends me one every Christmas," he explained, as he saw her look at the cup. "She lives in the country where such things still flourish, and she sends one every year because she knows that bachelors break things so often. Dear old soul, she doesn't know I have a round dozen on the shelf at this very moment. I'll get the thirteenth to-morrow."

"I wonder if you will ridiculo my present," said Amy, suddenly speaking in her natural voice, and tearing off her beard. "Your year of probation is up and my answer is——"

"Yes?" he asked, as he sprang forward.

"Yes," assured Amy. "I'm sorry, dear, that I ever doubted you. It was all a mistake. Your hospitality to Santa Claus is the final evidence of your goodness."

"Bless the old saint,' said Bonner, "I'm glad I offered him shelter."

"I'm glad, too," said Amy, demurely. "He has brought me the best present of all."

ABOUT THE MISTLETOE.

Popular Christmas Plant in Olden Times Was Sacred.

Although in the majority of Canadian and English homes mistletoe is displayed at Christmas time, is is remarkable how little is known of this curious plant. Mistletoe is a parasitic growth appearing most frequently on apple trees, although it is also found on evergreens and on poplar, hawthorn, pear and oak trees, but very rarely on the last named. It is an evergreen bush about four feet in length, thickly crowded with branches and leaves. Unlike all other plants, its leaves extend down as well as up. The plant flowers every year, but does not bear the little white berries until it is four years old. The mistletoe proper is a native of Europe. red plant, because its berries grow in clusters of three—emblematic of the Trinity. The ancient Celts used to hang sprigs of mistletoe around their necks as a safeguard from witches. The maid that was not caught and kissed under the mistletoe at Christmas would not be married within a year, so the tradition goes. According to the old rules the ceremony wa snot properly performed unless a berry was pulled off after each kiss, and presented to the maiden. When all the berries were gone the privilege ceased.

THE CHRISTMAS DINNER

—A family affair.
—If you have no family, find one.
—In the olden days big families were the rule.
—But the dinner was not complete without a visiting stranger.
—Kith and kin gathered together from a dozen shires at Christmas.
—That was in the feudal days, when the great halls would seat a hundred people.
—Emphasis was placed then upon the dinner and less upon the Christmas gifts, etc.
—The early Christmas dinner were very heavy functions, requiring enormous quantities of food.
—Those big banquets were marked by great and rich variety, in fish, meats, fowls, puddings, cakes, pies, etc.
—Many a Christmas dinner of the early times was nothing more than a carousal, and the diners were notorious for their excesses.
—The boar's head was the most distinguished dish; mince pie was regarded as a Christmas dinner essential even then.
—The English national dish of plum pudding was introduced at the time of Charles II, when Christmas dinners were not in keeping with the religious aspect of the day.
—The modern Christmas dinner differs greatly in the various lands. In France it includes poulet, cooked and garnished as the French do such things to perfection.
—Roast goose stuffed with chestnuts is favored by Germans, who include pork boiled with sauer kraut, beef with sour sauce, black pudding, smoked goose and baked apples.
—Eels are the principal dish at the Italian dinner (which are eaten at any time in the evening between eight and midnight), the eels being served each rolled in a laurel leaf, one to each guest.
—In modern Christmas dinner is served the turkey is the chief dish. No American Christmas is quite complete without turkey, which has become not only a national but a world-wide feature of the Christmas.

A CHRISTMAS GAME.

A Yuletide version of the donkey party is played thus: On a sheet sketch or paste a design of a Christmas tree. Have each branch of the tree terminate in a circle containing a number, using the numbers from one to ten or one to twenty-five, according to the size of the tree. Each person playing is blindfolded in turn and is given a resette with which he must "decorate the tree." Each person aims to pin his or her rosette on or near to the highest number of the tree. Each competitor has three trials, the three numbers to which he pins nearest being written down to his credit by the hostess, who keeps tally. The one whose three numbers added together give the largest sum total wins the first prize.