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TO DREAMLAND AND BACK.

1-101

A Christmas fable.



By J. W. PALMER.

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1885

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To Dreamland and Back.

A CHRISTMAS FANCY.

BY

J. W. PALMER.

TO
THE LITTLE ONES,
MY OWN AND OTHER PEOPLE'S,
THIS CHRISTMAS TALE
IS AFFECTIONATELY DEDICATED

To Dreamland and Back.

A CHRISTMAS FANCY.

By J. W. Palmer.

It was cold without, and warm within :
Within was silence ; without, the din
Of traffic roared around.

A crowd was hurrying through the street :
Warm hearts, cold faces, braved the sleet—
All were homeward bound.

The poor man found his burden light,
For care had taken wings to-night ;
And, far and near,
Peace and plenty and goodwill
Prepared with joy the world to fill,
And welcome Christmas cheer.

From the window where I sat
I watched, and, pondering this and that,

My thoughts commenced to stray.
 Strange fancies floated in my brain—
 Odd thoughts that came and went again,
 Till sleep swept all away.

A sense of sinking seemed to creep
 Upon me. I was falling—falling into sleep :
 A phantom steed, rough-shod,
 On flaming wings soared in the air,
 And carried me, all in my chair,
 Off to the land of Nod.

My steed, it never touched the ground,
 Yet answered unearthly echoes' sound,
 The hoof's noiseless tread ;
 And though we galloped on amain,
 We seemed transfixed, to remain
 Motionless and dead.

Around the dull, grey atmosphere
 Darkened into blackness : here
 All hope I banished.
 But the clouds rolled by, and summer skies
 Were now revealed. I rubbed my eyes :
 My steed had vanished !

In regions of eternal day,
 'Neath full green trees, and gardens gay,
 By laughing streams,
 Where shines the red round sun alway,
 And summer never dies, I stray
 In the Land of Dreams.

I lingered in the summer land,
 And came upon a bridge which spann'd
 A stream, with trees on
 Either bank—one white with frost,
 The other green with leaves. I cross'd
 Into the Winter Season.

The land of everlasting snow
 Was bright and white and well aglow
 With health and vigour,
 And all cheerful and serene,
 Despite the aspect of the scene
 Of King Frost's rigour.

Winter has its beauties, raro as those
 Which gentle summer only can disclose ;
 And winter's dreariness
 Brings with it gifts no less than it destroys

Spring-time has pleasures; Christmastide its
 joys,
 And seasonable cheeriness.

And so I pass from sunshine into snow,
 And listening to the winds, erst whispering
 low

Now whistling in my ear,
 I step on briskly forward, and the strong
 Wind with strength is laden. In Winter's song
 A goodly voice I hear—

A voice which woos me not to idle ways,
 To languorous rest and wasted days,
 To sloth and sin.

Winter's voice roars in the leafless tree,
 "Go forth into the world, and see
 The wickedness therein."

Winter's voice calls to the sun of man
 To rise and do the work he can;
 It howls at every door;
 It cries through the length of the crowded city,
 Imploring charity, awakening pity
 For the lowly and the poor.

As I set foot on Winter's ground,
 I heard a cheery, laughing sound—
 Some one spoke aloud.

A poor old man, with a laughing face,
 Was actually welcoming me to the place,
 And stepping forward, he bowed.

He bowed, and hoped to be allowed
 To have the honour—once more he bowed—
 Of offering friendly greeting.

He politely requested me then to explain
 (Here the old gentleman bowed again)
 The reason of our meeting.

The old gentleman's figure was familiar
 enough—

His venerable mien, his manner so bluff,
 I seemed to know ;
 But I could not remember where I had seen
 This old man carrying a fir-tree green,
 And up to his ears in snow.

So I said to him, "Sir—ahem!—I forget
When and where it was we last met—

I don't remember.

I recollect meeting you very well,
But when it was I really can't tell."

Says he, "Last December."

"You haven't altered a bit," I cried.

"I never do," the old fellow replied,
Shaking his head.

"Your voice, your appearance is just the
same ;

But—excuse me, pray—I've forgotten your
name,"

And I turned very red.

"I am Palmer," said I. "I live in the
Strand,"

Shaking the old fellow by the hand,
My goodwill to show.

"I've seen you scores of times, it appears,"

"A score," he answered, "in twenty years.
I'm Father Christmas, you know."

"What I dear old Father Christmas," I say.

"I never expected to see you to-day.

I couldn't believe——"

"Couldn't believe your eyes, it appears,

Perhaps you can hardly believe your ears.

Do you know it's Christmas Eve?"

"Christmas Eve, to be sure!" said I, with a smile.

"You come to us only once in a while —

Once in a year.

If you could, Mr. Christmas, prolong your stay,

Or pop in unawares once in a way,

You'd save us many a tear,

For the world grows good on Christmas Eve,

But as soon, dear Father, as you take leave,

It soon returns to strife.

The Devil goes off for one day in the year;

He's never about when Christmas is here—

Then he goes home to his wife."

Old Father Christmas spoke in accents mellow,
 And long I lingered talking with the genial
 fellow

 With the snow-white beard.

When day declined he shook his wintry locks,
 Bade me good cheer, gave me a Christmas-
 box,
 And disappeared.

The packet he had slipped into my hand
 Was thus directed: WILLIAM PALMER,
 STRAND."

 In blank amaze

I tore the packet open, 'neath a lamp,
 And, lo! an English penny postage stamp
 Met my gaze.

Hurriedly I snatched it from the paper case
 And stared the little picture in the face.

 I marked the figure

Of the youthful Queen: to my surprise,
 The stamp itself before my vory eyes
 Grew bigger.

With terror I was very nearly fainting,
 For the stamp was swelling to a life-size
 painting
 On my hand,
 I could not hold it, presently I found,
 And so before me on the cold bare ground
 I let it stand.

I stood before the image of our Queen,
 A portrait done in sickly yellow-green,
 And with disdain
 I turned away, and mocking the Postmaster's
 choice
 Of such a sickly shade, I heard a voice
 Murmuringly complain.

 peered into the darkness of the night—
 I looked around. No soul was there in sight,
 And yet the sound
 Continued, as of some one speaking all un-
 heeded.
 My ear inclined to whence the voice pro-
 ceeded—
 I bent towards the ground.

Listening, I bowed my head. Oddest of
quips,

It seemed my stamp abnormal moved its lips.

Its voice was weak :

I wondered much to find the power of speech

So curiously bestowed ; for what could teach

A postage stamp to speak ?

“ You marvel much to hear me speak,” it
sighed.

“ Oh, not at all,” politely I replied,

Not meaning it.

I watched its face : with smiles the stamp was
beaming.

I did not laugh at the queer sight, not
dreaming

I was dreaming it.

Then boldly spoke the stamp in accents
stronger,

“ Good friend, pray linger yet a little longer,
I’ve much to say, I ween.”

“ Say on,” I answered ; and the stamp began.

“ As sure, good friend, as I’m a living
man——”

“ A stamp you mean.”

“ As sure as I’m a living stamp, then,
And you the very happiest of men——”

“ Not so, I opine.

I have my troubles, like the rest of us.”

Said the philo’phic stamp, “ So has the best
of us.

I have mine.

Look at the colour on my face.

Is it not, I ask you frankly, a disgrace ?

Not to be invidious,

Every nation’s stamp’s prettier than mine.

My complexion’s livid, and my design

Is simply hideous.”

“ Be cool,” said I. “ You’re looking very
faint.”

“ Give me,” it muttered, “ give me—a little
paint.

'Twill soon restore me.

A healthy colour will be mine once more
If they replaced me by the stamp of yore,
In vogue before me."

"Your tale is pitiful, I do confess,
And, like my own," said I, "it needs redress.
Philately has been beset
For years by rascals, swindling scamps,
Who trafficked in the sale of forged stamps,
And do so yet.

An Act of Parliament was passed in '84,
Which promised that the world should hear
no more
Of the heap of them.
Mine the trouble and expense in honour's
cause.
For many years I worked for Palmer's Clause,
To make a sweep of them.

Palmer's Clause of the Protection Act
Is law, 'tis true; but there remains this fact,

That the community
 Is robbed by Hookey Walker, who decamps
 And moves from place to place his stock of
 forged stamps
 Still with impunity.

And things go on in this way just because
 The Government refuses to enforce Palmer's
 Clause,
 And no one else can.
 Some day the Post Administration will awake,
 And, waking, will discover the mistake,
 And the risks they ran."

"Some day," sang the stamp, a favourite air
 'twas humming.

"That day, I fear me, will be very long in
 coming.

Wherefore retardest
 Thou, O Postmaster!" I cried. "My grief is
 great."

"And greater mine," the stamp cried. Each
 thinks his fate
 The hardest.

The stamp resumed, now speaking faster,
" My compliments to the new Postmaster.

May he lend you his ear! "

With those words the stamp abruptly finished,
And then it slowly, gradually diminished
Within its proper sphere.

I nodded, lifted up my head, awoke.

Who's that? I'm certain some one spoke.

'Twas Mabel—

'Twas Mabel bringing in the lamp,
And there beside was a penny postage stamp
On the table.

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