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A
CHRISTMAS DREAM.

BY

JAMES T. BRADY.

ILLUSTRATED BY EDWARD S. HALL.



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MR STEPHEN C. MASSETT:

My Dear Stephen:

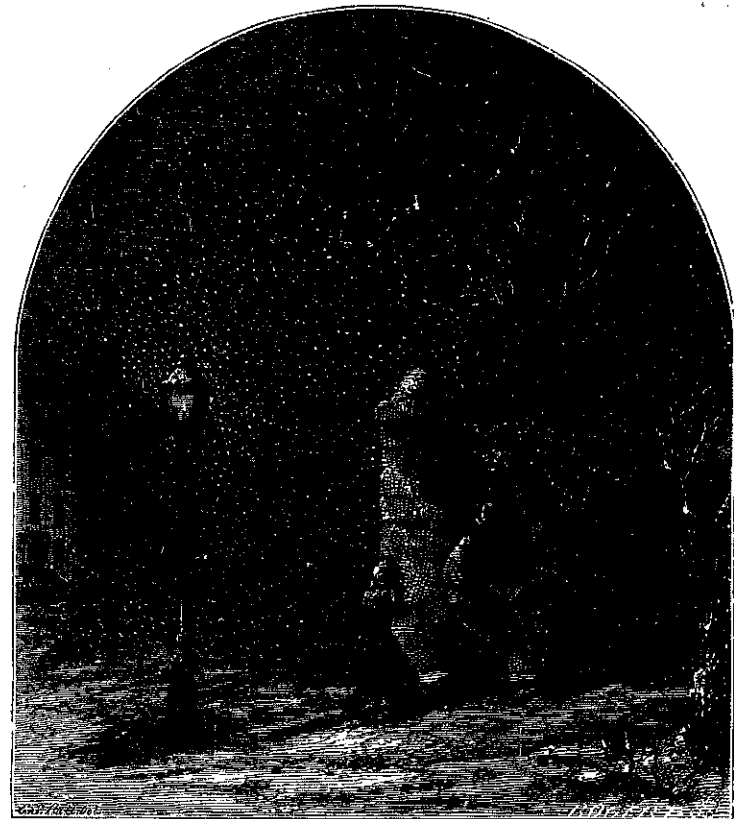
I dedicate to you this little volume. The sketch it contains was written some fourteen years ago, when you were a clerk in my office, and although it was published at the time in the "*New World*," then edited by our mutual friend, PARK BENJAMIN, Esq., I did not suppose it would ever be presented in a more durable form. But as you retained a copy, took it with you on your various pilgrimages, and during the Christmas season read it to strangers even at the antipodes, it seems to be yours more than mine, and I thus bestow it upon you. Mr. EDWARD S. HALL has made the book valuable by the admirable illustrations with which he has adorned it, and the friends for circulation amongst whom exclusively it is designed, may possibly derive gratification from having this frail memorial of him who with affection and esteem subscribes himself

YOURS EVER,

JAMES T. BRADY.

NEW YORK, *March 26*, 1860.

A Christmas Dream.



CHAPTER I.

“NOT one cent.”

“But please, sir, we haven’t any bread at home.”

“Not one cent, I say—begone!”

Yet it was Christmas Eve, and this sullen denial proceeded from one well provided with

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the world's goods, toward a ragged and barefooted girl, who as she tramped over the cold pavement, held out to the stony-hearted man a thin and tremulous hand.

Yes! It was Christmas Eve, the anniversary of that holy hour when we are taught that He was born, who, turning aside from the great and the wealthy, sought the friends of the humble, and achieved his most divine labors for man in relieving the loathsome and degraded.

It was Christmas Eve, and the heart of a girl which could have been made happy by the meanest coin that ever oppresses the rags of a beggar, was by a cold denial of the pitiful boon, sent cheerless out upon the wide sea of selfishness, where if it should break in agony, the event would no more attract the notice of the multitude amidst which it happened, than the bursting of a bubble would disturb the ocean.

It was Christmas Eve, and the streets were crowded with happy people, who thronged about the various shops to provide a jolly dinner for the morrow, or to purchase presents for young folks who were destined to dream all

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night of treasures, more valuable and vast than those which were displayed at the magic mention of "Open Sesame." Where the toys glittered in profusion, the boys were gathered at the door, wondering at the prices of what they were never to obtain, and gratifying their spirits by wishes that were never to be realized. In the windows of confectioners' shops, were exhibited the luscious and captivating preparations which were very likely soon to occasion busy employment for the family physician. Past all these the wretched girl wandered disconsolately, wearying herself still with the inquiry why others should be so blessed with all the means of pleasure, while she, in the prime of her life, knew little but sorrow and want. She had not yet become acquainted with Adam Smith's Wealth of Nations, nor investigated a report by the Secretary of the Treasury.

I had no time to pursue the person or fortunes of the girl. She disappeared suddenly in the tide of human beings that swept on in sullen monotony, even like the river which in its way to the ocean pauses not, whether the flower, the ripe fruit, the decayed tree, or the being full of life, fall on its rapid waters. My attention was

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arrested by the haggard features of a miserable *chiffonier*, who, with a sack over his shoulder, and a hook in his hand, was journeying homeward after a day's vile labor in searching the kennels of the metropolis. A fur cap drawn far down to his eyes, left exposed a sharp brow, under which were hidden cavernous eyes that seemed to shrink from the foul work to which they were subjected. One would have thought while gazing on his



sunken cheeks, stern mouth, and projecting chin, that no smile had even, for one instant, lighted his sombre coun-

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tenance. And yet who knows that he had not a hopeful and a happy youth in the "pleasant land of France," or the romantic home of the Switzer? It was hard to believe that the morose and melancholy wretch had ever been a child, and nestled in the arms of a devoted mother, while her fond eye shone upon his sweet slumber, like the evening star upon the dusky earth. But so it had been, no doubt, and possibly there were many who came at his birth to congratulate proud parents; hopes for a family's honor had perhaps grown strong as he progressed toward boyhood; he had haply been confided by a dying mother to the care of a merciful Heaven, and sent out upon the world to seek his fortune, with the cheering encouragement of interested friends. To think that the child, which, fresh from Heaven, would have received the blessing of the Redeemer, if it had lived in the period of his benevolent mission, should thus be converted into a begrimed and wrinkled wretch, obtaining the means of existence from the very refuse of poverty!

"The world has more justice than we believe," remarked at this moment a gentleman passing me, to the friend at his side; and I knew from the speaker's look

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and manner that the way of his life had been one of ease and success, and that he knew no more of the fierce passions and dreadful wrongs that often convulse men's frames, than the little rivulet making its way century after century through the solemn stillness of a primeval forest, knows of the tempests that sweep the ocean in the wildest nights.

A carriage passed me—the high-mettled horses attached to which were controlled in their graceful and spirited movements by a pompous coachman, who held



the reins delicately on the fingers of his white gloves, while behind, a footman in lace and frippery, looked over

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the top of the vehicle as if in constant expectation that an acquaintance would come flying over the heads of the horses. Inside was the same churl who had refused the girl one copper, and it was plain that he had forgotten forever, except, perhaps, as the theme of an inflated discourse about "increasing pauperism," what I could not but remember as a striking illustration of those disparities which, while they must ever exist in life, can never fail to excite the regrets of all who wish that there could be less of suffering on earth, and more of real pleasure.

A terrible shriek arose from the pavement, and I saw the wheel of the churl's carriage pass over the leg of an unfortunate girl. The carriage stopped for a moment. The driver coolly inquired if any body were hurt; the crowd who had immediately assembled, told him to drive on, and I pushed toward the injured girl, just in time to see that it was she who had but a few minutes before elicited my sympathies, and that the coarse man who was holding her in his arms, and exclaiming in French, "My daughter," "My poor daughter," was the scavenger whose dismal face I had just encountered.

Even at the moment when the poor girl was borne into

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a druggist's shop, and while the crowd stood gazing in, a boy racing past exclaimed, as if the world depended on his lungs:

"I wish you a merry Christmas, and a happy New Year."

The crowd melted away from the apothecary's door, the shuffle of the multitude went on in its old monotony, the curses and shouts of omnibus drivers were heard above the clatter of myriad wheels rattling over the cobble stones, and I wended my way homeward, resolved that I would on the morrow search for the unfortunate girl, and see what might be done to relieve her. But the sounds of music issuing from a fashionable restaurant attracted my attention, and I went in.

We all know what a restaurant is in New York now; with what elegance and costliness, if not taste, most spacious "*salons à manger*" have been arranged, where mirrors and polished white columns ornamented with gold, and gay curtains with glittering loops, and cushioned seats, invite to Apician suppers, with which the most fastidious palate must be gratified.

I hid myself in one of the boxes, and modestly ordered

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some ale and a cigar, resolved to let the music which had lured me from my homeward path, harmonize with the thoughts which arose out of the strange episode in my life which had occurred from the accident to the girl, and the circumstances which preceded it.

Well, it has ever been so, and it must be so until the end of time. Poets and orators have complained that suffering too often attends the lives of those who, deprived of the means to make woe endurable, linger through a painful existence to a wretched end. And this should stimulate the faith and the hope of the skeptic in his heaviest and most cheerless despondency. It cannot be that the Almighty will not, at some time, and in his own inscrutable manner, equalize the disparities at which in this life we revolt. His omniscience—which, seeing through all the disguises of a corrupt nature, beholds the lecher in the priest, and the virgin spirit in the unfortunate harlot; he who knows how favorably the conscience that has yielded to strong temptations compares with that which never felt the necessity of resisting one dishonest impulse; he who beholds the injustice by which trembling innocence suffers at the bar where bloated arrogance pre-

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sides; he who has his quick ear ready to catch the dying murmur of the poor outcast, reluctant even in the last agony to let the world that has rejected him know how he feels its tyranny; he, in short, who knows the truth and the right, and can exhume them, though centuries of falsehood and wrong be piled above, has some great temple ready, where, under his own infallible guidance, that which was unjust on earth shall be remedied, and those who suffered injustice shall be redressed.


All this while the four musicians performed a sweet German melody, full of home and its associations, a touching strain which convinced me that music derives its power from harmonizing with those unuttered thoughts of our deepest nature for which mere language is inadequate. Yes! And it is but just there should be a heaven in which those silent and unrevealed aspirations of the spirit which can never be satisfied here, and at which the world scoff, may find the pleasure for which they long.

The ale was heavy withal, and my eyes drooped under its unpoetical influence, so I left the lights, the Germans, and the music, and would have made my way homeward

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had I not been arrested at the door-step by a withered old man, very like the poor scavenger, but a little more neatly attired, who had a sack over his shoulder, and seemed hurried for time. As he expressed a wish to have some conversation with me, we passed back to the seat I had just left, and amidst the music, the clatter, and the smoke, took seats, and commenced gazing at each other with silent but absorbing interest.

CHAPTER II.

Y *vis à vis* was decidedly a strange character. It was difficult to detect the exact expression of his countenance, for it varied continually. Laying upon the table the sack I have mentioned, and opening it, he proceeded, with a very grave air, to produce a number of volumes, and arrange them with studious care.

"You will be surprised, sir," he remarked, "when I tell you who I am."

"Nothing can astonish me much in these days of magnetic telegraphs."

"But this is probably," said he, "the first time that you have had actual conversation with one who does not belong to this world, and is merely an agent of an absent monarch, to collect for him the trophies which increase with each succeeding moment."

I began to think my companion a madman, and the conviction was strengthened when he proceeded to say—

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"Yes! That monarch is the Past; an unrelenting and unyielding tyrant, who never returns the lightest trifle that ever comes within his grasp."

"And you," I remarked, "appear to be his confidential clerk, or travelling agent."

"It is my duty," said the mysterious stranger, "to collect, during the brief period assigned for my labor, such mementos of his power as this earth may afford, and when I shall have laid them at his feet, I, too, will become one of his victims and his monuments, and be denied the privilege of ever visiting this earth again."

"And what is your name?" I inquired.

"Alas!" exclaimed the stranger, "I am the 'Passing Year,' and although visible to you at this moment, have usually neither a 'local habitation' nor a name amongst mankind. I perceive that you are on the border line of life—that boundary between manhood and old age, at which the affections and feelings linger, the mind still looking backward to the scenes in which it knew the sweetest delights, while the flesh, growing weaker at every step, journeys toward eternity. In these volumes I have the record of what man has achieved during the

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time of my pilgrimage—of the wrongs and virtues that have disfigured or adorned his career. It is a strange history of hopes that are blighted, friendships estranged, promises violated, faith disregarded, right trodden in the dust, wrong elevated to the highest places, merit spurned by the foot of presumption, and Virtue checked, and insulted by Vice in her flagrant and infamous career. Ob-



serve the comparative size of these volumes. Here," holding up a book not larger than a child's primer, "is the record of virtuous resolutions kept. What huge quarto enrolls those that were violated? The bad pre-

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ponderates over the good through all these volumes in the same proportion. Ah, sir! mine has been an unpleasant duty. I was ushered into office amidst the wild shouts of the multitude hailing my approach, as if I were to bless them all with a profusion of Heaven's choicest gifts. Alas! many who shouted deliriously at my advent, are now low in the dust, and have been compelled to look on powerless, while death laid his icy hand upon some of the most generous hearts that ever thrilled within mortal bosom.

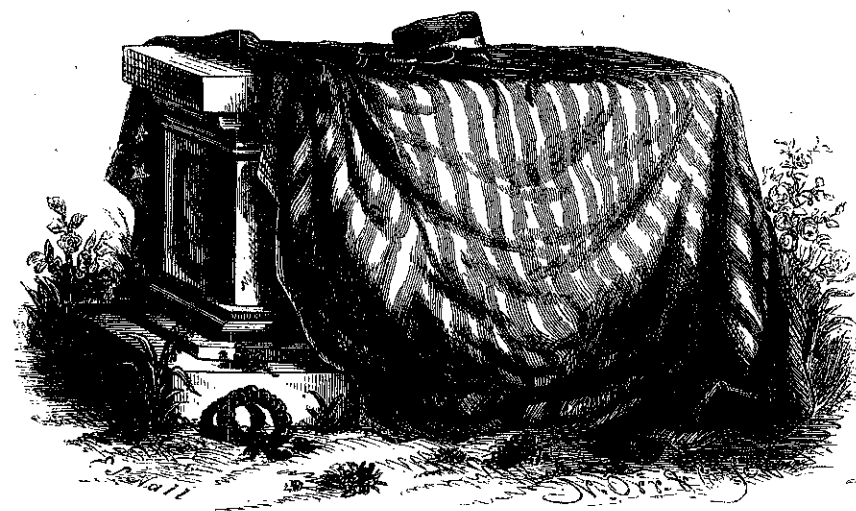
"I could tell you of one who seemed born to show how much that was immortal and noble could dwell within the precincts of a human frame. From childhood's earliest prime, to the moment when, far from friends and kindred, he breathed out his spirit to Heaven, there was no time when he stood in the path of any fellow-creature, or when there existed one wretch to whom his departure could afford a thrill of fiendish satisfaction. His heart was open to generous influences, as his countenance to the benign expressions which, beaming from every feature, cheered his troops of friends. There was no impulse of his soul, no word on his lip, no pressure in his hand,

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that had ever felt the influence of hypocrisy, and in the prime of his manhood you might read his nature as easily as that of a child. Having nothing to conceal, he wondered that men were surprised at the frankness which was part of his nature; and he could not understand why, in association with his fellows, there could be a feeling called reserve. There were many, very many places where, without his ever knowing of his importance, the appearance of this benevolent and kindly being was hailed as the sufferer hails the ruddy dawn; and when he was striving to cheer the heavy hours of those who seemed to need his sympathy, how many hearts were eager to yield him the same solace! Full of boyish innocence, he yet plumed himself upon the ripe experience and practical wisdom of the man, assuming for the while, to give himself the weight that age and trial demand, an appearance of austerity which could but for a moment abide upon him, and which only served to amuse, like a grotesque mask concealing the features of a smiling face. In all that was generous, unselfish, and warm-hearted, he was, to most of his fellows, the wonder as well as idol; and there lives not

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one being who ever sought the influence of his kindly spirit, and went away dissatisfied. Men wondered that he did not yearn for fame; and yet, detecting himself in such a desire, he would have banished the thought at once, as involving a wish to elevate himself above those whom he loved. He would rather have the thanks of a beggar than the throne of Cæsar. But he has gone down into the grave, even when his friends strained the insight of their hearts for his coming and delighted in the expect-



tation that they must soon behold one who never grasped the hand of his fellow from any but a brother's feeling.

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He has gone, from no more apparent necessity than dies the bird, which, during the sunny season poured out its melodious song from the leafy spray, and has since uttered its last note in the wild wood. He has gone, and all who knew him regret his departure, and feel that it is a greater trial to remain here, now that he is no more, than even to venture on the unknown world in quest of him, and the hearty greeting he knew how to give. If you ever feel a doubt that the beautiful and good exist hereafter, think of such a character as I have here described, and ask yourself if there can be one reason why such a being, having existed, should ever utterly perish. But I weary you with these saddening thoughts. It is the Christmas Eve. Come forth with me into the air, and I will reveal to you what no mortal eye hath seen before. I will show you, in your own history, how is connected by a mysterious influence the Christmas of the present with the Christmas of the past."

CHAPTER III.

HERE is an elm-tree in the Park, near Chatham Street, which, in the "golden prime" of my boyhood, was the *rendezvous* at which, after school hours and during holidays, we so often assembled, thence to set out on many a cheerful adventure in quest of fun. The merry group which clustered there so often, comes to my memory with the same distinctness as if by some magic influence I were carried backward over the intervening period to those happy school-boy days once more. I well remember that glorious period, during which, unlike almost all my companions, I did not lose the enjoyment of present happiness in the strange ambition to be a man. All my wants were then provided for by those whom it has been my lot to see laid in the dust. Oh! how at the hour when school was "dismissed" we scampered off as wild caprice suggested, making the street resound with jocund shouts, and engaging in the various sports which youth so inge-

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niously devises. There was an ogre too in those days—the keeper of the Park—a mild and worthy man in his ordinary mood, no doubt, but with a nose that blushed scarlet over the transgressions of his lips. We gave him the title of “Rum-nose,” which, perhaps, was more just than elegant, and it was our great delight to annoy the poor fellow, leading him into useless chases up and down the steps of the City Hall, and through its entries, over its vestibule, and even into the court-rooms, where justice is said to be administered. Christmas Eve was a great time then, and was seen from afar. We commenced discussing its advent, and the delights it would bring, from the last holiday that preceded it; and even now, when in the maturity of life we find Christmas at hand, and feel no excitement of preparation, we wonder why we miss the feverish expectation with which it was once awaited, forgetting how few cares we had then to disturb the darling anticipation of the heart. How delightful then became the home from which we had so often stolen out at nights in defiance of parental authority, and to the imminent danger of our persons! There was such a “busy note of preparation” about the house, such mys-

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terious deposits of turkeys and quarters of mutton in the hall, such strange developments of baskets, only equalled by the banquets that come from the earth in pantomimes, and such a profusion of fruit and confections actually left within our reach without even a prohibition to touch them. Who can even forget the smell of his Christmas home?

“There is the Christmas table of your youth,” said my companion, and lo! I had become a boy again. The dinner table was surrounded by the family once more. There was not even one absent. He “by whose kind, paternal side” we grew toward manhood, occupied the head of the table, his hair slightly dashed with gray, his face radiant with a cheerful smile, and his proud glance directed around the abundant board to those on whom his hopes and pride now centred. And there was, too, my mother—she of whom the recollection, now that she has been some years “laid in her narrow place of rest,” is like a mingled sense of pleasure and duty, each ever present, and each in turn growing stronger than its kindred feeling—she to whom, in my earliest sufferings, I breathed my secret complaints with the sublime con-

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fidence that they were as safe as they could be in Heaven—she whose ready ear caught up every syllable in which I told of any wrong her son had suffered, or honor he had attained, however evanescent—she, whose large heart, peopled by her children, seemed yet capacious enough to nurture all the afflicted of the human

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race—she, whose face now, in the greatest anguish of manhood, comes like an angel from God to my spiritual sense, and whispers, in language which the soul only can hear, that there will be a season of relief and of happiness—she, the dearly beloved idol of my whole nature, whose hand still seems to have smoothed my pillow when I lie down for rest on earth, whose presence shall be felt in each thrill of my latest breathings at the solemn hour of death, and who I know will be the first to meet me, if we be restored to each other by the benign mercy of a benevolent God.

There, too, about that table, were all my brothers and sisters. All were in perfect health, and all happy. Such eating, drinking, laughing, singing, and, after the dinner, such dancing, tumbling, and playing at Blindman's Buff! The scene went swimming before me, and in an instant the whole of a past life was disclosed.

"The Christmas of manhood," said my companion.

The same table, with no diminished store of what may yield the body pleasure, but, oh! how much narrowed the happy circle which once gathered there at the happy Christmas season! He was gone, the pillar and the prop

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of all; gone in the maturity of life, but before the frosts of age had been laid too deep on the generous impulses that burned in his magnanimous nature. She, too, had departed, at whose decease it seemed so unwise that any should be permitted to remain, and in the absence of whom the rose seemed to have lost its fragrance, and the very stars their glory. A sister, too, whose graceful form moved like a thing of light and pleasure through the household, gladdening wherever it came—her chair also was vacant. And now that I observe more closely, I miss the face of him whose features seemed to flash from them in combined light all of good and pleasant that existed in all the family beside. Death, alas! had “stepped in and thinned that little band,” and the members of the circle, once so extended, now drew closer and closer together, because of the breaches that had been made in their ranks, to sustain each other, until, at the command of him who gives and takes away, the last link of the chain shall, I trust, be reunited with that from which it was wrested when the first of our dear ones perished.

“My time is drawing near to its close,” said the Passing Year, “and I have but one more scene to show you.”

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There was the parlor of our home. The fire, that I had expected to see burning cheerfully when I returned, had a dim look, and, strange to say, four figures sat around it holding correspondence with each other, with looks that indicated conversation, but were unattended with any sounds. How can I describe the pleasure that pervaded each pulse of my frame, when I recognized the dear departed members of our family enjoying, as they were wont to do in life, the comforts of that home which their presence had so often made happy! How ecstatic would my joy have been could I have embraced them all; but the hand of my attendant was laid upon me, and I could but gaze upon my heavenly visitors, rapt in wonder and delight.

“They have been waiting for you to come home,” said he; “and will not quit the house until you are secure in slumber. Look!”

I gazed with astonishment while my dear lost ones ascended to the rooms where our family repose, and saw each of them stoop over those who were sleeping, to kiss the slumberer's cheek. Then all stood around the bed and elevated their eyes with their prayers to our Maker.

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Then they returned to the fire, and seated themselves once more, and there came back to my delighted spirit such a sensitive recollection of all they had done for me, and of what I had omitted that might have made their lives more happy, that I could have fallen on my knees before them and besought the forgiveness of each. But I was restrained by my companion; and it was not until I had laid myself down to rest for the night that the beloved faces visited my couch also, and lingered over my pillow with looks of undying love. Then I heard the prayers for my prosperity, mingled with sounds of sweetest melody, which seemed to combine expression of all the memories that followed my steps from childhood to the present hour.

The benign faces of the dear ones disappeared, but my old companion stood beside my bed, and, laying his hand upon mine, said, in a voice whose every tone still lingers in my memory:

"You have seen to-night the appeal of suffering spurned by the heartlessness of bloated avarice. You have seen what would be the rank injustice of a world controlled by blind chance, where, if the afflicted child

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were crushed beneath the wheel of the miser, there could be no redress for the one, nor punishment for the other.

You have been assured by visions that those whom you loved above all others on earth, still follow, and are with you, and watch over you when slumber is sweetest. These have not been the visions of a waking sense, but mysterious revelations from your heart, teaching the sublime lesson that the influence which any beloved object once gained over your nature will survive the decease of the object itself; and if you do but cherish it a little, will be as a fragrance shed upon your soul to make it pure forever. Wake on the morrow, and conduct your life as if it had been disclosed to you that they whose good opinion you so respected while they lived, are still near to the dear ones whom they nurtured, and for whose prosperity they were ready even to lay down life. The ancients had their household gods—the work of mortal hands, and only sanctioned by the sincerity of superstition—while you, through the blessing of Heaven, enjoy the omnipresent care of the great Creator, and have, as gods of the household, the memories of departed loved ones, to be reunited with whom should be the

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aim and end of your whole existence. Ponder this well, and feel the solemn truth which it was my mission to disclose, that in the midst of happiest life, and when the thoughts of death are furthest from your heart, there may be, close beside you, eager with care lest you should by some false step be lost from the path that may lead you to their arms, those for whose presence in another world you should pray most fervently to your Maker."

I know not how my mysterious visitor departed, nor where. But he made my Christmas more cheerful than it would have been but for his teachings. I communicate the lesson he imparted to me, with the hope that even with as much pleasure as descends upon one ray of sunshine into the prisoner's cell, it may fall on the heart of those who have recently suffered a domestic affliction. There must be many who at this festive season will be compelled to steal away from the pleasures of general hospitality, and who will spend the hours, that were in happier times devoted to heartfelt pleasure, in the society of the dead and not of the living. To these even my words may be like the rain-drops on the parched earth, and I would say to them that it may, perhaps, occasion

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anguish to those they love and have lost, to see them indulging sorrow that is useless, although grateful, and that they should rather spend in mild pleasure the hours of that holiest season when He came to bless the earth, through whom we are taught that the dead and the living may meet and be happy again.