

Santa Claus
(For the N.Z. Tablet.)

He's had his bath—his prayers are said,
And while I tuck him into bed
He prattles on in rapt delight:
"Dad, Santa Claus will come to-night,
To bring me all the toys I want to buy;
And Dad! I've been a good boy—haven't I?"

And then he talks of ships and trains,
Guns, motor cars and aeroplanes;
And lots of other "bosker" toys
That Father Christmas has for boys.
He rattles down the list without a pause,
And finishes with—"Dad! who's Santa
Claus?"

And there he beats me!—so I say:
"Oh, Santa Claus lives far away,
And travels round this night each year,
With sacks of toys (when they're not dear)."
And then another on to me he pops:
"Say, Dad! how does he climb our chimney
tops?"

Then I invent a scheme or two
To show what Santa Claus can do;
And how the chimneys shift about
To let him in and let him out
When he has filled the stockings on the
line—
"Say, Dad! how does he know which stockin's
mine?"

And so he trips me up again!
Of course, it's easy to explain
That Santa Claus knows everything:
Which boys are good and what to bring;
And that he has a prize above the rest
For that good boy who loves his mother
best.

And triumph gleams in his wide eyes
As he says, "Dad! I'll get that prize,
For I love Mummy best of all!"
(And that makes Dad feel rather small);
Then asks: "What time will Santa Claus be
here?"
And why is Christmas only once a year?"

And then, as simple as I can,
I tell how Santa Claus began;
How long ago, first Christmas morn,
In Bethlehem, a King was born
Who loved the little children so on earth
That Santa Claus comes on His day of
birth.

He listens, quiet and dreamy-eyed,
To my poor tale of Christmastide:
Of how God sent the brightest Star
To guide the wise men from afar;
And he's so silent that I take a peep—
And, sure enough, he's fallen fast asleep!

He'll dream to-night of Christmas joys
Up in the Fairyland of toys.
Maybe he'll hear the Angels sing
Their *Gloria* unto the King;
And when he wakens in the morn he'll find
That Santa Claus has left a sack behind!

—HAROLD GALLAGHER.

Nelson.

Three Christmas Trees

(By JOHN AYSKOUGH, in the *London Month*.)

Christmas Eve, and the night falling. For two days the same sharp wind had blown out of the east across the great central plain of Europe, with a bitter black frost in its mouth. Now the snow was falling, but sparsely, barely sufficient to whiten the house tops: but enough to keep all indoors who had no business to call them out into the long, narrow street—of Mariahilf, a small bleak townlet fifteen miles eastward of P—.

By the fire, in a wooden elbow-chair, sat Friedrich Günther—of a once great name, but of modest condition. His hair was grizzled but not white: a year ago it had been still almost black. The lines in his gray face were deep now, and the once genial mouth was set in what had become a chronic puckering of lips seldom opened without necessity, for sorrow had taken the man sternly, as it takes some gently—breaking down frozen tempers. Perhaps this bowed head had been held over-proudly till the weight of grief struck it down.

An elderly woman, evidently his wife, was pretending to have some occupation at the window, which had a long sill broad enough to support certain dull plants (which looked as if they had never flowered and never intended to flower), but in reality the woman was doing nothing, only peering through the screen of mouldy greenery out into the desolate street. From the window she could see, while the fading dusk lasted, a good way—as far as "Hans Schaun's corner," where Schaun's shop stood, a shop which had no speciality of stock-in-trade, but displayed in its window any articles Schaun could afford to procure and his neighbors could (as he calculated) afford to buy. Half the space in his window was taken up now by tiny fir-trees—for poor as the neighbors were they must even in war-time, have each their Christmas Tree: very small trees with very little on them.

Among the tiny fir-trees were small boxes of colored tapers—short and lean—red, blue, and yellow: and there was one box of tinsel balls, not all gold, but some rose-colored with tinsel stripes or stars, some white, also gold-starred. Also among the little trees there was a little crib, of brightly-painted, embossed cartridge-paper. It could fold up and was esteemed by Frau Schaun a miracle of art. She liked it none the less that the Blessed Virgin, St. Joseph, and the shepherds were clearly Germans—one of the shepherds remarkably like Anton Hess the wheelwright round the corner. Frau Günther up the street had been Maria Hess, and was Anton's sister, but older than him, and since her marriage—twenty years ago—much better off than any of the Hesses.

"Is there," Friedrich called out from his place by the hearth, "any sense in making thyself cold there? Do we have a fire to warm the chimney?"

His wife sighed meekly.

"Thou knowest why I look out by the window," she said. "When he went away

I promised to look out every evening at night-falling—let me set a candle in the window. We can afford it, especially just to-night; Christabend."

"What is the use of putting it? What is the use of looking out?"

Her husband objected. It had come to that with him that he asked concerning everything "What is the use of it?"

He let her alone and went on with his dreary musing. The fire at least was not dreary, it could warm his feet, if it could not keep his heart from freezing.

"Fritz," Maria said with a timid hardness over her shoulder, "when the other children came, long ago, after our Fritzchen, you did not welcome them. You were afraid they were going to be too many and would prevent you getting rich as soon as you wished."

Her husband frowned but let her go on, pretending not to listen at all. He bent forward and stirred the logs so that they made a brighter blaze, till all the homely room was filled with light: Maria saw how the bright light shone upon the long window and thought "it will do instead of the candle."

"You grumbled as they came," she went on, braving the frowning face that cast a huge shadow on the white wall; "you thought of nothing but the spending they would cost. And even when they died you did not care much. You only thought 'there will be more for Fritzchen.' You only cared for him, because he was the eldest—as if you were a Count of the Holy Empire all taken up with your heir, who was to carry on your fine name—a corn-factor's heir."

At last Friedrich interrupted harshly.

"My heir though: heir of the last of our branch of the Günthers—and, but you know nothing of what it is to hold a great name. It is no use expecting you to understand. How should Johann Hess's daughter understand!"

"Johann Hess loved all his children: not the eldest only. There were twelve of us. And he was poor, but he never thought one of them was one too many. He found bread for all and never cared if the eldest should be poorer because there were eleven brothers and sisters to love him."

The poor man groaned.

"And you think I didn't love my lad—my first-born, the only one left to me!"

It was a very bitter cry of protest and it dried up the reproaches his wife—with a pent-up silence of many years burst and broken at last—had been raining on him.

"Ah, dear God!" she cried weeping, "but you loved him: he had it all, all the love that should have been divided among all. And yet—yet you grudge a candle for him, and ask 'What use?'"

"Well, what use is it? Can a candle in the window give welcome to one who can never come home? Can he see it from his grave, if he has any grave? It only makes it worse—pretending to have hope when