Shepherd Knapp

Up the Chimney

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BY

SHEPHERD KNAPP

Preface

This play is intended, not only for acting, but also for reading. It is so arranged that boys and girls can read it to themselves, just as they would read any other story. Even the stage directions and the descriptions of scenery are presented as a part of the narrative. At the same time, by the use of different styles of type, the speeches of the characters are clearly distinguished from the rest of the text, an arrangement which will be found convenient when parts are being memorized for acting.

The play has been acted more than once, and by different groups of people; sometimes on a stage equipped with footlights, curtain, and scenery; sometimes with barely any of these aids. Practical suggestions as to costumes, scenery, and some simple scenic effects will be found at the end of the play.

What sort of a Christmas play do the boys and girls like, and in what sort do we like to see them take part? It should be a play, surely, in which the dialogue is simple and natural, not stilted and artificial; one that seems like a bit of real life, and yet has plenty of fancy and imagination in it; one that suggests and helps to perpetuate some of the happy and wholesome customs of Christmas; above all, one that is pervaded by the Christmas spirit. I hope that this play does not entirely fail to meet these requirements.

Worcester, Mass.

SHEPHERD KNAPP.

The Introduction

Before the curtain opens, MOTHER GOOSE *comes out, and this is what she says*:

Good evening, dear children. I see you are all expecting me to show you a Christmas Play. Well, I have one ready, sure enough. And now let me see, what shall I tell you about it? For one thing it will take place on Christmas Eve, and then it will be all about Christmas, of course. The first scene will be in the house, where a little girl and a little boy live, with their father, who is a doctor, and their mother. It is evening and the weather is very cold outside. The little girl and boy are writing letters--can you guess to whom they are writing?--and the mother is knitting, and the father is reading

his newspaper; as you will see in a moment for yourselves. So be very quiet, for now it is going to begin.

Up The Chimney

The First Scene

The curtain opens, and you see a room in a house and four people, just as Mother Goose promised. On one side is a fire-place, and notice the stockings hanging by it. At the back is a window, looking out into the street, but you cannot see anything there, because it is dark out of doors. The little girl's name is Polly, but the first one to speak is her brother, named JACK, *who looks up from his letter and says*:

Mother, how do you spell "friend"?

MOTHER *answers*: F, r, i, e, n, d. Have you nearly finished your letter, Jack?

Yes, *says* JACK, *still writing. Then he stops, straightens up and says*, There! It's all done. Shall I read it to you, Mother?

Do, MOTHER *answers. And Father puts down his newspaper to listen, and Polly stops writing. Mother goes on knitting, because she can knit and listen at the same time.*

So JACK *reads*: "Dear Santa Claus, I have been very good this year--most of the time; and I wish you would bring me a toy soldier. I am very well and I hope you are. Your loving little friend, Jack." Is that all right, Mother?

It is a very good letter, *says* MOTHER; only I thought you were going to speak about that pair of warm gloves for Father.

Oh, I forget that, *says* JACK, *looking a little bit ashamed*. I'll put it in a postscript. *So he goes on writing, and so does Polly*. JACK *says his words aloud while he writes them*: "P.S.--Fa--ather--would--like--a--pair--of--warm--gloves."

MOTHER *looks over at Polly, who seems to have finished, and says*: Polly, let us hear your letter.

So POLLY *reads*: "Dear Santa Claus, I am so glad that tomorrow is Christmas. We have all hung up our stockings, and I think I would like best to have a doll in short dresses. I love you very much. Your little friend, Polly. P.S.--I think Mother would like a ball of white knitting cotton." I had to put that in a postscript, Mother, because I forgot, too.

And now FATHER, *who has been listening all this time, says*: Where will you put the letters?--on the mantel-piece or in the stockings?

Oh, on the mantel-piece, *answers* JACK. We always put them on the mantel-piece. Don't you remember that, Father?

Yes, I believe I do, now that you speak of it, *says* FATHER.

Then the children put the two letters on the mantel-piece, standing them against the clock, so that they can be easily seen. While they are doing this, some one passes the window, walking along the street, and there comes a knock at the door.

Come in, *says* FATHER; *and in comes a little woman, rather old, and rather bent, and rather lame.*

Why, if it isn't little Nurse Mary, *cries* FATHER, *and they all rise up to greet her. She kisses both the children, and shakes hands with Father and Mother.*

Here's a chair for you, Nurse Mary, *says* JACK.

Let me take your cloak and hood, Nurse Mary, *says* POLLY.

When they were all seated again, FATHER *says*, I am afraid I shall have to give you a little scolding, Mary, for coming out on such a cold night. It really don't do, you know.

Now, Doctor John, NURSE MARY *answers*, What do you expect? Haven't I seen you every Christmas Eve since you were half the size of Master Jack here, and didn't I knit with my own hands the first little stocking you ever hung up for Santa Claus, and don't I remember how frightened you were that time when we heard the reindeers on the roof, and

when the handful of walnuts came tumbling down the chimney? And do you expect me to stay away on Christmas Eve, like some lonely old woman, who never was nurse to any children at all, let alone two generations of them? What are you thinking of, Doctor John?

I am thinking, *says* FATHER *smiling*, that if you hadn't come, we should have missed you dreadfully. But tell me, Nurse Mary, how are you feeling?

Well, *answers* NURSE MARY, to speak the truth, Doctor John, I think you must give me some medicine.

Medicine? *cries* MOTHER.

Are you sick, Nurse Mary? *asks* POLLY.

Yes, Miss Polly, sick, and very sick, too, NURSE MARY *answers*.

But how? *asks* FATHER. What's wrong? Where is the trouble?

First of all, in my back, Doctor John, *says* NURSE MARY. Today, after sweeping and scrubbing a little, and baking a Christmas cake, I just ironed out a few pieces, my best cap and apron, and the likes of that, and before I had finished, I give you word my back began to ache. Now what do you make of it? And then, my joints--stiff! Yes, Dr. John, stiff! How am I to do my work with stiff joints, I'd like to know?

I see, *says* FATHER, *shaking his head*. This is a serious matter. But cheer up, Nurse Mary; I believe I have the very thing that will help you. *He opens his medicine case, which stands on the table, and takes out a little bottle.* Here it is, *he says*, and let me tell you how to take it; for with this medicine that is the most important part. You must find some children to give it to you. If you take it from grown-up people, it will do you no good at all, so you must find a child somewhere, or two would be better, one to pour it out and one to hold the spoon--

Oh, let me pour it out, *cries* JACK.

And let me hold the spoon, *cries* POLLY.

Why, that will do finely, *says* FATHER, *and hands Jack the bottle.* And now I must go out, *he continues*; for old Mrs. Cavendish is sick and has sent for me. It may be quite late, when I come home. *He begins to put on his overcoat.*

And I, *says* MOTHER, have some Christmas bundles to tie up. If Nurse Mary goes before I come back, will you both go quietly to bed like good children?

Yes, Mother, *cry* POLLY *and* JACK *together.*

Well, good night, then, Mary dear, *says* MOTHER.

Good night, Nurse Mary, *says* FATHER. *Then Mother and Father both go out, the one to her own room and the other to the street.*

Come, Nurse Mary, *says* JACK, you must take your medicine.

Do you suppose it is very bitter? *asks* NURSE MARY.

I think it is, *says* JACK, *looking into the bottle and smelling it*. It looks bitter and it smells bitter.

But you mustn't mind that, Nurse Mary, *says* POLLY; because it will make you well.

All right, *says* NURSE MARY. Pour it out.

Then Polly holds the spoon, and Jack carefully pours the medicine into it. Nurse Mary opens her mouth, swallows the dose, and makes a wry face, shuddering.

Was it horrid? *asks* JACK.

Horrid! *answers* NURSE MARY.

Do you feel better? *asks* POLLY.

I can't tell yet, *answers* NURSE MARY. I suppose I must wait a little for the medicine to work.

And while we are waiting, *says* JACK, tell us about when Father was a little boy.

So Nurse Mary sits down, and takes Polly on her lap, while Jack sits on a stool at her feet, and then NURSE MARY

begins, When Dr. John was a very little boy--

But, Nurse Mary, JACK *says, interrupting*, he wasn't named "Dr. John" then, was he?

No, *answers* NURSE MARY, he was just "Master John" then. Well, when he was a very little boy, so that I could carry him upstairs to bed without any trouble at all, he was the most beautiful boy you ever saw. He had fat rosy cheeks, and fine big eyes, and stout little legs.

Was he big enough to walk, when you first took care of him? *asks* POLLY.

No, indeed, *answers* NURSE MARY; and the first time he ever went to a Christmas tree, I had to carry him. I held him up to see the candles.

Did he like it? *asks* JACK.

I think that he was just a wee bit frightened, *says* NURSE MARY, but I'll tell you what he did like. You know the little figures of Mary and Joseph and the Christ Child in the manger, that you always set out on Christmas Day, with the cows and the sheep standing all about? *The children both nod*. Well, when your father saw that, and heard your grandparents and all the older brothers and sisters singing "The Carol of the Friendly Beasts"--just as you will sing it again tomorrow--he held out his hands and danced up and down in my arms. I tell you, I could hardly hold him.

Nurse Mary, *says* POLLY, won't you sing us "The Carol of the Friendly Beasts" now?

In my old cracked voice? *says* NURSE MARY. Well, if you will both help me, I'll try.

So the three of them together sing:

THE CAROL OF THE FRIENDLY BEASTS[1]

Jesus our brother, strong and good,
Was humbly born in a stable rude,
And the friendly beasts around him stood.

I, said the cow, all white and red,
I gave him my manger for his bed,
I gave him my hay to pillow his head.

I, said the camel, yellow and black,
Over the desert, upon my back,
I brought him a gift in the wise man's pack.

I, said the donkey, shaggy and brown,
I carried his mother uphill and down,
I carried her safely to Bethlehem town.

I, said the sheep, with the curly horn,
I gave him my wool for his blanket warm,
He wore my coat on Christmas morn.

I, said the dove, from my rafter high,
Cooed him to sleep that he should not cry,
We cooed him to sleep my mate and I.

And every beast, by some good spell
In the stable dark, was glad to tell
Of the gift he gave Immanuel.

When the carol is finished, NURSE MARY *looks at the clock, and says*, My dears, it is time we were all in bed, or Santa Claus when he comes, will find us awake, and that would never do. So I must be going home.

But how do you feel? *asks* POLLY. Has the medicine done your back good?

My back? *says* NURSE MARY. Why, I had forgotten all about my back--not an ache in it.

And your joints? *asks* JACK.

I wouldn't know I had any joints, *answers* NURSE MARY. I declare, I believe I could dance the Highland Fling. But where is my cloak?

Then Polly gets the cloak and hood, and helps her put them on, and as Nurse Mary goes out at the door,

Good-night, Nurse Mary, *cry* JACK *and* POLLY.

Good-night, my dears, NURSE MARY *answers. And the door closes behind her.*

Now while the children had their backs turned, a funny thing happened, for out of the fire-place there stepped, without making a sound, a little man dressed all in green. Jack and Polly, when they turn about, see him standing there.

Why, who are you? *asks* JACK, *standing still, but very bravely keeping in front of Polly.*

The little green man says never a word, but after waiting a moment with his finger on his lips, he beckons to them to come forward, and slowly, for they are a little frightened, they obey him. When they are quite close, he looks cautiously around, and then draws a large white letter out of his pocket, and hands it to Jack. Jack looks at it, and shows it to Polly. Then he looks at the little green man, who nods his head with a funny little jerk.

Shall I open it? *asks* JACK. *And the little green man nods again. So Jack opens it.*

Shall I read it? *asks* JACK. *And the little green man nods again. So Jacks begins to read:* "My dear Children all over the world, I, who write you this letter, am your old friend Santa Claus, and how shall I tell you the sad news, for tonight is the night when I ought to get into my reindeer sleigh and go about filling your precious stockings with Christmas gifts, and I cannot do it because I am sick. My back aches like a tooth ache, and every joint in my whole body is so stiff that I can hardly move. Old Father Time, who pretends to be something of a doctor, says the trouble is that I am growing old--the idea of it! I sent him packing about his business, I can tell you. But all the same I do feel mighty queer, and that's a fact. And the worst of it is that this is Christmas Eve, and here I am shut up indoors in my house at the North Pole, and every stocking in the world is hanging empty. I cannot bear to have Christmas come and go without any word at all from me, so I have gotten my good little friends the gnomes and fairies and elves to help me out. They had some old fairy toys, that are almost as good as new, and these they are going to carry about to all the children; and although these gifts are rather different from what you usually receive from me, I hope they will at least keep you from forgetting poor old Santa Claus."

Jack and Polly look sadly at one another, and then at the little green man. He reaches out his hand, takes the letter, folds it up, replaces it in the envelope, and tucks it away in his pocket. Then he brings out two little packages, all in green paper, tied with green string, and gives one to Polly and one to Jack. Then, quick as a flash, he has disappeared in the fire-place.

Where did he go to? *asks* POLLY, *after a moment of surprise.*

Up the chimney, *says* JACK.

But what has he given to us? *says* POLLY, *looking at the little green package in her hand.*

Let's open them, *says* JACK.

So the two children untie the strings, and open the papers, and soon hold up the things they have found inside. Jack has a pair of spectacles with large round glasses and black rims. Polly has a curious little brown cap. They look at them in perplexity.

Oh, there is some writing fastened to mine, *says* POLLY.

And to mine, too, *adds* JACK.

POLLY *reads:*

"A fairy wishing-cap am I;
So put me on, and away you fly.
Wherever you wish, 'tis there you'll be,
And quicker than saying three-times-three."

Polly puts the cap on her head. Then JACK *reads*:

"Fairy spectacles are we;
Put us on, and you shall see
Things you never saw before,
Easy as saying four-times-four."

Jack puts the spectacles on his nose, and begins to go about the room looking at everything through them.

Oh, Polly, *he exclaims*, I can see all sorts of queer things. I can see what is in the table drawer without opening it, and I can see the pictures in the books right through the covers. And oh, Polly, look here. *He is looking into the fire-place, when he says this*. I can see now how the little green man went up the chimney, for there are steps in the side, all the way up. Look at them.

POLLY *looks. Then she says*, I don't see any steps, Jack.

It's the fairy spectacles, Polly, *cries* JACK. Isn't it wonderful?

Jack! *says* POLLY *suddenly*, do you know what we must do? We must go to Santa Claus, and carry him the medicine that cured Nurse Mary's back and joints. You will go first up the chimney, and I will go after, stepping just where I see you step, and then at the top I will take tight hold of your hand, and with my wishing cap on I will wish to be at Santa Claus' house at the North Pole.

Splendid! Let's start this minute, *cries* JACK.

Polly takes the spoon, and Jack takes the medicine bottle, and one after the other they go up the chimney.

A moment later MOTHER *comes in*. Children, *she begins, looking about; but then she continues*, Oh, I see: they have gone to bed. *She goes across to the other door and listens. Then she says*: Not a sound! They are fast asleep already.

So she takes the lamp from the table, and carries it out with her, leaving the room all in black darkness.

And that is the end of the First Scene.

Interlude

While the curtain is closed, MOTHER GOOSE *comes out, and this is what she says:*

Children, did you see Jack and Polly go up that chimney? Well, as soon as they got to the top, Polly took fast hold of Jack's hand and wished to be at the North Pole, and away they went flying through the air. They have gotten there already, I think. Hark! Yes, they are just going in at the gate that leads up to Santa Claus's house, and soon they will be knocking at his door. Then you will see them come in, for you will be there before they are; and when the curtain opens, as it will in just a moment, you will see the inside of the house where Santa Claus lives. You must be very quiet for Santa Claus is sick, remember, and a noise might make his head ache. Hush! It is going to begin.

The Second Scene

When the Curtain opens, you again see a room, but quite different from the first one. There is a door on one side, and at the back is a sort of tall box with closed doors in the front of it, a kind of cupboard. On shelves at the sides of the room are some toys and packages, and a bag, nearly full, leans against the wall. There are two people in the room. One of them, of course, is Santa Claus, but oh, how sick he looks. The other person is a woman, you will see, and she must be Mrs. Santa Claus. There are two other figures that look a good deal like people, but they are only big toys that Santa Claus and his wife have been making, a soldier on one side, and a doll on the other.

SANTA CLAUS, *who is sitting, wrapped up in a great blanket wrapper, and is leaning his head on his hand, while*

he holds a cane in the other is saying, What is the use of working any longer, for if I can't carry the presents to the children, what is the good of finishing them?

But you might feel better at the last moment, *says* MRS. SANTA CLAUS, *who is tieing a sash on the big doll that stands beside her.*

That's true, *says* SANTA CLAUS. Well, I believe I'll finish this soldier, then. He's the last one I need to make, and he's all done except to have his cheeks painted. I'll get my paint out and finish him.

So Santa Claus rises up very stiffly and painfully, and hobbles across the room to get his paint and paintbrush. Then he sits down again in front of the big toy soldier, and paints both its cheeks a fine bright red. Just as he is finishing, there comes a knock at the door.

Come in, *says* MRS. SANTA CLAUS. *And in walk Jack and Polly, hand in hand, wearing the fairy spectacles and the wishing cap, one holding the bottle and the other the spoon.*

Donner and Blitzen! *exclaims* SANTA CLAUS, *laying down his brush,* if it isn't Polly and Jack!

Oh, Santa, *cries* POLLY, we got your letter and the wishing-cap--

And the fairy spectacles, says JACK.

And we've brought you some of father's medicine, *continues* POLLY, because it made Nurse Mary quite well--her back, you know.

And her joints, *adds* JACK.

And you have to take it from children, POLLY *goes on*. One of them holds the spoon--*Here* POLLY *holds out the spoon.*

And the other pours out the medicine, *says* JACK, *and with that he pours it out.* It's very bitter, *he adds, as Polly holds it out for Santa Claus to take.*

Then Santa Claus opens his mouth, and swallows the dose, with a wry face and a shudder.

Is it horrid? *asks* POLLY.

Horrid! *says* SANTA CLAUS.

But it will make you well, you know, *says* POLLY *encouragingly.* Only you have to wait a little for the medicine to work.

And you came all the way to the North Pole, to bring me this medicine? *says* SANTA CLAUS, *looking from Polly to Jack and back to Polly again*. How did you get here?

First, we went up the chimney, *says* JACK, I saw the steps with the fairy spectacles, you know.

And then, *says* POLLY, I held fast hold of his hand, and wished. I had the wishing-cap, you see.

But weren't you afraid? *asks* SANTA CLAUS. When you climbed up the black chimney, and when you stood on the top, in the black night under the stars, and when you came flying through the air, weren't you frightened?

Well, it wasn't much fun, *says* POLLY, but we didn't know how else to get here.

And we knew you were sick, *says* JACK.

But, *asks* SANTA CLAUS, what difference did it make to you children whether an old man like me was sick or not?

Why, Santa Claus, *answers* POLLY, we all just love you, you know.

Well, well, *says* SANTA CLAUS. *Then he lays down his cane on the floor, and stretches himself, and stands up, and walks across the room without hobbling at all.*

How do you feel now? *asks* JACK.

Feel? *answers* SANTA CLAUS, *moving more and more briskly*. I feel as young as a snow flake; I feel as strong as a northeast blizzard. Quick, Mrs. Santa Claus, bring me my fur cap and gloves. There's time yet to fill the children's stockings.

While Mrs. Santa Claus is out of the room, JACK *says*: Santa, I didn't even know there was a Mrs. Santa Claus.

Have you ever been very sick? *asks* SANTA CLAUS.

We've had chicken pox, *answers* JACK.

Oh, that doesn't count, *says* SANTA CLAUS, but some times, when children are very sick indeed--or, for days and days--and when they are very good and patient, and take their medicine, and never kick the bed clothes off, then Mrs. Santa Claus comes in the night, and brings them a present, and when they wake up, they find it beside the bed.

Oh, *says* POLLY, I think she must be almost as good as you, Santa Claus.

And besides that, *says* SANTA CLAUS, who do you suppose dresses all the dolls that I put into the stockings? She does, of course. Look here at this fine one that she has just finished. To be sure, I make the doll part myself, and this one here is a very fine one, if I do say it: it can talk. Would you like to hear it, Polly? Just pull that string there.

Polly pulls the string and the DOLL, *in a very squeaky voice, says*, Ma-ma.

And, by the way, SANTA CLAUS *goes on*, I must put this doll and that soldier into the shrinking-machine.

Why, what is that, Santa Claus? *asks* JACK.

The shrinking-machine? *says* SANTA CLAUS. That is it, over there. *He points to the tall cupboardy thing at the back. Then he goes on*. You see it's easier to make toys big, but I couldn't carry them that way, for the sleigh wouldn't hold them, and besides they wouldn't go into the stockings. So after they are made, I put them into the machine, and shrink them. Open the doors, Polly, and we will shrink these two.

So Polly opens the doors, and at a signal from Santa Claus the doll and the soldier walk in; but they move in a funny stiff way, because they haven't any joints at their knees or elbows.

Then SANTA CLAUS *shuts the doors*. Jack, *say he,* you may turn the crank, if you want. *So Jack turns the crank*.

After a little SANTA CLAUS *says*: Stop! *Then he opens the door and out walk, in the same funny stiff way, the doll and the soldier, only now they are about half as big as they were before. They walk down to the front.* SANTA CLAUS *looks at them, shakes his head, and says,* No, you must be much smaller than that. Go back into the machine.

So back the doll and soldier go; and Jack again turns the crank and this time, when SANTA CLAUS *cries,* Stop, *and the doors are opened, the toys have grown very small indeed, as you can see, when Santa Claus holds them up. He puts the soldier into a box, and then puts the box and the doll into his bag.*

And now Mrs. Santa Claus comes in with the cap and gloves; and Santa Claus puts them on. At the same time sleighbells are heard outside, and a stamping of hoofs.

We're off! *cries* SANTA CLAUS, *taking up his pack*. Come, Polly! Come, Jack! I'll stow you away as warm as toast down under the buffalo robe.

Good-bye, *cries* MRS. SANTA CLAUS as *they go out at the door.*

Good-bye, good-bye, *they* ALL *call back*.

Then there is more stamping of hoofs outside, and a great jingling of sleighbells, which grow fainter and fainter, as they drive away.

And that is the end of the Second Scene.

Interlude

Again while the curtain is closed MOTHER GOOSE *comes out, and this is what she says:*

My dears, we must hurry back to the house where Jack and Polly live, for Santa Claus's sleigh is going so fast through the sky, that it will be there before us, unless we are quick about it. It is still dark night there, and nothing has happened since we were there before, except that Dr. John has come home from seeing sick old Mrs. Cavendish, and he

has let himself in with his key, and has felt his way in the dark to his own door, and has gone to bed. He and Mother are both fast asleep, and they haven't an idea but that Jack and Polly are fast asleep in their beds too. But you and I know that they are in the reindeer sleigh with Santa Claus. And all the time they are coming nearer and nearer. Listen for the sleighbells, for now it is going to begin.

The Third Scene

When the curtain opens you can see nothing at all at first, for the room is all dark, just as Mother left it, you remember, when she went out and took the light with her. But after a moment you can hear something--the sleighbells far away. Nearer and nearer they come; then there is a stamping sound on the roof; then a sort of scrambling sound in the place where you know the chimney is; and then Santa Claus, who by this time is crouching down in the fire-place, turns the light of his lantern into the room. He steps out carrying his pack, and then down the chimney come Jack and Polly.

Hush! *says* SANTA CLAUS, *with his finger at his lips.* Off to bed with you both! And don't you dare to open your eyes until the day-light comes. It won't be long.

On tiptoes Polly and Jack go out at the door. Then Santa Claus turns to his work. First he reads Polly's letter by the light of his lantern, and fills Polly's stocking and Mother's; then he reads Jack's letter and fills Jack's stocking and Father's; then he puts out the light so that the room is all dark again. You hear him climbing up the chimney, then there is a jingling of sleighbells on the roof, which grows fainter and fainter, and then all is still once more.

After a little while you notice that you can see faintly through the window at the back, because it is beginning to be daylight. Very, very slowly it grows brighter. Then the door, that Jack and Polly went out by, opens, and in come the two children in their wrappers.

Is it daylight now? *asks* JACK, *but he is looking toward the fire-place instead of toward the window.*

Yes, I think it is, *says* POLLY, *and she is looking in the same direction.*

Then they go on tiptoe to the door of the other room, where Father and Mother sleep; they open the door and shout:

Merry Christmas! Merry Christmas!

Two rather sleepy voices, from MOTHER *first and then from* FATHER, *answer:* Merry Christmas. Merry Christmas. *And* MOTHER *continues,* All right, children; we'll be there in a moment, as soon as we have put our wrappers on.

The children go over to the fire-place, and feel the lumpy stockings; and then in come Father and Mother in wrappers and nightcaps.

Oh, *says* FATHER, old Santa Claus hasn't forgotten us, has he? And candy canes are still in fashion, I see; I'm glad of that. Bring Mother her stocking, Polly; and Jack, get mine for me. We'll sit down and take our time about it.

No fair, Jack, *cries* POLLY. You're peeking into your stocking. I've only felt of mine.

But my thing is in a box, *says* JACK, so that I can't see anything anyway. Oh, let's begin quick.

All right, *says* FATHER, and ladies first. Mother, you lead off.

Shall I? *says* MOTHER, *feeling her stocking*. Oh, I know what this round thing is: it's an orange. No, it isn't either: it's a ball of knitting cotton. Just what I want, and the very kind I use. Now, Polly, it's your turn to see what is in the top of yours.

I'm sure I know what mine is, *says* POLLY, *and then as she draws it out.* Yes, it is: it's a doll.

Why, Polly, *cries* JACK, it's the very same doll that we--

Hush! *says* POLLY *quickly*. Yes, it's the very same kind of a doll I asked for. See, Mother, she has a pink sash. Isn't she lovely?

Now, Jack, *says* FATHER, I think it is your turn next. What is in that box of yours? Slate pencils, probably.

Slate pencils! *says* JACK, *indignantly*. You know I didn't want slate pencils.

But are you sure you will get just what you want? *asks* FATHER.

Yes, indeed I am, *answers* JACK, *pulling out the box and opening it*, and there it is--a soldier. I knew it would be that, because I saw it when--

Hush! *says* POLLY *quickly*. Father, it is now your turn at last.

And I know all about mine, *says* FATHER. It is soft and squashy, so of course it's a sponge. Now why do you suppose Santa Claus brought me a sponge? for my old one is quite good enough.

But it isn't a sponge at all, *cries* JACK, *who has been peeking into the little bundle*.

Not a sponge? *says* FATHER. But what is it, then? *He opens the paper*. A pair of warm gloves, I declare--just what I need. Well, Santa Claus is a great old fellow, and no mistake.

Mother has been turning her head toward the window, as though she were listening to something, and now she says:

Hush! Is that singing that I hear, far away?

They all listen, and sure enough from some distance can be heard the sound of singing voices. The children, nodding their heads, show that they hear it.

What can it be? *says* MOTHER. Why, I know; it's the Christmas Waits, of course, singing carols from house to house.

Oh, I wish they would sing in our street, *cries* POLLY, *and runs to the window. Then she exclaims,* There they are: they are coming around the corner.

The others all go toward the window, and JACK *says delightedly.* One of them has a fiddle. Oh, I do hope they will stop here.

Then outside the window the Christmas Waits can be seen, all in warm caps and mittens and mufflers. They stop just in front of the window, hold up their music before them, and begin to sing the dear old carol, called:

THE CAROL OF CHRISTMAS MORNING

God rest you merry, gentlemen,
Let nothing you dismay.
Remember Christ our Saviour
Was born on Christmas Day.

When the carol is finished, POLLY *and* JACK *and* MOTHER *and* FATHER *wave to the Waits, and cry,* Merry Christmas! Merry Christmas!

And the WAITS *wave back and cry*: Merry Christmas! Merry Christmas! Merry Christmas!

And this is the end of the Play.

Characters and Costumes

MOTHER GOOSE--The conventional costume; full skirt, peaked hat, cane, spectacles, mits. It is effective for her to draw her lips tight over her teeth so that her speech is that of a toothless old woman.

POLLY--A little girl, and; JACK--a little boy--first in ordinary indoor clothes; afterwards in wrappers.

DOCTOR JOHN--Their father; indoor clothes; also overcoat and hat; medicine case; afterwards in a dressing gown.

MOTHER--Doctor John's wife; indoor clothes; afterwards in kimono or wrapper.

NURSE MARY--A little old woman; first dressed for outdoors, in cloak and hood; simple dark dress underneath.

AN ELF--Acted by a very little boy, dressed all in green; he does not speak.

SANTA CLAUS--At first in heavy wrapper, preferably white; underneath this his conventional costume; later he puts on fur cap and gloves.

MRS. SANTA CLAUS--Indoor clothes of red and white, corresponding to the conventional costume of Santa Claus.

DOLL--Acted by two girls, one much smaller than the other, but both exactly alike as to dress, stockings, sash, hair ribbons, and color and arrangement of hair.

SOLDIER--Acted by two boys, one much smaller than the other, but corresponding as closely as possible in uniform and appearance, except that the small one has bright red cheeks from the beginning.

CHRISTMAS WAITS--Boys in outdoor clothes; warm caps, mufflers, gloves or mittens; one carries and plays a violin; others hold copies of the carols.

Scenery and Scenic Effects

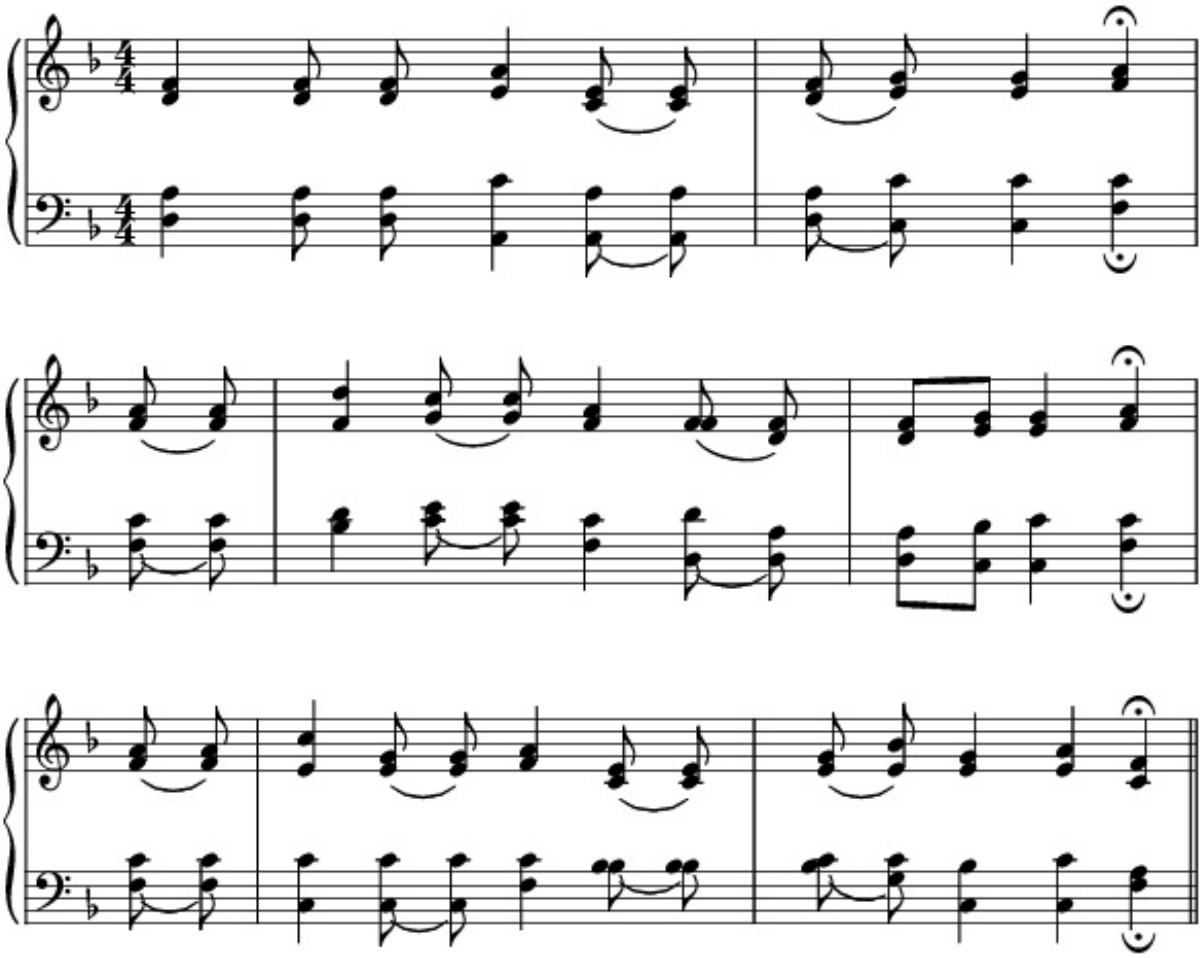
SCENES I AND III.

The stage should contain a table, a little at one side, opposite the fire-place, and five chairs, one for each of the family, and the fifth for Nurse Mary when she arrives. On the table a lighted lamp. For safety, it may be lighted by an ever-ready electric torch. The lighting of the stage must, of course, be otherwise provided for.

There should be two doors on opposite sides of the stage, and a practicable window at the back, through which in the last scene a view of houses or landscape is visible, and the Waits at the close.

As the fire-place is at the side, it is easy to arrange steps by which the elf and the children appear to climb up and down the chimney. A box or small step ladder, just out of sight on the side toward the front, will serve the purpose.

The Carol of the Friendly Beasts may be sung to the following tune:



There is also another tune composed by Clarence Dickinson. A different carol may, of course, be substituted, if desired.

SCENE II.

The Shrinking Machine stands at the back of the stage, and must be accessible from behind, for the changing of the doll and the soldier. There should be doors in front which can be opened wide. At one side should be the crank. For this an ice cream freezer will serve, well secured in place, only the handle showing through the cambric side wall of the Machine. The sound is effective, even though the children in the audience will announce its identity at once.

For painting the soldier's cheeks, cranberry juice is both brilliant and harmless.

If gifts or candies are to be distributed, Mother Goose may enter again immediately after the final curtain, and say something like this:

Well, my dear children, it is all over, and I hope it has pleased you. I heard you laugh once or twice, and that makes me think that you must have liked it. But there is one more thing to tell you, and this you are sure to like very much indeed. You will remember that they had only looked at the first things, in the very top of their stockings. Well, after the curtain closed, they had time to look at what was left. And what do you suppose Father found in the bottom of his stocking, down in the very toe of it? A little note from Santa Claus, telling him that if he would look into the fire-place he would find there some boxes of candy, one for every child in this audience: And sure enough, there they were: and if you will sit very still, the curtain will open again, and they will be brought out and given to you. And so, my dears, as I bid you Good-night, I wish you all (or, I hope you have had) a very Merry Christmas and (wish you) a Happy New Year.

1 (return)
By Robert Davis.