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ONE SHILLING.

THE PEACE EGG



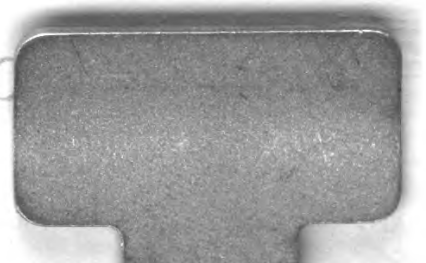
BY
Juliana Horatia Ewing

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Gordon Browne

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THE PEACE EGG
AND
A CHRISTMAS MUMMING PLAY.



“ He gave her her choice between the Captain and his own favour and money.
She chose the Captain.”— PAGE 7.

Frontispiece.

THE PEACE EGG

AND

A Christmas Mumming Play

BY

JULIANA HORATIA EWING

AUTHOR OF "JACKANAPES," ETC., ETC., ETC.

WITH ILLUSTRATIONS BY GORDON BROWNE

ENGRAVED AND PRINTED BY EDMUND EVANS.



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THE PEACE EGG.

A CHRISTMAS TALE.



VERY one ought to be happy at Christmas. But there are many things which ought to be, and yet are not; and people are sometimes sad even in the Christmas holidays.

The Captain and his wife were sad, though it was Christmas Eve. Sad, though they were in the prime of life, blessed with good health, devoted to each other and to their children, with competent means, a comfortable house on a little freehold property of their own, and, one might say, everything that heart could desire. Sad, though they were good people, whose peace of mind had a firmer foundation than their earthly goods alone; contented people, too, with plenty of occupation for mind and body. Sad—and in the nursery this was held to be past all reason—though the children were performing that ancient and most entertaining Play or Christmas Mystery of Good St. George of England, known as *The Peace Egg*, for their benefit and behoof alone.

The play was none the worse that most of the actors were too young to learn parts, so that there was very little of the rather tedious dialogue, only plenty of dress and ribbons, and of fighting with the wooden swords. But though St. George looked bonny enough to warm any

father's heart, as he marched up and down with an air learned by watching many a parade in barrack-square and drill-ground, and though the Valiant Slasher did not cry in spite of falling hard and the Doctor treading accidentally on his little finger in picking him up, still the Captain and his wife sighed nearly as often as they smiled, and the mother dropped tears as well as pennies into the cap which the King of Egypt brought round after the performance.

THE CAPTAIN'S WIFE.



ANY many years back the Captain's wife had been a child herself, and had laughed to see the village mummers act the Peace Egg, and had been quite happy on Christmas Eve. Happy, though she had no mother. Happy, though her father was a stern man, very fond of his only child, but with an obstinate will that not even she dared thwart. She had lived to thwart it, and he had never forgiven

her. It was when she married the Captain. The old man had

a prejudice against soldiers, which was quite reason enough, in his opinion, for his daughter to sacrifice the happiness of her future life by giving up the soldier she loved. At last he gave her her choice between the Captain and his own favour and money. She chose the Captain, and was disowned and disinherited.

The Captain bore a high character, and was a good and clever officer, but that went for nothing against the old man's whim. He made a very good husband too; but even this did not move his father-in-law, who had never held any intercourse with him or his wife since the day of their marriage, and who had never seen his own grandchildren. Though not so bitterly prejudiced as the old father, the Captain's wife's friends had their doubts about the marriage. The place was not a military station, and they were quiet country folk who knew very little about soldiers, whilst what they imagined was not altogether favourable to "red-coats," as they called them. Soldiers are well-looking generally, it is true (and the Captain was more than well-looking—he was handsome); brave, of course, it is their business (and the Captain had V.C. after his name and several bits of ribbon on his patrol jacket). But then, thought the good people, they are here to-day and gone to-morrow, you "never know where you have them;" they are probably in debt, possibly married to several women in several foreign countries, and, though they are very courteous in society, who knows how they treat their wives when they drag them off from their natural friends and protectors to distant lands where no one can call them to account?

"Ah, poor thing!" said Mrs. John Bull, junior, as she took off her husband's coat on his return from business, a week after the Captain's wedding, "I wonder how she feels? There's no doubt the old man behaved disgracefully; but it's a great risk marrying a soldier. It stands to reason,

military men aren't domestic ; and I wish—Lucy Jane, fetch your papa's slippers, quick!—she'd had the sense to settle down comfortably amongst her friends with a man who would have taken care of her."

"Officers are a wild set, I expect," said Mr. Bull, complacently, as he stretched his limbs in his own particular armchair, into which no member of his family ever intruded. "But the red-coats carry the day with plenty of girls who ought to know better. You women are always caught by a bit of finery. However, there's no use our bothering *our* heads about it. As she has brewed she must bake."

The Captain's wife's baking was lighter and more palatable than her friends believed. The Captain (who took off his own coat when he came home, and never wore slippers but in his dressing-room) was domestic enough. A selfish companion must, doubtless, be a great trial amid the hardships of military life, but when a soldier is kind-hearted, he is often a much more helpful and thoughtful and handy husband than any equally well-meaning civilian. Amid the ups and downs of their wanderings, the discomforts of shipboard and of stations in the colonies, bad servants, and unwonted sicknesses, the Captain's tenderness never failed. If the life was rough the Captain was ready. He had been, by turns, in one strait or another, sick-nurse, doctor, carpenter, nursemaid, and cook to his family, and had, moreover, an idea that nobody filled these offices quite so well as himself. Withal, his very profession kept him neat, well-dressed, and active. In the roughest of their ever-changing quarters he was a smarter man, more like the lover of his wife's young days, than Mr. Bull amid his stationary comforts. Then if the Captain's wife was—as her friends said—"never settled," she was also for ever entertained by new scenes ; and domestic mischances do not weigh very heavily on people whose possessions are

few and their intellectual interests many. It is true that there were ladies in the Captain's regiment who passed by sea and land from one quarter of the globe to another, amid strange climates and customs, strange trees and flowers, beasts and birds, from the glittering snows of North America to the orchids of the Cape, from beautiful Pera to the lily-covered hills of Japan, and who in no place rose above the fret of domestic worries, and had little to tell on their return but of the universal misconduct of servants, from Irish "helps" in the colonies, to *compradors* and China-boys at Shanghai. But it was not so with the Captain's wife. Moreover, one becomes accustomed to one's fate, and she moved her whole establishment from the Curragh to Corfu with less anxiety than that felt by Mrs. Bull over a port-wine stain on the best table-cloth.

And yet, as years went and children came, the Captain and his wife grew tired of travelling. New scenes were small comfort when they heard of the death of old friends. One foot of murky English sky was dearer, after all, than miles of the unclouded heavens of the South. The grey hills and over-grown lanes of her old home haunted the Captain's wife by night and day, and home-sickness (that weariest of all sicknesses) began to take the light out of her eyes before their time. It preyed upon the Captain too. Now and then he would say, fretfully, "I *should* like an English resting-place, however small, before *everybody* is dead! But the children's prospects have to be considered." The continued estrangement from the old man was an abiding sorrow also, and they had hopes that, if only they could get to England, he might be persuaded to peace and charity this time.

At last they were sent home. But the hard old father still would not relent. He returned their letters unopened. This bitter disappointment made the Captain's wife so ill that she almost died, and in one month the Captain's hair

became iron grey. He reproached himself for having ever taken the daughter from her father, "to kill her at last," as he said. And (thinking of his own children) he even reproached himself for having robbed the old widower of his only child. After two years at home his regiment was ordered to India. He failed to effect an exchange, and they prepared to move once more—from Chatham to Calcutta. Never before had the packing to which she was so well accustomed, been so bitter a task to the Captain's wife.

It was at the darkest hour of this gloomy time that the Captain came in, waving above his head a letter which changed all their plans.

Now close by the old home of the Captain's wife there had lived a man, much older than herself, who yet had loved her with a devotion as great as that of the young Captain. She never knew it, for when he saw that she had given her heart to his younger rival, he kept silence, and he never asked for what he knew he might have had—the old man's authority in his favour. So generous was the affection which he could never conquer, that he constantly tried to reconcile the father to his children whilst he lived, and, when he died, he bequeathed his house and small estate to the woman he had loved.

"It will be a legacy of peace," he thought, on his death-bed. "The old man cannot hold out when she and her children are constantly in sight. And it may please GOD that I shall know of the reunion I have not been permitted to see with my eyes."

And thus it came about that the Captain's regiment went to India without him, and that the Captain's wife and her father lived on opposite sides of the same road.

MASTER ROBERT.



HE eldest of the Captain's children was a boy. He was named Robert, after his grandfather, and seemed to have inherited a good deal of the old gentleman's character, mixed with gentler traits. He was a fair, fine boy, tall and stout for his age, with the Captain's regular features, and (he flattered himself) the Captain's firm step and martial bearing. He was apt—like his grandfather—to hold his own will to be other people's law, and (happily for the peace of the nursery) this opinion was devoutly shared by his brother

Nicholas. Though the Captain had sold his commission, Robin continued to command an irregular force of volunteers in the nursery, and never was colonel more despotic. His brothers and sister were by turn infantry, cavalry, engineers, and artillery, according to his whim, and when his affections finally settled upon the Highlanders of "The Black Watch," no female power could compel him to keep his stockings above his knees, or his knickerbockers below them.

The Captain alone was a match for his strong-willed son.

"If you please, sir," said Sarah, one morning, flouncing

in upon the Captain, just as he was about to start for the neighbouring town,—“If you please, sir, I wish you'd speak to Master Robert. He's past my powers.”

“I've no doubt of it,” thought the Captain, but he only said, “Well, what's the matter?”

“Night after night do I put him to bed,” said Sarah, “and night after night does he get up as soon as I'm out of the room, and says he's orderly officer for the evening, and goes about in his night-shirt and his feet as bare as boards.”

The Captain fingered his heavy moustache to hide a smile, but he listened patiently to Sarah's complaints.

“It ain't so much *him* I should mind, sir,” she continued, “but he goes round the beds and wakes up the other young gentlemen and Miss Dora, one after another, and when I speak to him, he gives me all the sauce he can lay his tongue to, and says he's going round the guards. The other night I tried to put him back in his bed, but he got away and ran all over the house, me hunting him everywhere, and not a sign of him, till he jumps out on me from the garret-stairs and nearly knocks me down. ‘I've visited the outposts, Sarah,’ says he; ‘all's well.’ And off he goes to bed as bold as brass.”

“Have you spoken to your mistress?” asked the Captain.

“Yes, sir,” said Sarah. “And missis spoke to him, and he promised not to go round the guards again.”

“Has he broken his promise?” asked the Captain, with a look of anger, and also of surprise.

“When I opened the door last night, sir,” continued Sarah, in her shrill treble, “what should I see in the dark but Master Robert a-walking up and down with the carpet-brush stuck in his arm. ‘Who goes there?’ says he. ‘You owdacious boy!’ says I, ‘Didn't you promise your ma you'd leave off them tricks?’ ‘I'm not going round the guards,’



“I’m for sentry-duty to-night . . . You mustn’t speak to a sentry on duty.”—PAGE 14.

says he; 'I promised not. But I'm for sentry-duty to-night.' And say what I would to him, all he had for me was, 'You mustn't speak to a sentry on duty.' So I says, 'As sure as I live till morning, I'll go to your pa,' for he pays no more attention to his ma than to me, nor to any one else."

"Please to see that the chair-bed in my dressing-room is moved into your mistress's bedroom," said the Captain. "I will attend to Master Robert."

With this Sarah had to content herself, and she went back to the nursery. Robert was nowhere to be seen, and made no reply to her summons. On this the unwary nursemaid flounced into the bedroom to look for him, when Robert, who was hidden beneath a table, darted forth, and promptly locked her in.

"You're under arrest," he shouted, through the keyhole.

"Let me out!" shrieked Sarah.

"I'll send a file of the guard to fetch you to the orderly-room, by-and-by," said Robert, "for 'preferring frivolous complaints.'" And he departed to the farmyard to look at the ducks.

That night, when Robert went up to bed, the Captain quietly locked him into his dressing-room, from which the bed had been removed.

"You're for sentry duty, to-night," said the Captain. "The carpet-brush is in the corner. Good-evening."

As his father anticipated, Robert was soon tired of the sentry game in these new circumstances, and long before the night had half worn away he wished himself safely undressed and in his own comfortable bed. At half-past twelve o'clock he felt as if he could bear it no longer, and knocked at the Captain's door.

"Who goes there?" said the Captain.

"Mayn't I go to bed, please?" whined poor Robert.

"Certainly not," said the Captain. "You're on duty."

And on duty poor Robert had to remain, for the Captain had a will as well as his son. So he rolled himself up in his father's railway rug, and slept on the floor.

The next night he was very glad to go quietly to bed, and remain there.

IN THE NURSERY.



THE Captain's children sat at breakfast in a large, bright nursery. It was the room where the old bachelor had died, and now *her* children made it merry. This was just what he would have wished.

They all sat round the table, for it was breakfast-time. There were five of them, and five bowls of boiled bread - and - milk smoked before them. Sarah (a foolish, gossiping girl, who acted as nurse till better could be found) was waiting on them, and by the table sat Darkie, the black retriever, his long, curly back swaying slightly from the difficulty of holding himself up, and his solemn hazel eyes fixed very intently on each and all of the breakfast bowls. He was as silent and sagacious as Sarah

was talkative and empty-headed. The expression of his face was that of King Charles I. as painted by Vandyke. Though large, he was unassuming. Pax, the pug, on the contrary, who came up to the first joint of Darkie's leg, stood defiantly on his dignity (and his short stumps). He always placed himself in front of the bigger dog, and made a point of hustling him in doorways and of going first downstairs. He strutted like a beadle, and carried his tail more tightly curled than a bishop's crook. He looked, as one may imagine the frog in the fable would have looked, had he been able to swell himself rather nearer to the size of the ox. This was partly due to his very prominent eyes, and partly to an obesity favoured by habits of lying inside the fender, and of eating meals proportioned more to his consequence than to his hunger. They were both favourites of two years' standing, and had very nearly been given away, when the good news came of an English home for the family, dogs and all.

Robert's tongue was seldom idle, even at meals. "Are you a Yorkshirewoman, Sarah?" he asked, pausing, with his spoon full in his hand.

"No, Master Robert," said Sarah.

"But you understand Yorkshire, don't you? I can't, very often; but Mamma can, and can speak it, too. Papa says Mamma always talks Yorkshire to servants and poor people. She used to talk Yorkshire to Themistocles, Papa said, and he said it was no good; for though Themistocles knew a lot of languages, he didn't know that. And Mamma laughed, and said she didn't know she did."—"Themistocles was our man-servant in Corfu," Robin added, in explanation. "He stole lots of things, Themistocles did; but Papa found him out."

Robin now made a rapid attack on his bread-and-milk, after which he broke out again.

"Sarah, who is that tall old gentleman at church, in the

seat near the pulpit? He wears a cloak like what the Blues wear, only all blue, and is tall enough for a Life-guardman. He stood when we were kneeling down, and said, *Almighty and most merciful Father* louder than anybody."

Sarah knew who the old gentleman was, and knew also that the children did not know, and that their parents did not see fit to tell them as yet. But she had a passion for telling and hearing news, and would rather gossip with a child than not gossip at all. "Never you mind, Master Robin," she said, nodding sagaciously. "Little boys aren't to know everything."

"Ah, then, I know you don't know," replied Robert; "if you did, you'd tell. Nicholas, give some of your bread to Darkie and Pax. I've done mine. *For what we have received the Lord make us truly thankful.* Say your grace and put your chair away, and come along. I want to hold a court-martial." And seizing his own chair by the seat, Robin carried it swiftly to its corner. As he passed Sarah he observed tauntingly, "You pretend to know, but you don't."

"I do," said Sarah.

"You don't," said Robin.

"Your ma's forbid you to contradict, Master Robin," said Sarah; "and if you do I shall tell her. I know well enough who the old gentleman is, and perhaps I might tell you, only you'd go straight off and tell again."

"No, no, I wouldn't!" shouted Robin. "I can keep a secret, indeed I can! Pinch my little finger, and try. Do, do tell me, Sarah, there's a dear Sarah, and then I shall know you know." And he danced round her, catching at her skirts.

To keep a secret was beyond Sarah's powers.

"Do let my dress be, Master Robin," she said, "you're ripping out all the gathers, and listen while I whisper.

As sure as you're a living boy, that gentleman's your own grandpapa."

Robin lost his hold on Sarah's dress; his arms fell by his side, and he stood with his brows knit for some minutes, thinking. Then he said, emphatically, "What lies you do tell, Sarah!"

"Oh, Robin!" cried Nicholas, who had drawn near, his thick curls standing stark with curiosity, "Mamma said 'lies' wasn't a proper word, and you promised not to say it again."

"I forgot," said Robin. "I didn't mean to break my promise. But she does tell—ahem!—*you know what*."

"You wicked boy!" cried the enraged Sarah; "how dare you to say such a thing, and everybody in the place knows he's your ma's own pa."

"I'll go and ask her," said Robin, and he was at the door in a moment; but Sarah, alarmed by the thought of getting into a scrape herself, caught him by the arm.

"Don't you go, love; it'll only make your ma angry. There; it was all my nonsense."

"Then it's not true?" said Robin, indignantly. "What did you tell me so for?"

"It was all my jokes and nonsense," said the unscrupulous Sarah. "But your ma wouldn't like to know I've said such a thing. And Master Robert wouldn't be so mean as to tell tales, would he, love?"

"I'm not mean," said Robin, stoutly; "and I don't tell tales; but you do, and you tell *you know what*, besides. However, I won't go this time; but I'll tell you what—if you tell tales of me to Papa any more, I'll tell him what you said about the old gentleman in the blue cloak." With which parting threat Robin strode off to join his brothers and sister.

Sarah's tale had put the court-martial out of his head, and he leaned against the tall fender, gazing at his little

sister, who was tenderly nursing a well-worn doll. Robin sighed.

"What a long time that doll takes to wear out, Dora!" said he. "When will it be done?"

"Oh, not yet, not yet!" cried Dora, clasping the doll to her, and turning away. "She's quite good, yet."

"How miserly you are," said her brother; "and selfish, too; for you know I can't have a military funeral till you'll let me bury that old thing."

Dora began to cry.

"There you go, crying!" said Robin, impatiently. "Look here: I won't take it till you get the new one on your birthday. You can't be so mean as not to let me have it then!"

But Dora's tears still fell. "I love this one so much," she sobbed. "I love her better than the new one."

"You want both; that's it," said Robin, angrily. "Dora, you're the meanest girl I ever knew!"

At which unjust and painful accusation Dora threw herself and the doll upon their faces, and wept bitterly. The eyes of the soft-hearted Nicholas began to fill with tears, and he squatted down before her, looking most dismal. He had a fellow-feeling for her attachment to an old toy, and yet Robin's will was law to him.

"Couldn't we make a coffin, and pretend the body was inside?" he suggested.

"No, we couldn't," said Robin. "I wouldn't play the Dead March after an empty candle-box. It's a great shame—and I promised she should be chaplain in one of my night-gowns, too."

"Perhaps you'll get just as fond of the new one," said Nicholas, turning to Dora.

But Dora only cried, "No, no! He shall have the new one to bury, and I'll keep my poor, dear, darling Betsy." And she clasped Betsy tighter than before.

"That's the meanest thing you've said yet," retorted Robin; "for you know Mamma wouldn't let me bury the new one." And, with an air of great disgust, he quitted the nursery.

"A MUMMING WE WILL GO."



NICHOLAS had sore work to console his little sister, and Betsy's prospects were in a very unfavourable state, when a diversion was caused in her favour by a new whim which put the military funeral out of Robin's head.

After he left the nursery he strolled out of doors, and, peeping through the gate at the end of the drive, he saw a party of boys going through what looked like a military exercise with sticks and a good deal of stamping; but, instead of mere words of command, they all spoke

by turns, as in a play. In spite of their strong Yorkshire accent, Robin overheard a good deal, and it sounded very fine. Not being at all shy, he joined them, and asked so many questions that he soon got to know all about it. They were practising a Christmas mumming-play, called "The Peace Egg." Why it was called thus they could not tell him, as there was nothing whatever about eggs in it, and so far from being a play of peace, it was made up

of a series of battles between certain valiant knights and princes, of whom St. George of England was the chief and conqueror. The rehearsal being over, Robin went with the boys to the sexton's house (he was father to the "King of Egypt") where they showed him the dresses they were to wear. These were made of gay-coloured materials, and covered with ribbons, except that of the "Black Prince of Paradine," which was black, as became his title. The boys also showed him the book from which they learned their parts, and which was to be bought for one penny at the post-office shop.

"Then are you the mummers who come round at Christmas, and act in people's kitchens, and people give them money, that Mamma used to tell us about?" said Robin.

St. George of England looked at his companions as if for counsel as to how far they might commit themselves, and then replied, with Yorkshire caution, "Well, I suppose we are."

"And do you go out in the snow from one house to another at night; and oh, don't you enjoy it?" cried Robin.

"We like it well enough," St. George admitted.

Robin bought a copy of "The Peace Egg." He was resolved to have a nursery performance, and to act the part of St. George himself. The others were willing for what he wished, but there were difficulties. In the first place, there are eight characters in the play, and there were only five children. They decided among themselves to leave out the "Fool," and Mamma said that another character was not to be acted by any of them, or indeed mentioned; "the little one who comes in at the end," Robin explained. Mamma had her reasons, and these were always good. She had not been altogether pleased that Robin had bought the play. It was a very old thing,

she said, and very queer; not adapted for a child's play. If Mamma thought the parts not quite fit for the children to learn, they found them much too long; so in the end she picked out some bits for each, which they learned easily, and which, with a good deal of fighting, made quite as good a story of it as if they had done the whole. What may have been wanting otherwise was made up for by the dresses, which were charming.

Robin was St. George, Nicholas the valiant Slasher, Dora the Doctor, and the other two Hector and the King of Egypt. "And now we've no Black Prince!" cried Robin in dismay.

"Let Darkie be the Black Prince," said Nicholas. "When you wave your stick he'll jump for it, and then you can pretend to fight with him."

"It's not a stick, it's a sword," said Robin. "However, Darkie may be the Black Prince."

"And what's Pax to be?" asked Dora; "for you know he will come if Darkie does, and he'll run in before everybody else too."

"Then he must be the Fool," said Robin, "and it will do very well, for the Fool comes in before the rest, and Pax can have his red coat on, and the collar with the little bells."



CHRISTMAS EVE.

ROBIN thought that Christmas would never come. To the Captain and his wife it seemed to come too fast. They had hoped it might bring reconciliation with the old man, but it seemed they had hoped in vain.

There were times now when the Captain almost regretted the old bachelor's bequest. The familiar scenes of her old home sharpened his wife's grief. To see her father every Sunday in church, with marks of age and infirmity upon him, but with not a look of tenderness for his only child, this tried her sorely.

"She felt it less abroad," thought the Captain. "An English home in which she frets herself to death is, after all, no great boon."

Christmas Eve came.

"I'm sure it's quite Christmas enough now," said Robin. "We'll have 'The Peace Egg' to-night."

So as the Captain and his wife sat sadly over their fire, the door opened, and Pax ran in shaking his bells, and followed by the nursery mummies. The performance was most successful. It was by no means pathetic, and yet, as has been said, the Captain's wife shed tears.

"What is the matter, Mamma?" said St. George, abruptly dropping his sword and running up to her.

"Don't tease Mamma with questions," said the Captain; "she is not very well, and rather sad. We must all be very kind and good to poor dear Mamma;" and the Captain raised his wife's hand to his lips as he spoke. Robin seized

the other hand and kissed it tenderly. He was very fond of his mother. At this moment Pax took a little run, and jumped on to Mamma's lap, where, sitting facing the company, he opened his black mouth and yawned, with a ludicrous inappropriateness worthy of any clown. It made everybody laugh.

"And now we'll go and act in the kitchen," said Nicholas.

"Supper at nine o'clock, remember," shouted the Captain. "And we are going to have real frumenty and Yule cakes, such as Mamma used to tell us of when we were abroad."

"Hurray!" shouted the mummers, and they ran off, Pax leaping from his seat just in time to hustle the Black Prince in the doorway. When the dining-room door was shut, St. George raised his hand, and said "Hush!"

The mummers pricked their ears, but there was only a distant harsh and scraping sound, as of stones rubbed together.

"They're cleaning the passages," St. George went on, "and Sarah told me they meant to finish the mistletoe, and have everything cleaned up by supper-time. They don't want us, I know. Look here, we'll go *real mumming* instead. That *will* be fun!"

The Valiant Slasher grinned with delight.

"But will Mamma let us?" he inquired.

"Oh, it will be all right if we're back by supper-time," said St. George, hastily. "Only of course we must take care not to catch cold. Come and help me to get some wraps."

The old oak chest in which spare shawls, rugs, and coats were kept was soon ransacked, and the mummers' gay dresses hidden by motley wrappers. But no sooner did Darkie and Pax behold the coats, &c., than they at once began to leap and bark, as it was their custom to do

when they saw any one dressing to go out. Robin was sorely afraid that this would betray them; but though the Captain and his wife heard the barking they did not guess the cause.

So the front door being very gently opened and closed, the nursery mummings stole away.

THE NURSERY MUMMERS AND THE OLD MAN.



It was a very fine night. The snow was well-trodden on the drive, so that it did not wet their feet, but on the trees and shrubs it hung soft and white.

"It's much jollier being out at night than in the daytime," said Robin.

"Much," responded Nicholas, with intense feeling.

"We'll go a was-sailing next week," said Robin. "I know all about it, and perhaps we shall get a good lot of money, and then we'll buy tin swords with scabbards for next year. I don't

like these sticks. Oh, dear, I wish it wasn't so long between one Christmas and another."

"Where shall we go first?" asked Nicholas, as they turned into the high road. But before Robin could reply, Dora clung to Nicholas, crying, "Oh, look at those men!"

The boys looked up the road, down which three men were coming in a very unsteady fashion, and shouting as they rolled from side to side.

"They're drunk," said Nicholas; "and they're shouting at us."

"Oh, run, run!" cried Dora; and down the road they ran, the men shouting and following them. They had not run far, when Hector caught his foot in the Captain's great-coat, which he was wearing, and came down headlong in the road. They were close by a gate, and when Nicholas had set Hector upon his legs, St. George hastily opened it.

"This is the first house," he said. "We'll act here;" and all, even the Valiant Slasher, pressed in as quickly as possible. Once safe within the grounds, they shouldered their sticks, and resumed their composure.

"You're going to the front door," said Nicholas. "Mummers ought to go to the back."

"We don't know where it is," said Robin, and he rang the front-door bell. There was a pause. Then lights shone, steps were heard, and at last a sound of much unbarring, unbolting, and unlocking. It might have been a prison. Then the door was opened by an elderly, timid-looking woman, who held a tallow candle above her head.

"Who's there?" she said, "at this time of night."

"We're Christmas mummers," said Robin, stoutly; "we didn't know the way to the back door, but——"

"And don't you know better than to come here?" said the woman. "Be off with you, as fast as you can."

"You're only the servant," said Robin. "Go and ask

your master and mistress if they wouldn't like to see us act. We do it very well."

"You impudent boy, be off with you!" repeated the woman. "Master'd no more let you nor any other such rubbish set foot in this house——"

"Woman!" shouted a voice close behind her, which made her start as if she had been shot, "who authorizes you to say what your master will or will not do, before you've asked him? The boy is right. You *are* the servant, and it is not your business to choose for me whom I shall or shall not see."

"I meant no harm, sir, I'm sure," said the housekeeper; "but I thought you'd never——"

"My good woman," said her master, "if I had wanted somebody to think for me, you're the last person I should have employed. I hire you to obey orders, not to think."

"I'm sure, sir," said the housekeeper, whose only form of argument was reiteration, "I never thought you would have seen them——"

"Then you were wrong," shouted her master. "I will see them. Bring them in."

He was a tall, gaunt old man, and Robin stared at him for some minutes, wondering where he could have seen somebody very like him. At last he remembered. It was the old gentleman of the blue cloak.

The children threw off their wraps, the housekeeper helping them, and chattering ceaselessly, from sheer nervousness.

"Well, to be sure," said she, "their dresses are pretty, too. And they seem quite a better sort of children, they talk quite genteel. I might ha' knowed they weren't like common mummings, but I was so flusterated hearing the bell go so late, and——"

"Are they ready?" said the old man, who had stood

like a ghost in the dim light of the flaring tallow candle, grimly watching the proceedings.

"Yes, sir. Shall I take them to the kitchen, sir?"

"—for you and the other idle hussies to gape and grin at? No. Bring them to the library," he snapped, and then stalked off, leading the way.

The housekeeper accordingly led them to the library, and then withdrew, nearly falling on her face as she left the room by stumbling over Darkie, who slipped in last like a black shadow.

The old man was seated in a carved oak chair by the fire.

"I never said the dogs were to come in," he said.

"But we can't do without them, please," said Robin, boldly. "You see there are eight people in 'The Peace Egg,' and there are only five of us; and so Darkie has to be the Black Prince, and Pax has to be the Fool, and so we have to have them."

"Five and two make seven," said the old man, with a grim smile; "what do you do for the eighth?"

"Oh, that's the little one at the end," said Robin, confidentially. "Mamma said we weren't to mention him, but I think that's because we're children.—You're grown up, you know, so I'll show you the book, and you can see for yourself," he went on, drawing "The Peace Egg" from his pocket: "there, that's the picture of him, on the last page; black, with horns and a tail."

The old man's stern face relaxed into a broad smile as he examined the grotesque woodcut; but when he turned to the first page the smile vanished in a deep frown, and his eyes shone like hot coals with anger. He had seen Robin's name.

"Who sent you here?" he asked, in a hoarse voice. "Speak, and speak the truth! Did your mother send you here?"

Robin thought the old man was angry with them for playing truant. He said, slowly, "N—no. She didn't exactly send us ; but I don't think she'll mind our having come if we get back in time for supper. Mamma never *forbid* our going mumming, you know."

"I don't suppose she ever thought of it," Nicholas said, candidly, wagging his curly head from side to side.

"She knows we're mummers," said Robin, "for she helped us. When we were abroad, you know, she used to tell us about the mummers acting at Christmas, when she was a little girl ; and so we thought we'd be mummers, and so we acted to Papa and Mamma, and so we thought we'd act to the maids, but they were cleaning the passages, and so we thought we'd really go mumming ; and we've got several other houses to go to before supper-time ; we'd better begin, I think," said Robin ; and without more ado he began to march round and round, raising his sword and shouting,—

"I am St. George, who from Old England sprung,
My famous name throughout the world hath rung."

And the performance went off quite as creditably as before.

As the children acted the old man's anger wore off. He watched them with an interest he could not repress. When Nicholas took some hard thwacks from St. George without flinching, the old man clapped his hands ; and, after the encounter between St. George and the Black Prince, he said he would not have had the dogs excluded on any consideration. It was just at the end, when they were all marching round and round, holding on by each other's swords "over the shoulder," and singing "A mumming we will go, &c," that Nicholas suddenly brought the circle to a standstill by stopping dead short, and staring up at the wall before him.

"What *are* you stopping for?" said St. George, turning indignantly round.

"Look there!" cried Nicholas, pointing to a little painting which hung above the old man's head.

Robin looked, and said, abruptly, "It's Dora."

"Which is Dora?" asked the old man, in a strange, sharp tone.

"Here she is," said Robin and Nicholas in one breath, as they dragged her forward.

"She's the Doctor," said Robin; "and you can't see her face for her things. Dor, take off your cap and pull back that hood. There! Oh, it *is* like her!"

It was a portrait of her mother as a child; but of this the nursery mummies knew nothing. The old man looked as the peaked cap and hood fell away from Dora's face and fair curls, and then he uttered a sharp cry, and buried his head upon his hands. The boys stood stupified, but Dora ran up to him, and putting her little hands on his arms, said, in childish pitying tones, "Oh, I am so sorry! Have you got a headache? May Robin put the shovel in the fire for you? Mamma has hot shovels for her headaches." And, though the old man did not speak or move, she went on coaxing him, and stroking his head, on which the hair was white. At this moment Pax took one of his unexpected runs, and jumped on to the old man's knee, in his own particular fashion, and then yawned at the company. The old man was startled, and lifted his face suddenly. It was wet with tears.

"Why, you're crying!" exclaimed the children with one breath.

"It's very odd," said Robin, fretfully. "I can't think what's the matter to-night. Mamma was crying too when we were acting, and Papa said we weren't to tease her with questions, and he kissed her hand, and I kissed her hand too. And Papa said we must all be very good and kind to

poor dear Mamma, and so I mean to be, she's so good. And I think we'd better go home, or perhaps she'll be frightened," Robin added.

"She's so good, is she?" asked the old man. He had put Pax off his knee, and taken Dora on to it.

"Oh, isn't she!" said Nicholas, swaying his curly head from side to side as usual.

"She's always good," said Robin, emphatically; "and so's Papa. But I'm always doing something I oughtn't to," he added, slowly. "But then, you know, I don't pretend to obey Sarah. I don't care a fig for Sarah; and I won't obey any woman but Mamma."

"Who's Sarah?" asked the grandfather.

"She's our nurse," said Robin, "and she tells—I mustn't say what she tells—but it's not the truth. She told one about *you* the other day," he added.

"About me?" said the old man.

"She said you were our grandpapa. So then I knew she was telling *you know what*."

"How did you know it wasn't true?" the old man asked.

"Why, of course," said Robin, "if you were our Mamma's father, you'd know her, and be very fond of her, and come and see her. And then you'd be our grandfather, too, and you'd have us to see you, and perhaps give us Christmas-boxes. I wish you were," Robin added with a sigh. "It would be very nice."

"Would *you* like it?" asked the old man of Dora.

And Dora, who was half asleep and very comfortable, put her little arms about his neck as she was wont to put them round the Captain's, and said, "Very much."

He put her down at last, very tenderly, almost unwillingly, and left the children alone. By-and-by he returned, dressed in the blue cloak, and took Dora up again.



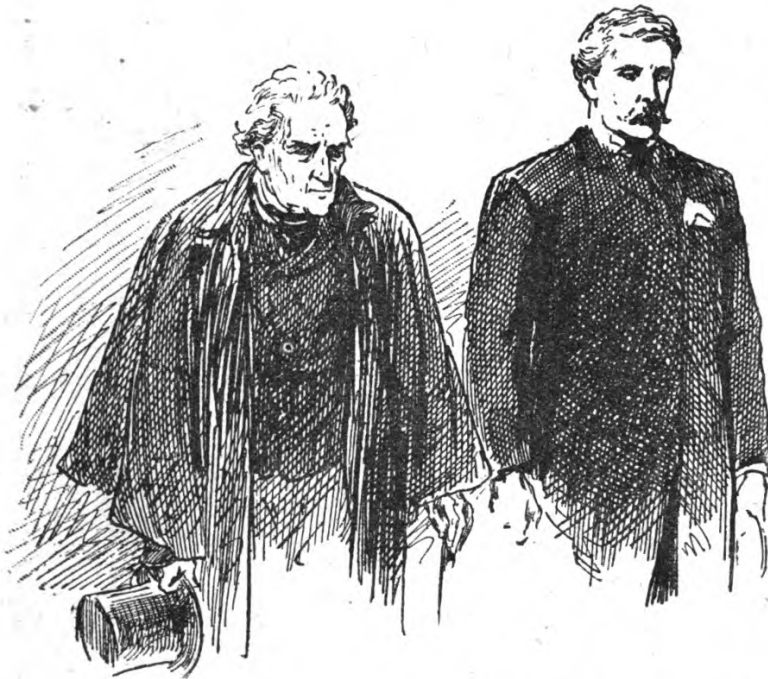
“It was her father, with her child in his arms!”—PAGE 33.

"I will see you home," he said.

The children had not been missed. The clock had only just struck nine when there came a knock on the door of the dining-room, where the Captain and his wife still sat by the Yule log. She said "Come in," wearily, thinking it was the frumenty and the Christmas cakes.

But it was her father, with her child in his arms!

PEACE AND GOODWILL.



LUCY Jane Bull and her sisters were quite old enough to understand a good deal of grown-up conversation when they overheard it. Thus, when a friend of Mrs. Bull's observed during an afternoon call that she believed that "officers' wives were very dressy," the young

ladies were at once resolved to keep a sharp look-out for the Captain's wife's bonnet in church on Christmas Day.

The Bulls had just taken their seats when the Captain's wife came in. They really would have hid their faces, and looked at the bonnet afterwards, but for the startling sight that met the gaze of the congregation. The old grandfather walked into church abreast of the Captain.

"They've met in the porch," whispered Mr. Bull under the shelter of his hat.

"They can't quarrel publicly in a place of worship," said Mrs. Bull, turning pale.

"She's gone into his seat," cried Lucy Jane in a shrill whisper.

"And the children after her," added the other sister, incautiously aloud.

There was now no doubt about the matter. The old man in his blue cloak stood for a few moments politely disputing the question of precedence with his handsome son-in-law. Then the Captain bowed and passed in, and the old man followed him.

By the time that the service was ended everybody knew of the happy peacemaking, and was glad. One old friend after another came up with blessings and good wishes. This was a proper Christmas, indeed, they said. There was a general rejoicing.

But only the grandfather and his children knew that it was hatched from "The Peace Egg."

A

CHRISTMAS MUMMING PLAY.

INTRODUCTION.

SINCE a little story of mine called "The Peace Egg" appeared in AUNT JUDY'S MAGAZINE, I have again and again been asked where the Mummung Play could be found which gave its name to my tale, and if real children could act it, as did the fancy children of the story.

As it stands, this old Christmas Mummung Play (which seems to have borrowed the name of an Easter Entertainment or Pasque Egg) is not fit for domestic performance; and though probably there are few nurseries in those parts of England where "mumming" and the sword-dance still linger, in which the children do not play some version of St. George's exploits, a little of the dialogue goes a long way, and the mummery (which must almost be seen to be imitated) is the chief matter.

In fact, the mummery *is* the chief matter—which is what makes the play so attractive to children, and it may be added, so suitable for their performance. In its rudeness, its simplicity, its fancy dressing, the rapid action of the plot, and last, but not least, its *bludginess*—that quality which made the history of Goliath so dear to the youngest of Helen's Babies!—it is adapted for nursery amusement, as the Drama of Punch and Judy is, and for similar reasons.

For some little time past I have purposed to try and blend the various versions of "Peace Egg" into one Mummery for the nursery, with as little change of the old rhymes as might be. I have been again urged to do so this Christmas, and though I have not been able to give as much time or research to it as I should have liked, I

have thought it better to do it without further delay, even if somewhat imperfectly.

To shuffle the characters and vary the text is nothing new in the history of these "Mock Plays," as they were sometimes called.

They are probably of very ancient origin—"Pagan, I regret to say," as Mr. Pecksniff observed in reference to the sirens—and go back to "the heathen custom of going about on the Kalends of January in disguises, as wild beasts and cattle, the sexes changing apparel." (There is a relic of this last unseemly custom still in "The Old Tup" and "The Old Horse;" when these are performed by both girls and boys, the latter wear skirts and bonnets, the former hats and great coats; this is also the case in Scotland where the boys and girls go round at Hogmanay.)

In the 12th century the clergy introduced miracle plays and scripture histories to rival the performances of the strolling players, which had become very gross. They became as popular as beneficial, and London was famous for them. Different places, and even trade-guilds and schools, had their differing "mysteries."

Secular plays continued, and the two seem occasionally to have got mixed. Into one of the oldest of old plays, "St. George and the Dragon," the Crusaders and Pilgrims introduced the Eastern characters who still remain there. This is the foundation of The Peace Egg. About the middle of the 15th century, plays, which, not quite religious, still witnessed to the effect of the religious plays in raising the standard of public taste, appeared under the name of "Morals," or "Moralities."

Christmas plays, masques, pageants, and the like were largely patronized by the Tudor sovereigns, and the fashion set by the Court was followed in the country. Queen Elizabeth was not only devoted to the drama, and herself performed, but she was very critical and exacting; and

the high demand which she did so much to stimulate, was followed by such supply as was given by the surpassing dramatic genius of the Elizabethan age of literature. Later, Ben Jonson and Inigo Jones combined to produce the Court masks, one of which,—the well-known "Mask of Christmas," had for chief characters, Christmas and his children, Misrule, Carol, Mince Pie, Gambol, Post and Pair, New Years' Gift, Mumming, Wassel, Offering, and Baby's Cake. In the 17th century the Christmas Mummeries of the Inns of Court were conducted with great magnificence and at large cost.

All such entertainments were severely suppressed during the Commonwealth, at which time the words "Welcome, or not welcome, I am come," were introduced into Father Christmas's part.

At one time the Jester of the piece (he is sometimes called the Jester, and sometimes the Fool, or the Old Fool) used to wear a calf's hide. Robin Goodfellow says, "Ill go put on my devilish robes—I mean my Christmas calf's skin suit—and then walk to the woods." "I'll put me on my great carnation nose, and wrap me in a rousing calf-skin suit, and come like some hob-goblin." And a character of the 18th century "clears the way" with—

" My name it is Captain Calftail, Calftail—
And on my back it is plain to be seen,
Although I am simple and wear a fool's cap,
I am dearly beloved of a queen—"

which looks as if Titania had found her way into that mummery!

"The Hobby Horse's" costume was a horse's hide, real or imitated. I have no copy of a Christmas Play in which the Hobby Horse appears. In the north of England, "The Old Horse" and "The Old Tup" are the respective heroes of their own peculiar mummeries, generally per-

formed by a younger, or perhaps a rougher, set of lads than those who play the more elegant mysteries of St. George. The boy who acts "Old Tup" has a ram's head impaled upon a short pole, which he grasps and uses as a sort of wooden leg in front of him. He needs some extra support, his back being bent as if for leap-frog, and covered with an old rug (in days when "meat" was cheaper it was probably a hide). The hollow sound of his peg-leg upon the "flags" of the stone passages and kitchen floor, and the yearly test of courage supplied by the rude familiarities of his gruesome head as he charged and dispersed maids and children, amid shrieks and laughter, are probably familiar memories of all Yorkshire, Lancashire, and Derbyshire childhoods. I do not know if the Old Horse and the Old Tup belong to other parts of the British Isles. It is a rude and somewhat vulgar performance, especially if undertaken by older revellers, when the men wear skirts and bonnets, and the women don great coats and hats—the Fool, the Doctor, and a darker character with a besom, are often of the party, but the Knights of Christendom and the Eastern Potentates take no share in these proceedings, which are oftenest and most inoffensively performed by little boys not yet promoted to be "mummers." It is, however, essential that one of them should have a good voice, true and tuneful enough to sing a long ballad, and lead the chorus.

In the scale of contributions to the numerous itinerant Christmas Boxes of Christmas week—such as the Ringers, the Waits, the Brass Band, the Hand-bells, the Mummers (Peace Egg), the superior Mummers, who do more intricate sword-play (and in the North Riding are called Morris Dancers), etc., etc., the Old Tup stands low down on the list. I never heard the Rhymes of the Old Horse; they cannot be the same. These diversions are very strictly localized and handed on by word of mouth.

Of the best version of Peace Egg which I have seen performed, I have as yet quite vainly endeavoured to get any part transcribed. It is oral tradition. It is practised for some weeks beforehand, and the costumes, including wonderful head dresses about the size of the plumed bonnet of a Highlander in full-dress, are carefully preserved from year to year. These pasteboard erections are covered with flowers, feathers, bugles and coloured streamers. The dresses are of coloured calico, with ribbons everywhere; "points" to the breeches and hose, shoulder-knots and sashes.

But, as a rough rule, it is one of the conveniences of mumming play, that the finery may be according to the taste and the resources of the company.

The swords are of steel, and those I have seen are short. In some places I believe rapiers are used. I am very sorry to be unable to give proper directions for the sword-play, which is so pretty. I have only one version in which such directions are given. I have copied the "Grand Sword Dance" in its proper place for the benefit of those who can interpret it. It is not easy to explain in writing, even so much of it as I know. Each combat consists of the same number of cuts, to the best of my remembrance, and the "shoulder cuts" (which look very like two persons sharpening two knives as close as possible to each other's nose!) are in double time, twice as quick as the others. The stage directions are as follows:—

			A. and B. fight.
Cut 1	...	...	Crossing each other.
			(They change places, striking as they pass.)
Cut 2	...	...	„ „ back.
Cut 3	...	...	„ „ other.
Cut 4	...	...	„ „ back.
			4 shoulder cuts.

A. loses his sword and falls.

But I do not think the version from which this is an extract is at all an elaborate one. There ought to be a "Triumph," with an archway of swords, in the style of Sir Roger de Coverley. After the passing and repassing strokes, there is usually much more hand-to-hand fighting, then 4 shoulder cuts, and some are aimed high and some down among their ankles, in a way which would probably be quite clear to anyone trained in broad-sword exercise.

The following Christmas Mumming Play is compiled from five versions. The "Peace Egg," the "Wassail Cup," "Alexander the Great," "A Mock Play," and the "Silverton Mummer's Play" (Devon), which has been lent to me in manuscript.

The Mumming Chorus, "And a mumming we will go," etc., is not in any one of these versions, but I never saw mumming without it.

The Silverton version is an extreme example of the continuous development of these unwritten dramas. Generation after generation, the most incongruous characters have been added. In some cases this is a very striking testimony to the strength of rural sympathy with the great deeds and heroes of the time, as well as to native talent for dramatic composition.

Wellington and Wolfe almost eclipsed St. George in some parts of England, and the sea Heroes are naturally popular in Devonshire. The death of Nelson in the Silverton play has fine dramatic touches. Though he "has but one arm and a good one too," he essays to fight—whether Tippo Saib or St. George is not made clear. He falls, and St. George calls for the Doctor in the usual words. The Doctor ends his peculiar harangue with: "Britons! our Nelson is dead." To which a voice, which seems to play the part of Greek chorus, responds—"But he is not with

the dead, but in the arms of the Living God!" Then, enter Collingwood—

*“ Collingwood—Here comes I, bold Collingwood,
Who fought the French and boldly stood ;
And now the life of that bold Briton's gone,
I'll put the crown of victory on ”—*

with which—“he takes the crown off Nelson's head and puts it on his own.”

I have, however, confined myself in the “Peace Egg” to those characters which have the warrant of considerable antiquity, and their number is not small. They can easily be reduced by cutting out one or two; or some of the minor characters could play more than one part, by making real exits and changing the dress, instead of the conventional exit into the background of the group.

Some of these minor characters are not the least charming. The fair Sabra (who is often a mute) should be the youngest and prettiest little maid that can toddle through her part, and no old family brocade can be too gorgeous for her. The Pretty Page is another part for a “very little one,” and his velvets and laces should become him. They contrast delightfully with Dame Dolly and Little Man Jack, and might, if needful, be played by the same performers.

I have cut out everything that could possibly offend, except the line—“Take him and give him to the flies.” It betrays an experience of Asiatic battlefields so terribly real, that I was unwilling to abolish this unconscious witness to the influence of Pilgrims and Crusaders on the Peace Egg. It is easily omitted.

I have dismissed the Lord of Flies, Beelzebub, and (with some reluctance) “Little Devil Doubt” and his besom. I had a mind to have retained him as “The Demon of Doubt,” for he plays in far higher dramas. His besom also

seems to come from the East, where a figure "sweeping everything out" with a broom is the first vision produced in the crystal or liquid in the palm of a medium by the magicians of Egypt.

Those who wish to do so can admit him at the very end, after the sword dance, very black, and with a besom, a money-box and the following doggrel:—

In come I, the Demon of Doubt,
If you don't give me money I'll sweep you all out ;
Money I want and money I crave,
Money I want and money I'll have.

He is not a taking character — unless to the antiquary ! I have substituted the last line for the less decorous original, "If you don't give me money, I'll sweep you all to the grave."

It is perhaps only the antiquary who will detect the connection between the Milk Pail and the Wassail Cup in the Fool's Song. But it seems at one time to have been made of milk. In a play of the 16th century it is described as—

"Wassayle, wassayle, out of the mylk payle
Wassayle, wassayle, as white as my nayle,"

and Selden calls it "a slabby stuff," which sounds as if it had got mixed up with frumenty.

Since the above went to press, I have received some extracts from the unwritten version of Peace Egg in the West Riding of Yorkshire to which I have alluded. They recall to me that the piece properly opens with a "mumming round," different to the one I have given, *that* one belonging to the end. The first Mumming Song rehearses each character and his exploits. The hero of the verse which describes him singing (auto-biographically!) his own doughty deeds in the third person. Thus St. George begins, I give it in the vernacular.

“ The first to coom in is the Champion bould,
 The Champion bould is he,
 He never fought battle i’ all his loife-toim,
 But he made his bould enemy flee, flee, flee,
 He made his bould enemy flee.”

The beauty of this song is the precision with which each character enters and joins the slowly increasing circle. But that is its only merit. It is wretched doggrel, and would make the play far too tedious. I was, however, interested by this verse :

The next to come in is the Cat and Calftail,
 The Cat and Calftail is he ;
 He’ll beg and he’ll borrow, and he’ll steal all he can,
 But he’ll never pay back one penny, penny,
 He’ll never pay back one penny.

Whether “Cat and Calftail” is a corruption of Captain Calftail or (more likely) Captain Calftail was evolved from a Fool in Calf’s hide and Cat’s skins, it is hard to say. They are evidently one and the same shabby personage !

The song which I have placed at the head of the Peace Egg Play has other verses which also recite “the argument” of the piece, but not one is worth recording. A third song does not, I feel sure, belong to the classic versions, but to another “rude and vulgar” one, which I have not seen for some years, and which was played in a dialect dark, even to those who flattered themselves that they were to the manner born. In it St. George and the Old Fool wrangle, the O. F. accusing the Patron Saint of England of stealing clothes hung out to dry on the hedges. St. George, who has previously boasted,—

I’ve travelled this world all round,
 And hopes to do it again,
 I was once put out of my way
 By a hundred and forty men—

THE PEACE EGG.
A
CHRISTMAS MUMMING PLAY.



DRESSING THE DRAGON.

THE PEACE EGG.

A CHRISTMAS MUMMING PLAY.

Written expressly for all Mummers, to commemorate the Holy Wars, and the happy Festival of Christmas.

DRAMATIS PERSONÆ.

- ST. GEORGE OF ENGLAND (*he must wear a rose.*)
ST. ANDREW OF SCOTLAND (*he must wear a thistle.*)
ST. PATRICK OF IRELAND (*he must wear the shamrock.*)
ST. DAVID OF WALES (*he must wear a leek.*)
SALADIN, A PAGAN GIANT OF PALESTINE (*a very tall grown up actor would be effective.*)
THE KING OF EGYPT (*in a turban and crown.*)
THE PRINCE OF PARADINE, HIS SON (*face blacked, and it is "tradition" to play this part in weeds, as if he were Hamlet.*)
THE TURKISH KNIGHT (*Eastern costume.*)
HECTOR.
THE VALIANT SLASHER (*old yeomanry coat, etc., is effective.*)
THE DRAGON (*a paste-board head, with horrid jaws, if possible. A tail, and paws with claws.*)
THE FOOL (*Motley: with a bauble long enough to put over his shoulder and be held by the one behind in the mumming circle.*)
OLD FATHER CHRISTMAS (*white beard, etc., and a staff.*)
THE DOCTOR (*wig, spectacles, hat and cane.*)
THE LITTLE PAGE (*pretty little boy in velvet, etc.*)
LITTLE MAN JACK (*big mask head, if convenient, short cloak and club.*)
PRINCESS SABRA (*pretty little girl, gorgeously dressed, a crown.*)
DAME DOLLY (*a large mask head, if possible, and a very amazing cap. Dame Dolly should bob curtseys and dance about.*)
-

No scenery is required. The actors, as a rule, all come in together. To "enter" means to stand forth, and "exit" that the actor retires into the background. But the following method will be found most effective. Let Fool enter alone, and the rest come in one by one when the Fool begins to sing.

They must march in to the music, and join the circle with regularity. Each actor as he "brags," and gives his challenge, does so marching up and down, his drawn sword over his shoulder. All the characters take part in the "Mumming Round." The next to Fair Sabra might hold up her train, and if Dame Dolly had a gamp umbrella to put over *her* shoulder, it would not detract from her comic charms. The Trumpet Calls for the four Patron Knights should be appropriate to each. If a Trumpet is quite impossible some one should play a national air as each champion enters.

[Enter FOOL.]

FOOL. Good morrow, friends and neighbours dear,
We are right glad to meet you here,
Christmas comes but once a year,
But when it comes it brings good cheer,
And when its gone it's no longer near.
May luck attend the milking pail,
Yule logs and cakes in plenty be,
May each blow of the thrashing flail,
Produce good frumenty.
And let the Wassail Cup abound,
When'er the mummer's time comes round.

Air, "Le Petit Tambour."

Sings. Now all ye jolly mummers,
Who mum in Christmas time,
Come join with me in chorus,
Come join with me in rhyme.

[*He has laid his bauble over his shoulder, and it is taken by ST. GEORGE, who is followed by all the other actors, each laying his sword over his right shoulder and his left hand on the sword point in front of him, and all marking time with their feet till the circle is complete, when they march round singing the chorus over and over again.*]

Chorus. And a mumming we will go, will go,
And a mumming we will go,
With a bright cockade in all our hats, we'll go with a
gallant show.

[Disperse, and stand aside.]

[Enter FATHER CHRISTMAS.]

FATHER CHRISTMAS. Here come I, old Father Christmas,
Welcome, or welcome not,
I hope poor old Father Christmas
Will never be forgot!
My head is white, my back is bent,
My knees are weak, my strength is spent.

Eighteen hundred and eighty three
 Is a very great age for me.
 And if I'd been growing all these years
 What a monster I should be!
 Now I have but a short time to stay,
 And if you don't believe what I say—
 Come in Dame Dolly, and clear the way.

[*Enter DAME DOLLY.*]

DAME DOLLY. Here comes I, little Dame Dolly,
 Wearing smart caps in all my folly,
 If any gentleman takes my whim,
 I'll set my holiday cap at him.
 To laugh at my cap would be very rude ;
 I wish you well, and I won't intrude.
 Gentlemen now at the door do stand,
 They will walk in with drawn swords in hand,
 And if you don't believe what I say—
 Let one Fool and four knights from the British Isles,
 come in and clear the way !

[*Enter FOOL and four Christian knights.*]

FOOL, *shaking his bells at intervals.*

Room, room, brave gallants, give us room to sport,
 For to this room we wish now to resort :
 Resort, and to repeat to you our merry rhyme,
 For remember, good sirs, that this is Christmas time.
 The time to make mince-pies doth now appear,
 So we are come to act our merriment in here.
 At the sounding of the trumpet, and beating of the drum,
 Make room, brave gentlemen, and let our actors come.
 We are the merry actors that traverse the street,
 We are the merry actors that fight for our meat,
 We are the merry actors that show pleasant play,
 Stand forth, St. George, thou champion, and clear the way.

[*Trumpet sounds for ST. GEORGE.*]

[ST. GEORGE *stands forth and walks up and down with sword on shoulder.*]

ST. GEORGE. I am St. George, from good Old England sprung,
 My famous name throughout the world hath rung,
 Many bloody deeds and wonders have I shown,
 And made false tyrants tremble on their throne.
 I followed a fair lady to a giant's gate,
 Confined in dungeon deep to meet her fate.

Then I resolved with true knight errantry
 To burst the door, and set the captive free.
 Far have I roamed, oft have I fought, and little do I rest ;
 All my delight is to defend the right, and succour the opprest.
 And now I'll slay the Dragon bold, my wonders to begin,
 A fell and fiery Dragon he, but I will clip his wing.
 I'll clip his wings, he shall not fly,
 I'll rid the land of him, or else I'll die.

[*Enter THE DRAGON, with a sword over his shoulder.*]

DRAGON. Who is it seeks the Dragon's blood,
 And calls so angry and so loud ?
 That English dog who looks so proud —
 If I could catch him in my claw —
 With my long teeth and horrid jaw,
 Of such I'd break up half a score,
 To stay my appetite for more.
 Marrow from his bones I'd squeeze,
 And suck his blood up by degrees.

[*ST. GEORGE and THE DRAGON fight. THE DRAGON is killed. Exit DRAGON.*]

ST. GEORGE. I am St. George, that worthy champion bold,
 And with my sword and spear I won three crowns of gold,
 I fought the fiery Dragon and brought him to the slaughter,
 By which behaviour I won the favour of the King of Egypt's
 daughter.
 Thus I have gained fair Sabra's hand, who long had won her
 heart,
 Stand forth, Egyptian Princess, and boldly act thy part !

[*Enter THE PRINCESS SABRA.*]

SABRA. I am the Princess Sabra, and it is my delight,
 My chiefest pride, to be the bride of this gallant Christian
 knight.

[*ST. GEORGE kneels and kisses her hand. FOOL advances and holds up his
 hands over them.*]

FOOL. Why here's a sight will do any honest man's heart good,
 To see the Dragon-slayer thus subdued !

[*ST. GEORGE rises. Exit SABRA.*]

ST. GEORGE. Keep thy jests in thy pocket if thou would'st keep thy head
 on thy shoulders.
 I love a woman, and a woman loves me,
 And when I want a fool I'll send for thee.

If there is any man but me
 Who noxious beasts can tame,
 Let him stand forth in this gracious company,
 And boldly tell his name.

[*Trumpet sounds for St. PATRICK.*]

[*St. PATRICK stands forth.*]

ST. PATRICK. I am St. Patrick from the bogs,
 This truth I fain would learn ye,
 I banished serpents, toads, and frogs,
 From beautiful Hibernia.
 I flourished my shillelah
 And the reptiles all ran races,
 And they took their way into the sea,
 And they've never since shown their faces.

[*Enter THE PRINCE OF PARADINE.*]

PRINCE. I am black Prince of Paradine, born of high renown,
 Soon will I fetch thy lofty courage down.
 Cry grace, thou Irish conqueror of toads and frogs,
 Give me thy sword, or else I'll give thy carcase to the dogs.

ST. PATRICK. Now, Prince of Paradine, where have you been?
 And what fine sights pray have you seen?
 Dost think that no man of thy age
 Dares such a black as thee engage?
 Stand off, thou black Morocco dog, or by my sword thou'll
 die,
 I'll pierce thy body full of holes, and make thy buttons fly.

[*They fight. THE PRINCE OF PARADINE is slain.*]

ST. PATRICK. Now Prince of Paradine is dead,
 And all his joys entirely fled,
 Take him and give him to the flies,
 That he may never more come near my eyes.

[*Enter KING OF EGYPT.*]

KING. I am the King of Egypt, as plainly doth appear,
 I am come to seek my son, my only son and heir.

ST. PATRICK. He's slain! That's the worst of it.

KING. Who did him slay, who did him kill,
 And on the ground his precious blood did spill

ST. PATRICK. I did him slay, I did him kill,
And on the ground his precious blood did spill.
Please you, my liege, my honour to maintain,
As I have done, so would I do again.

KING. Cursed Christian! What is this thou hast done?
Thou hast ruined me, slaying my only son.

ST. PATRICK. He gave me the challenge. Why should I him deny
How low he lies who held himself so high!

KING. Oh! Hector! Hector! help me with speed,
For in my life I ne'er stood more in need.

[*Enter* HECTOR.]

KING. Stand not there, Hector, with sword in hand,
But fight and kill at my command.

HECTOR. Yes, yes, my liege, I will obey,
And by my sword I hope to win the day.
If that be he who doth stand there
That slew my master's son and heir,
Though he be sprung from royal blood
I'll make it run like ocean flood.

[*They fight. HECTOR is wounded.*]

I am a valiant hero, and Hector is my name,
Many bloody battles have I fought, and always won the same,
But from St. Patrick I received this deadly wound.

[*Trumpet sounds for* ST. ANDREW.]

Hark, hark, I hear the silver trumpet sound,
It summons me from off this bloody ground.
Down yonder is the way (*pointing*),
Farewell, farewell, I can no longer stay.

[*Exit* HECTOR.]

[*Enter* ST. ANDREW.]

KING. Is there never a doctor to be found
Can cure my son of his deep and deadly wound?

[*Enter* DOCTOR.]

DOCTOR. Yes, yes, there is a doctor to be found
Can cure your son of his deep and deadly wound.

KING. What's your fee?

DOCTOR. Five pounds and a yule cake to thee.
I have a little bottle of Elacampane
It goes by the name of virtue and fame,
That will make this worthy champion to rise and fight again.

To PRINCE. Here, sir, take a little of my flip-flop,
Pour it on thy tip-top.

[To Audience, bowing.]

Ladies and Gentlemen can have my advice gratis.

[Exeunt KING OF EGYPT, PRINCE OF PARADINE, and DOCTOR.]
[ST. ANDREW stands forth.]

ST. ANDREW. I am St. Andrew from the North,
Men from that part are men of worth,
To travel south we're nothing loth,
And treat you fairly, by my troth,
Here comes a man looks ready for a fray,
Come in, come in, bold soldier, and bravely clear the way.

[Enter SLASHER.]

SLASHER. I am a valiant soldier, and Slasher is my name,
With sword and buckler by my side, I hope to win more fame,
And for to fight with me I see thou art not able,
So with my trusty broadsword I soon will thee disable.

ST. ANDREW. Disable, disable? It lies not in thy power,
For with a broader sword than thine I soon will thee devour.
Stand off, Slasher, let no more be said,
For if I draw my broadsword, I'm sure to break thy head.

SLASHER. How can'st thou break my head?
Since my head is made of iron;
My body made of steel;
My hands and feet of knuckle-bone,
I challenge thee to feel.

[They fight, and SLASHER is wounded.]

[FOOL advances to SLASHER.]

FOOL. Alas, alas, my chiefest son is slain!
What must I do to raise him up again?
Here he lies before you all,
I'll presently for a doctor call,
A doctor! A doctor! I'll go and fetch a doctor.

DOCTOR. Here am I.

FOOL. Are you the doctor?

- DOCTOR. That you may plainly see, by my art and activity.
- FOOL. What's your fee to cure this poor man ?
- DOCTOR. Five pounds is my fee ; but Jack, as thou art a fool, I'll only take ten from thee.
- FOOL. You'll be a clever doctor if you get any. [aside.]
Well, how far have you travelled in doctorship ?
- DOCTOR. From the front door to the cupboard,
Cupboard to fireplace, fireplace upstairs and into bed.
- FOOL. So far, and no farther ?
- DOCTOR. Yes, yes, much farther.
- FOOL. How far ?
- DOCTOR. Through England, Ireland, Scotland, Flanders, France, and Spain,
And now am returned to cure the diseases of Old England again.
- FOOL. What can you cure ?
- DOCTOR. All complaints within and without,
From a cold in your head to a touch of the gout.
If any lady's figure is awry
I'll make her very fitting to pass by,
I'll give a coward a heart if he be willing,
Will make him stand without fear of killing.
Ribs, legs, or arms, whate'er you break, be sure
Of one or all I'll make a perfect cure.
Nay, more than this by far, I will maintain,
If you should lose your head or heart, I'll give it you again.
Then here's a doctor rare, who travels much at home,
So take my pills, I cure all ills, past, present, or to come.
I in my time many thousands have directed,
And likewise have as many more dissected,
And I never met a gravedigger who to me objected,
If a man gets 19 bees in his bonnet, I'll cast twenty of 'em out. I've got in my pocket crutches for lame ducks, spectacles for blind bumble-bees, pack-saddles and panniers for grasshoppers, and many other needful things. Surely I can cure this poor man.
Here, Slasher, take a little out of my bottle, and let it run down thy throttle ; and if thou beest not quite slain, rise man, and fight again. [SLASHER rises.]
- SLASHER. Oh, my back !
- FOOL. What's amiss with thy back ?

SLASHER. My back is wounded,
And my heart is confounded,
To be struck out of seven senses into fourscore,
The like was never seen in Old England before.

[*Trumpet sounds for ST. DAVID.*]

Oh, hark ! I hear the silver trumpet sound !
It summons me from off this bloody ground,
Down yonder is the way (*points,*)
Farewell, farewell, I can no longer stay. [Exit SLASHER.]

FOOL. Yes, Slasher, thou had'st better go,
Else the next time he'll pierce thee through.

[*ST. DAVID stands forth.*]

ST. DAVID. Of Taffy's Land I'm Patron Saint,
Oh yes, indeed, I'll you acquaint,
Of Ancient Britons I've a race
Dare meet a foeman face to face.
For Welshmen (hear it once again ;)
Were born before all other men.
I'll fear no man in fight or freaks,
Whilst Wales produces cheese and leeks.

[*Enter TURKISH KNIGHT.*]

TURKISH KNIGHT. Here comes I, the Turkish Knight,
Come from the Turkish land to fight.
I'll take St. David for my foe,
And make him yield before I go ;
He brags to such a high degree,
He thinks there was never a Knight but he.
So draw thy sword, St. David, thou man of courage bold,
If thy Welsh blood is hot, soon will I fetch it cold.

ST. DAVID. Where is the Turk that will before me stand ?
I'll cut him down with my courageous hand.

TURKISH KNIGHT. Draw out thy sword and slay,
Pull out thy purse and pay,
For satisfaction I will have, before I go away.

[*They fight.* THE TURKISH KNIGHT *is wounded, and falls on one knee.*]

Quarter ! quarter ! good Christian, grace of thee I crave,
Oh, pardon me this night, and I will be thy slave.

ST. DAVID. I keep no slaves, thou Turkish Knight,
So rise thee up again, and try thy might.

[*They fight again.* THE TURKISH KNIGHT *is slain.*]

[*Exit TURKISH KNIGHT.*]

ST. GEORGE. I am the chief of all these valiant knights,
 We'll spill our heart's blood for Old England's rights,
 Old England's honour we will still maintain,
 We'll fight for Old England once and again.

[*Flourishes his sword above his head and then lays it over his right shoulder.*]

I challenge all my country's foes.

ST. PATRICK [*dealing with his sword in like manner, and then taking the point of ST. GEORGE'S sword with his left hand.*]

And I'll assist with mighty blows.

ST. ANDREW [*acting like the other.*]

And you shall find me ready too.

ST. DAVID [*the same.*]

And who but I so well as you.

FOOL [*imitates the Knights, and they close the circle and go round.*]

While we are joined in heart and hand,
 A gallant and courageous band,
 If e'er a foe dares look awry,
 We'll one and all poke out his eye.

[*Enter SALADIN.*]

SALADIN. Don't vaunt thus, my courageous knights,
 For I, as you, have seen some sights
 In Palestine, in days of yore.
 'Gainst prowess strong I bravely bore
 The sway, when all the world in arms
 Shook Holy Land with wars alarms.
 I for the crescent, you the cross,
 Each mighty host oft won and lost.
 I many a thousand men did slay,
 And ate two hundred twice a day,
 And now I come, a giant great,
 Just waiting for another meat.

ST. GEORGE. Oh! Saladin! Art thou come with sword in hand,
 Against St. George and Christendom so rashly to withstand?

SALADIN. Yes, yes, St. George, with thee I mean to fight,
 And with one blow, I'll let thee know
 I am not the Turkish Knight.

ST. GEORGE. Ah, Saladin, St. George is in this very room,
 Thou'rt come this unlucky hour to seek thy fatal doom.

[Enter LITTLE PAGE.]

LITTLE PAGE. Hold, hold, St. George, I pray thee stand by,
I'll conquer him, or else I'll die ;
Long with that Pagan champion will I engage.
Although I am but the Little Page.

ST. GEORGE. Fight on, my little page, and conquer !
And don't thee be perplext,
For if thou discourage in the field,
Fight him will I next.

[*They fight. THE LITTLE PAGE falls.*]

SALADIN. Though but a little man, they were great words he said.

ST. GEORGE. Ah! cruel monster. What havoc hast thou made?
See where the lovely stripling all on the floor is laid,
A Doctor! A Doctor! Ten pounds for a doctor!

[DAME DOLLY *dances forward, bobbing as before.*]

DAME DOLLY. Here comes I, little Dame Dorothy,
Flap front, and good morrow to ye ;
My head is big, my body is small.
I'm the prettiest little jade of you all.
Call not the Doctor for to make him worse,
But give the boy into my hand to nurse.

To LITTLE PAGE. Rise up, my pretty page, and come with me,
And by kindness and kitchen physic, I'll cure thee without
fee.

[PAGE rises. *Exeunt PAGE and DAME DOLLY.*]

[ST. GEORGE and SALADIN fight. SALADIN is slain.]

ST. GEORGE. Carry away the dead, Father.

FATHER CHRISTMAS. Let's see whether he's dead or no, first, Georgy.
Yes; I think he's dead enough, Georgy.

ST. GEORGE. Carry him away then, Father.

FATHER CHRISTMAS [*vainly tries to move the GIANT'S body.*]

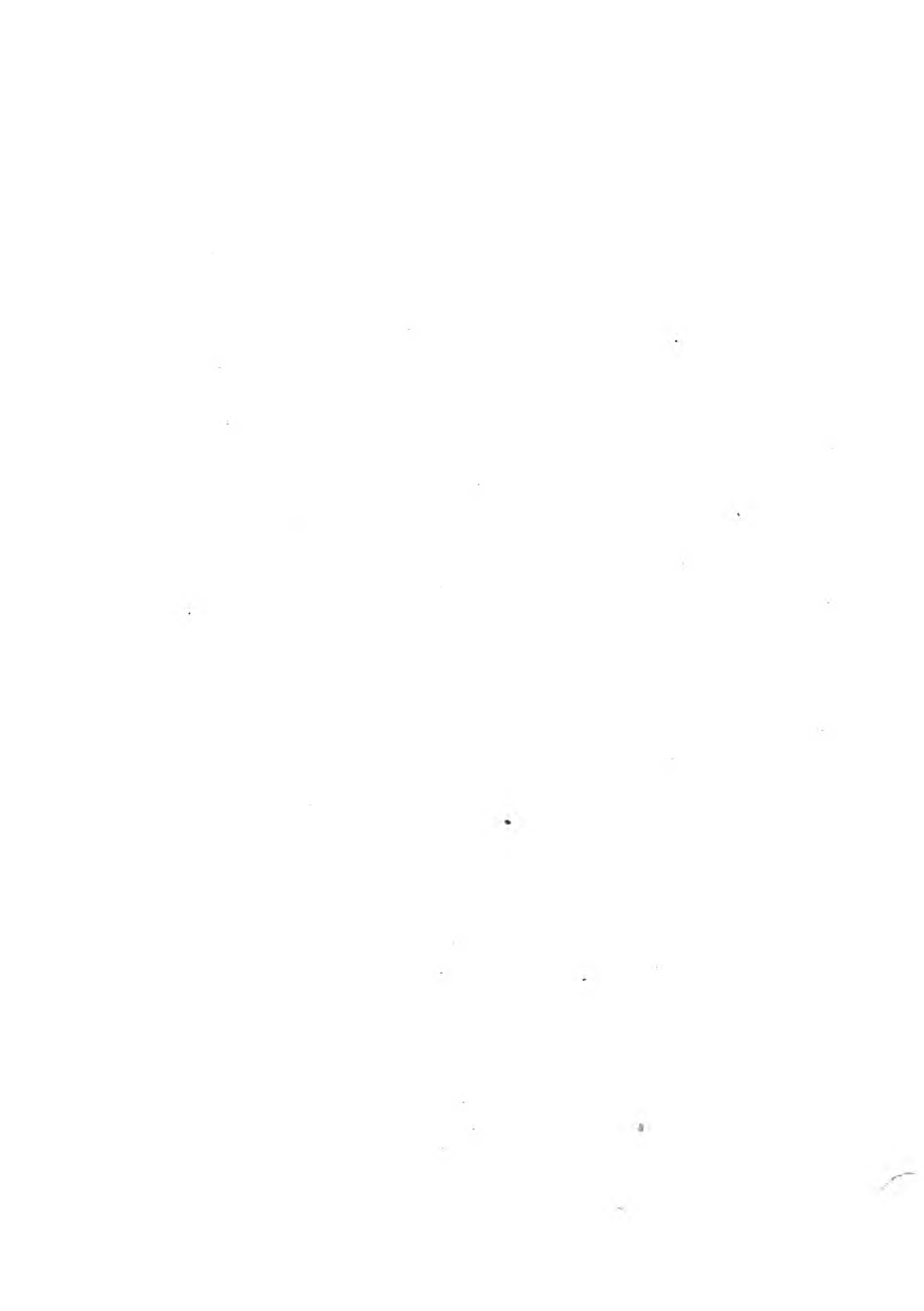
Thou killed him; thou carry him away.

ST. GEORGE. If you can't carry him, call for help.

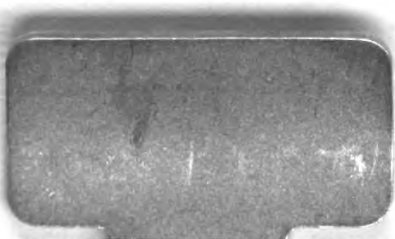
FATHER CHRISTMAS [*to audience.*]

Three or four of you great logger-headed fellows,
Come and carry him away.

[DOCTOR and FOOL raise the GIANT by his arms. Exit GIANT.]







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