

**OUR CHRISTMAS IN
A PALACE. A
TRAVELLER'S STORY**

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Our Christmas in a palace. A traveller's story by Edward Everett Hale

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A TRAVELLER'S STORY

BY

EDWARD EVERETT HALE

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1772
89

THE admirable story of "Christmas in Cooney Camp," included in this volume, is kindly given me by my friend, Mr. Collingwood, who describes in it what he has seen and heard. It has never been published before. The other stories and sketches are my own.

EDWARD E. HALE.

ROXBURY, MASS., Oct. 1, 1883.

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OUR CHRISTMAS IN A PALACE.

CHAPTER I.

THEODORA BOURN AND JANE MARHILL.

"COME out and walk, Mary; we shall have full twenty minutes. The conductor says fifteen, and you may be sure we shall not start till two."

Mary was glad enough to join him. As she crowded by the stove and porter's seat, at the end of the car, she proposed that he should ask little Black Ribbons to join them, and he did so. He went back to the place where Black Ribbons was sitting alone, touched his hat, and said :

"My wife is going to take a walk on the platform. Will you not join us?"

They had exchanged civilities with Black Ribbons before. But she was shy. They were happy in the joy of their wedding journey. Her seat was "three," quite at one end of the Pullman, and theirs was "twenty-one to twenty-four," quite at the other. Mary had offered her cold coffee at lunch and she had declined. The walk, therefore, was the first successful effort at anything like intimacy.

"Look there," said Hector, and he kicked with his foot an ingot of silver, which lay as heavy and motion-

less under the blow as if it had been spiked to the plank on which they stood. "If we were dishonest, we could hardly get that off—all three of us. And now the expressmen leave these three blocks, trusting not in our honesty, not in law or sheriff, not in any All-Seeing Eye, but simply in the dead weight of silver. That is the way of the world."

"The way of what world?"

"The way of this world. What I mean is that heavy people and things—people with much specific gravity—are let alone and prosper, as if dead weight were a merit, while light and airy people like us three, and elegant things like that silver when it shall have been drawn into threads, and moulded into butterflies for breast-pins, have to be watched and tended and daintily lifted from place to place. Now, there is our Cæsar Ganymede, the Pullman porter, sadly looking upon you now, he is so afraid you will be left, Mary."

"You would like to go as freight?" said Mary.

"Not quite that. For then they would lay me on my back, and put two tea-chests on me, and a log of red-wood on them, and these ingots of silver on them, and lock the car door for ten days."

"You would arrive breathless, like a messenger in a novel."

"Yes, and my clothes would need brushing. But we might all three have been sent not as freight, but as parcels, by Adams's Express. We could have been tied up in brown paper, like dolls. They could have marked us, 'This side up with care.' We should go by 'great speed,' as they say in France. We should not have to pay a cabman when we arrived in Columbus, and we should have, to spend at the theatre, all the money these blessed through tickets have cost us."

"Minus what we paid the expressman."

"No, madam. For that we have provided independently. For the hard-earned specie which I gave to yonder bloated conductor for our Pullman section, and which our friend here has paid for hers, would more than satisfy the greed of the express company. I am tall but thin. I should not measure more than six cubic feet. I should first tie up both you ladies back to back, and you would not together measure more than eight feet. It is not too late now. I will go and speak to the express agent."

And he pretended to leave them. But at this moment the train conductor touched his hat, and said: "Please get on board again, sir. I shall start the train a little before time. It is beginning to snow above us, and my plough is at station one hundred and three. I should rather be there before the snow gathers."

So they tumbled into the car. But in this nonsense of Hector's the ice was broken, and Mary and Black Ribbons took seats twenty-three and twenty-four, when they returned to the car, while Hector went forward and found company in the smoking-car.

Black Ribbons proved to be going to the East for the first time she could remember. Her father had been a superintendent in a queer sort of mine, if you may so call it, which was covered by every tide of the Pacific, twice in twenty-four hours. When the waters receded, they could work the gold-besprent sand. When the waters gathered again, they slept, or ate, or played poker, I suppose. Mining with such limitations had not rendered much profit. The child who grew up in such queer surroundings was by far the best dividend her father and mother had won from them.