

**CHRISTMAS EVE,
AND NEW
YEAR'S EVE**

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Christmas eve, and New Year's eve by Amy Campbell

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BY
AMY CAMPBELL.

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CHRISTMAS EVE.

CHAPTER I.

DEAR children, did you ever hear of the Harz Mountains? They are not in Great Britain, not in England, Scotland, Ireland, or Wales; they are in Germany. How well do I remember them! Not barren, sterile, and rugged in their beauty, like some of the mountains of Scotland; but fertile and graceful, clothed with the varying tints of fir, beech, and oak. Then from their heights one can see the little picturesque villages, with their red-tiled roofs, dotted here and there over the landscape, nestling into the valleys like loving children seeking for rest, and so shut in by the mountains that they seem to form little kingdoms of themselves, and dreamily to let life go on. Ah! a passing sunbeam lets us catch

glimpse of the rivers which now and then wind their way, like silver threads, through valleys and villages, murmuring softly to the mountain peasants strange tales and legends of those old mountains—of the witches who still dance in weird-like confusion, of the steed who sprang across a deep gulf, from mountain to mountain, leaving on one of them the impression of its hoof, which can never be effaced.

They have also true stories to tell—of the old German kings, who built fortresses and defended themselves against the attacks of the foe; of the robber chiefs, who, from their high towers, whence they could overlook the surrounding countries, used to pounce upon the wayfarers, rob and plunder them.

You boys would like to hear about a good skirmish. Well, perhaps some other day, when I have time; but I have wandered too far already, for I wanted to tell you the story of little Gretchen Härtel, whose home is in one of those little villages I mentioned before as nestling into a valley.

Gretchen Härtel is the daughter of the

village schoolmaster, and she has never known any other home than the little red-tiled house, with the wooded mountains rising behind it, a silvery river flowing in front, spanned by a little rustic bridge, which forms the means of communication between the schoolmaster's house and the rest of the village.

The schoolmaster is a very important personage in this small community. He is the village oracle. The man who has saved a little money carefully communicates it to Herr Härtel, and begs him to tell him ways and means of laying it out in the most profitable manner. The mother who has received a letter from her son, far away in business, comes to Herr Härtel to have many passages read and explained. The child who has dirtied her clean pinafore seeks out the schoolmaster to act as her mediator. On all such occasions where his advice is sought, Herr Härtel adjusts his spectacles, crosses his arms over his dusty coat, sits down to consider the matter in hand, and after due consideration returns his verdict.

But he is a different person when, 180 children having plodded their way homewards across the little bridge, school and consultations over, he enters the small sitting-room, where supper is spread on the round table, and Gretchen his only child, with hair smoothed and a clean pinafore on, anxiously waits for the well-known step on the stairs. Then the spectacles are taken off, the dusty coat laid aside for a larger and more comfortable one, the feet thrust into slippers, Gretchen's smooth head patted, and all sit down with good appetite to the fare spread before them—potatoes in their skins, Harz cheese and butter, a huge loaf of black bread, and a large pewter jug full of beer.

Little is spoken during the meal, the clattering of knives and forks tells that all are busy. Frau Härtel now and then speaks in undertones to the servant-maid sitting next her (a stout strongly-built girl, with coarse features, and a mass of thick black hair tightly drawn off her face, and twined with black velvet into a massive coil at the back) *about the next day's cleaning, baking, or*

washing, but so low as not to disturb her husband, whom she seems to hold in great reverence.

The meal ended, Frau Härtel and the servant begin clearing away, making more clatter than such an occasion warrants. Herr Härtel, however, seems quite accustomed to it, and does not mind. He has been furnished with his ever dear companion, a long pipe, reaching to the ground, and seated in an immense arm-chair near the stove, he puffs away, totally regardless of the clouds of smoke that quickly fill the apartment.

It was in the beginning of December, the weather was piercingly cold, snow lay thick on the ground, and covered the mountains with a hard, crisp, glistening carpet. All the lakes and the ponds in the district were thickly frozen over with ice, and many feared that soon the murmuring river would be stopped in its peaceful course, and detained prisoner by the fetters of "King Frost."

But in Herr Härtel's little sitting-room little of the cold is felt. The double shutters have been securely closed, and the stove