

month, so you can get all tiresome business finished by then," persisted Charlotte.

"You must come and visit us also," said Fred Weston. "Indeed you must. We shall expect you," chimed in the brother and sister.

"You see you are in for it," said Charlotte, gaily tapping his hand as it lay on the table near her. "So submit, sir, with a good grace."

"My dear children," answered Uncle Caleb, looking rather confused, but very happy, "it is impossible for me to accept any of your invitations to return with you on the 14th, for—for I am going to be married in the following week."

A profound silence ensued. They all saw at once that he was not joking, and yet could neither realise nor understand this sudden announcement.

"Yes, my dear children," continued Uncle Caleb, "I am going to marry a lady whom I deeply loved and from whom I was separated when I was young. That lady is Frances' mother."

As no one ventured a remark their uncle continued—

"I hope this will not be the only Christmas we shall spend together. You must all come and see us often."

"Thank you, uncle. Thanks. We will keep you to your word," came from the Westons and Stephen Boyd. Neither Charlotte nor her brother made any response.

"Perhaps there is something else that I ought to say to you, though the time has not yet come that I had proposed to myself to speak on the subject.

"When I asked you all to spend a month

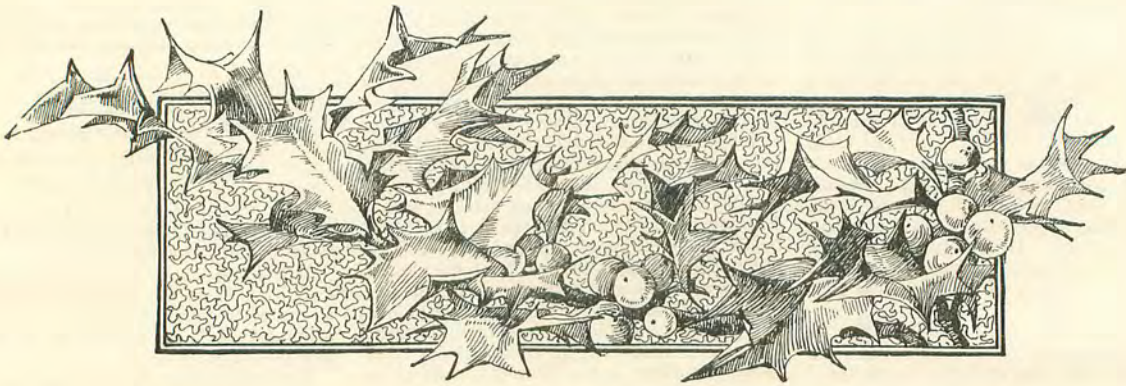
with me, I had resolved to choose from among you—if I could do so—one I considered suitable to make my heir. You will all agree with me that circumstances have in a measure helped to decide that question. But I may as well tell you that my choice is made. Frances, whom I hope shortly to own as daughter, may eventually become my heiress.

"Now, my dear children, I must beg you all to excuse me for I am very tired. Good-night."

As Caleb Ayres walked slowly along the passage his heart swelled with gratitude, and his eyes were misty with the unshed tears of a great happiness.

"My God, I thank thee," he murmured, "Thy way is best. Thy gift has not come too late. My times are in Thy hands."

THE END.



DIAMOND CUT DIAMOND.

A CHRISTMAS ENTERTAINMENT.

By SOMERVILLE GIBNEY, Author of "A Friend in Need," "By Parcel Post," "Speaking Likenesses," &c.



In recent years there have appeared in these pages, about Christmas-time, entertainments suitable for a small number of performers, with a limited space at their command; but, as I have each time owned, they have not been absolutely new, in that they were performed at the house of Mrs. Greyden before they appeared in the "G.O.P." This year, however, I propose giving you one that is absolutely new, as it has never been performed anywhere.

They say there is a charm about novelty, and on this account it may be acceptable. I have framed it on the same lines as the previous ones, viz., that it requires only a small number of performers, that no large platform is requisite, and that it provides for the distribution of presents. It is therefore applicable to school treats as well as private parties, where young people always appreciate their gifts more if accompanied by a certain amount of mystery in their production.

Let me start by saying there is no real difficulty in what I am going to set before you that cannot easily be overcome by fertile brains and active hands, and, acting on the rule I have hitherto followed, I will first give you the words and directions for performance, and then such further hints as may be necessary.

Performers:

WINTER.

DISCONTENT.

GOODWILL.

And two Pages or Attendants to GOODWILL (if preferred).

SCENE.

(A rocky cavern, with opening at back. The lights are low and blue. On the curtain being raised WINTER is discovered seated on a piece of rock in the cave.)

WINTER. There is a saying "Each dog has his day,"

And if that's true, well, then, perhaps, I may
Be fortunate in this respect as well;
Though why I should thus draw a parallel
Between myself, being Winter, and a hound
I cannot give a reason really sound,
Although I know a sad dog some folks dub me;
Still low abuse does not the wrong way rub me.
I'm Winter, and as such have my employment,
And with it what to me is great enjoyment.
My stay in England always is but brief,
And my departure some think a relief.
The way last Spring and Summer lingered here
Most anxious made me, and caused me to fear
That I should be excluded altogether,
And Christmas would be spent in scorching weather.
But here I am, and my intention now is
To make up for lost time, and show my prowess.
I'll let folks know, and knowing they shall rue,
What Winter, when he's put to it can do.
I'll rain, I'll hail, and vary this with snow;
And in between times, for a change, I'll blow,
Not genial airs, but downright blinding blizzards;
For as to storms I've all the skill of wizards.
I'll start this minute, just to let folks see
What they, poor souls, may now expect of me.

[Rises, and taking his staff, waves it slowly in all directions during the following, which he speaks slowly.]

Black clouds arise,
Blot out the skies.
Blow high, blow low,
Come hail! come snow!

Stern warfare wage,
And tear and rage.
And in an icy shroud, and cold,
The shivering, trembling world enfold.

[*Sounds of a fierce tempest with rain and hail are heard outside. WINTER stands quite still for a time, listening, then seating himself.*]

That's set them going, what a noise! Oh dear!
It's glorious the howling wind to hear,
I must be in it. [*Rises to go out.*]

(*A voice heard outside.*) Hollo, there, I say!

WINTER (*laughing*). There's some poor wretch—

(*A voice.*) Who's that? I've lost my way.
Where am I? Give me shelter. I'm half dead
With cold and snow and wet.

WINTER (*at entrance and speaking off*). Come straight ahead.
There's shelter here. Now mind that rock.

(*A voice.*) I see. My word! it is an awful night. All right,

[*Enter DISCONTENT shaking a cloud of snow off her head and shoulders.*]

So unexpectedly it came on, too.
Why, Winter! you don't mean to say that's you?

WINTER. What, Discontent! It's you, my lady, is it,
Upon your way to pay your yearly visit?
We always meet.

DISCONTENT. Now, Winter, it's too bad
To play a trick like this, and send half mad
The elements about my ears to-night;
A joke's a joke, but this is far from right,
There's no fun in it, none at least for me.

WINTER. I'm sorry, Discontent; but then you see
I'd no idea—

DISCONTENT. Oh, nonsense! No excuse,
You know with me they're not the slightest use.
I'm up to all your ways—

WINTER. But, Discontent,
I didn't mean—

DISCONTENT. No matter what you meant,
Just stop this noise, and let me speak in peace;

WINTER (*waving his wand*). Wind, storm, snow, hail, shut up,
your turmoil cease. [*Instant silence.*]

DISCONTENT. That's better; now then, what's all this about?
And why this dreadful atmospheric rout?
You've got a finger in it, come now?

WINTER. Yes;
You're not so very far out in your guess.
The fact is simply this, last spring and summer
Were so superb, I feared the latest comer.

DISCONTENT. You mean yourself?

WINTER. Just so; might underrated
Be, or scoffed at, so I contemplated
A little taste of what I really *could* do,
And what, as days and weeks went on, I should do.

DISCONTENT. Quite right, for mortals very uppish get,
And fancy they must have, now dry, now wet,
Just as it suits them.

WINTER. No, it will not do
To pander to their fancies; but then you
Don't do it.

DISCONTENT. No. I act up to my name,
I'm Discontent, and make some mortals blame
Most things.

WINTER (*laughing*). You do; your nature is not sweet,
For disagreeableness you're hard to beat.
Now I'll be bound that in your bag you've got
Of ills and trials quite a pretty lot.

DISCONTENT. You're right, I have, a really choice collection,
There are some outside, quite worthy your inspection.

[*She undoes a bag she is carrying, and takes from it parcels, as required.*]

Look here (*holding up parcel*), this is a gross or two of colds,
And this sore throats and influenza holds, (*holding up another*)
Chilblains and hotaches for the hands and toes, (*another*)
And this is for young ladies, marked "red nose"; (*another*)

Burst water-pipes, which mortals do not much like, (*another*)
And here are frozen greenhouses and such-like; (*another*)
This one is loss of work (*another*), and this, you see, (*another*)
Contains a mass of want and misery.
I've here a batch of falls and accidents,
And broken limbs make up this one's contents;
Besides all these—

WINTER. Oh, thank you, that will do,
I shall receive, I see, much help from you.
And we shall little difficulty find
In making these poor mortals keep in mind
For years to come this season, as the one
In which they'd all the kicks and little fun.

DISCONTENT. Let's start at once, I'm sheltered now and warm,
So just turn on again that awful storm,
'Twill set some people shivering.

WINTER. All right,
We'll start our season with an awful night!

[*Rising and waving his wand as before.*]

Black clouds arise,
Blot out the skies,
Stern warfare wage,
And tear and rage;
Blow high, blow low,
Come hail, come snow,
And in an icy shroud and cold,
The shivering, trembling world enfold.

[*The noise of the storm is heard outside as before.*]

DISCONTENT. That's grand, I love the sound when I'm in shelter,
Just hark how it is hailing helter-skelter.

WINTER. Yes, listen to the hurricane too! This
A real good storm is (*sounds cease suddenly*). Hollo! what's
amiss?

There's something wrong; they've stopped!

DISCONTENT. What can it be?

WINTER. I can't conceive. I'll just run out and see.

[*Going, when he is met at the door by GOODWILL, at the same moment the lights are turned up, and change from blue to rose, and the scene becomes bright and warm-looking, and WINTER and DISCONTENT huddle together in the farthest corner away from GOODWILL, as if in terror.*]

GOODWILL. Ah, yes! just what I thought might be the case.
No wonder you don't like to see my face.

WINTER (*aside to DIS.*). Goodwill! We're done for!

GOODWILL. Raising such a storm,
And you yourselves in shelter, snug and warm.
However, Winter, I have scotched your spite
And bottled up your malice for to-night.

DISCONTENT (*aside*). Just like her impudence, this domineering.
I hate Goodwill, she's always interfering.

WINTER (*aside*). It is too bad.

GOODWILL. Who have you with you there?
What, Discontent! A very pretty pair!
No wonder mischief was abroad! No doubt
You quite expected not to be found out.
But I won't have it, Winter. Do you hear? (*decidedly*)
It's perfectly disgusting! you appear
To fancy you can do just what you please,
Send snow and hail in showers, blow, and freeze,
As if the place belonged to you. But I
Won't have it, as I said; I'll tell you why—
You're sent here to do good, not ill, and so
I don't object to now and then some snow,
And ice in reason, also wind and rain,
When through them Earth can some advantage gain;
But if you send them only out of spite,
At once I'll stop them, as I've done to-night;
And further, you will give of all you do
A strict account—

WINTER (*sullenly*). What! give account to you?
I'll not.

GOODWILL. You will, or else, my friend, you'll rue it.
You'd better settle once for all to do it;
For if you don't—but there— Now, Discontent,
A word with you. You're not like Winter, sent—

DISCONTENT. No, rather not.

GOODWILL. But come of your free will,
Yet when you come you bring no good, but ill.

DISCONTENT (*aside*). Just listen to her.

GOODWILL. Now then, I'll be bound
A mass of trouble might on you be found.
What have you in that bag?

DISCONTENT (*impudently*). What's that to you?
The bag's my own.

GOODWILL. Hollo! This will not do (*looks fixedly and sternly at DISCONTENT, who cowers back and slowly opens the bag she carries*).

Now, Discontent, be careful; you know well
You're powerless before my potent spell.
Produce what you have there, and if I see
That you have tried to steal a march on me,
Then woe betide you. Quick now, hand them out.
What's this? (*Taking a packet which DISCONTENT hands her.*)

DISCONTENT. Bad colds.

GOODWILL (*taking another*). And this sore throats, no doubt.

DISCONTENT (*handing another*). Chilblains and hotaches.

GOODWILL. One might well suppose
You would not spare the young. What's this (*reading*) "Red
Nose,"

You wretch! (*to DISCONTENT*).

DISCONTENT (*handing another*). Burst water-pipes.

GOODWILL. It's clear.

You've—

DISCONTENT (*handing another*). Frozen greenhouses.

GOODWILL. No business here.

Give me them all, and those you left outside

[DISCONTENT turns out her bag, and brings in the other parcels, putting them all down together.]

You needn't think that I can be defied.
Your spite I'll bring to naught (*standing over the parcels with outstretched hands*). It is my will
That each and all be changed to good from ill.
They're harmless now; indeed they each contain
Something that pleasure will afford, not pain—
Now, Discontent, begone. At this glad season
Your presence here is nothing short of treason.

DISCONTENT. But may I not?—

GOODWILL. At once begone, I say,
Nor dare to linger longer.

[*Exit DISCONTENT, WINTER is following.*]

Winter, stay,

Your time's not up, and as a punishment
For what you did in spite, you shall present
These gifts to those for whom they are intended.
And take care that henceforth your ways are mended,
So that in future mortals may have reason
To speak of Winter as a merry season.

DISTRIBUTION OF PRESENTS.

And now then for the *modus operandi*. As to the curtain and the proscenium, I have recently in "Speaking Likenesses" given full instruction with regard to them, so that I need only refer my readers to that article. For the scene itself a rocky cavern will be most effective, and there is no difficulty in this. I gave instructions how it was to be managed in an article in one of the Christmas Numbers, headed "A Friend in Need," but as some of my present readers may not have seen it, I may say that the rocks are formed by sheets of brown paper crumpled up and sewn on to canvas, which is either nailed to frames or hung from cords, stretched out of sight above the proscenium. The brown paper can be made more effective by being painted here and there to deepen the shadows, when the canvas is hung in its place. A roof can also be formed in the same way, but this should not be stretched too tightly, but allowed to sag down in the middle, thus giving the effect of naturally uneven rockwork. In the present case an opening can be left at the back through which the performers may enter, but then a back cloth must be painted with a wintry scene. This would not be a difficult task to some, for the opening need not be a large one; and the effect would be greatly enhanced. The floor of the cavern should be covered with brown canvas or holland to represent sand, and a few stones or rocks lying about would help the illusion.

The lights should be hung as described in the entertainment "Speaking

Likenesses," with the addition of one behind the canvas on which the rocks are fastened, pointing on the back cloth, otherwise this would hardly be seen. Sheets of blue gelatine or pieces of blue glass fixed in front of the lamps will give the cold, dim light requisite during the first portion of the entertainment, and these can be quickly changed for red ones on the entrance of Goodwill, when the lights will of course be turned up to their full. Several careful rehearsals of the lighting should be held before the performance, when the best effects will be discovered, for it may be that it will be found sufficient to have only one of the lamps lighting the interior of the cave with the red glass in front, and the other merely the plain white light.

The sound of the hail is obtained by allowing peas to fall upon a sheet of cardboard from some little height, and the moaning of the wind is managed by a piece of silk stretched over a wheel.

Of course these effects must be carefully rehearsed, as a good deal of the picturesqueness of the performance will depend upon their being well executed; they should attain their full power when the characters are silent, and gradually sink so as not to interfere with the words. Use them at all rehearsals so that those who manage them may be fully up to their duties, and the performers may grow accustomed to the noise and not be distracted by it.

Winter should be represented by a male, and should be clad in a grey robe down to his feet, edged with ermine or fur, and tied with a girdle round his waist. His head should be covered by a hood, part of the garment also edged in the same way. He should have a wig of straggling grey hair, and grey eyebrows made, as I have often previously described, of *crepe* hair, but no beard or moustache. His face should be made up old, lantern-jawed, and sallow. You will find grease paints the best to work with, and the easiest to get rid of after the performance if the face is well rubbed with vaseline before washing in warm water. Winter's nose should be decidedly red towards the tip, and you may make this more or less pointed by the aid of spirit-gum and cotton wool. I may here mention that there is a book published on making up, which may be obtained through any bookseller's, in which you will find directions for representing any class of face that may be desired. Care must be taken that Winter is not confused with Father Christmas, but this can be avoided by giving him a thin, pinched, miserable look, instead of a jovial, merry, good-tempered one. In this performance it will be seen that the worst side of Winter's character is brought to the front, and his face must be a reflex of it.

Discontent may be represented by either a male or female as may be found most convenient, but if by the latter she must not hesitate to sacrifice every atom of her good looks to the character. Discontent, as her name implies, is a disagreeable, vixenish old hag, soured in temper and looks. She also should be in grey with bare skinny arms, and a hood or cloak over her head, beneath which grey elf locks should appear, falling partly over her face, which should be very sallow and withered-looking, the corners of the mouth must be shaded to give the appearance of being drawn down, and the forehead must be well wrinkled, while two short, dark lines going straight upwards from the inner ends of the eyebrows will give a cross, ill-tempered expression. Her disagreeable appearance may be heightened by depriving her of most of her front teeth. There will be no need of a dentist to effect the operation, it will be quite sufficient to stick black court plaster on those you wish to disappear, and at a few feet distant the effect will be complete.

In direct contrast, in every way, to these two characters must be Goodwill, who will be sure to carry off the sympathies of the audience. Her representative should be young and nice-looking. She must dress in any flowing robe of white (of course not of a modern fashion), which may be relieved by a gold belt or some gold embroidery, but not put on too heavily. Her hair should be worn down her back and a diamond star in the front would heighten the effect. Her arms and neck should be bare. The only jewels she should wear must be diamonds, and not too many of them. Her character is a bright and happy one, and this should be reflected in her dress and appearance. A little rouge should be used, and the eyelashes lined as I have given directions in former articles.

The snow which Discontent shakes off on her entrance is formed of coarse powdered salt, sprinkled over her just before she appears. The parcels of "troubles" which she carries are of course the presents intended to be given to the guests, and they may be done up in any way most convenient.

And now what more is there to say, save my oft-repeated direction, rehearse, rehearse, rehearse, till the whole thing goes like clockwork. Let the representatives of Winter and Discontent remember that they are not to expect a particle of sympathy from their audience, and that if they get it they may know they have not performed their part properly. They are the villains of the piece, and the greatest compliments they can receive is to be soundly hissed. Goodwill may have two pages attending her if it is found convenient, and space is sufficiently large, but if she has them, they should also attend rehearsals though they have not a word to say, because they must learn where to stand so as not to get in the way of the others; as to their dress I may leave that to the taste of my readers, only imploring them not to allow them to appear in anything in modern fashion; and now then go to work, and may success attend your efforts.