

A FRIEND IN NEED.

By SOMERVILLE GIBNEY, Author of "Something New," "A Christmas Surprise."

THE possession of a character for originality and invention has its drawbacks as well as its advantages, and no one will be more ready to back me up in this assertion than Mrs. Greyden, the lady at whose house the representations of the "White World" and "Father Christmas" were given, chronicled and explained in the last two Christmas numbers of this paper. After her first success with the "White World" it cost the hostess many hours of cogitation and thought before she evolved the "sell" of having a tree with only trumpery presents, reserving the proper ones to be brought in by King Christmas just when the guests were very down in the mouth at having been "done." But her puzzling then was as nothing to what she underwent on the last occasion. What could she have? What new idea could she hit on that would be a surprise to everyone? For Mrs. Greyden's guests had learnt to consider that half the pleasure of her Christmas entertainments lay in the surprises she was wont to spring upon them; and desperate and ingenious, though always unsuccessful, were the attempts made in Langton to gain a clue as to what was going to take place on the eventful night. What could she do this year? Councils of war were held behind closed doors, and many suggestions were made and discussed only to be dismissed as useless, till it really seemed as though all efforts would end in nothing, and she would have to fall back upon the commonplace Christmas tree. But this thought was too humiliating to be contemplated for a moment, and the very idea of such a thing was the final spur needed. Like a flash a notion came across Mrs. Greyden. She imparted it to her sub-officer, and—*Eureka!* the thing was done. Well, hardly done. I am getting on a little too fast; but the idea was found, and it only remained to work it out. How it was worked out I will endeavour to explain later, but first I propose to tell what took place from the point of view of one of the numerous guests, who, shortly after eight o'clock had struck on the eventful evening, commenced to arrive in crowds at "Merlyn," the name of Mrs. Greyden's house.

As usual, the entertainment commenced

with tea and coffee in the morning-room, and during the conversation and gossip which took place there, many speculations were hazarded as to what was coming next. Some felt confident that a return would be made to the old-fashioned Christmas tree, but this was strongly doubted by one ingenious and observant lady, who had noticed that the words "Christmas tree" were not to be found in the corner of the invitation cards, as on previous occasions. The excitement was further increased when Mrs. Greyden slipped from the room and did not return, leaving Mr. Greyden to act as host and hostess combined. But the suspense was soon ended when a gong sounded, and a general move was made upstairs to the room in which the Christmas tree had previously been held. This room, I should state, had a large bow window, taking up nearly the whole of one end. But no bow window was visible now. In its place was a massive rocky cave, the dim recesses—for so they appeared from the front—of which seemed to run back some distance, being only faintly illumined by four candles in tin sconces placed on the floor between the audience and the cave. A rope stretched across the room served as a further barrier, the use of which will be made clear later. There was no doubt about the cave—walls, sides, and roof were as rugged and uneven as you could wish, and on the floor, leaning against the sides, were piles of loose rocks and blocks of stone. The floor of the cave looked sandy, and there were two masses of rock bigger than the rest, one of which stood nearly in the centre, the other close against one of the sides. The view of the cave from the front was like that shown in the illustration. As soon as the audience had settled themselves, and their eyes had grown accustomed to the dim light, a figure appeared from the depths of the cave, leaning on a staff, and hobbled forward to the lesser rock, and, attempting to sit down, made a bad shot and nearly landed on the floor; a second attempt was, however, much more successful. The figure was that of an old man bent and crippled with age, and wearing a high conical cap of red with an edging of fur. His hair fell over his shoulders in black ringlets, and



his eyebrows and long drooping moustache (like some Chinamen wear), were jet black also. His face was very sallow and deeply lined, and his eyes twinkled and flashed with a curious mystic green light. He was clad in a long red gown that reached to his feet, which was bordered with the signs of the zodiac, and planets in black, while under his left arm he carried a leather-bound volume. He appeared somewhat exhausted on taking his seat, but recovering his breath said—

At home at last! and I've not made a sou
Although I've tramped the whole place
through and through.

Oh, dear! it's warm—it's more than that,
it's hot,

And very trying is this chimney-pot—(re-
moving conical cap).

It's hot without it, with this fur it's hotter:
Fur (*far*) 'otter? Oh!—(laughs)—I've made

a joke, and not a
Bad one either, it will do to crack

In next year's issue of my Almanack.

Yes, times are bad; of that there is no
doubt;

There seems to be so little cash about,
Or, if there is it does not come my way—
The cash from me is certainly *caché*.

Another joke! What are we coming to?

A pretty question that to come from you,
You, Zadkiel, astrologer and seer,
Magician, wizard, who sees all things clear,

Or should do. But alas! the fact
is, you

Have grown quite rusty having
naught to do.

Yes, so it is, and since good work
I lack,

I've sunk to editing an Almanack.
And yet there was a time when I,
you know,

Was looked upon as being quite
the go;

When ladies, kings, M.P.'s, and
M.P.ors—(Emperors),

And crowds of lesser fry flocked
round my doors,

Intent upon soliciting my aid—
And very well this class of people
paid.

Some at the future came to take
a peep,

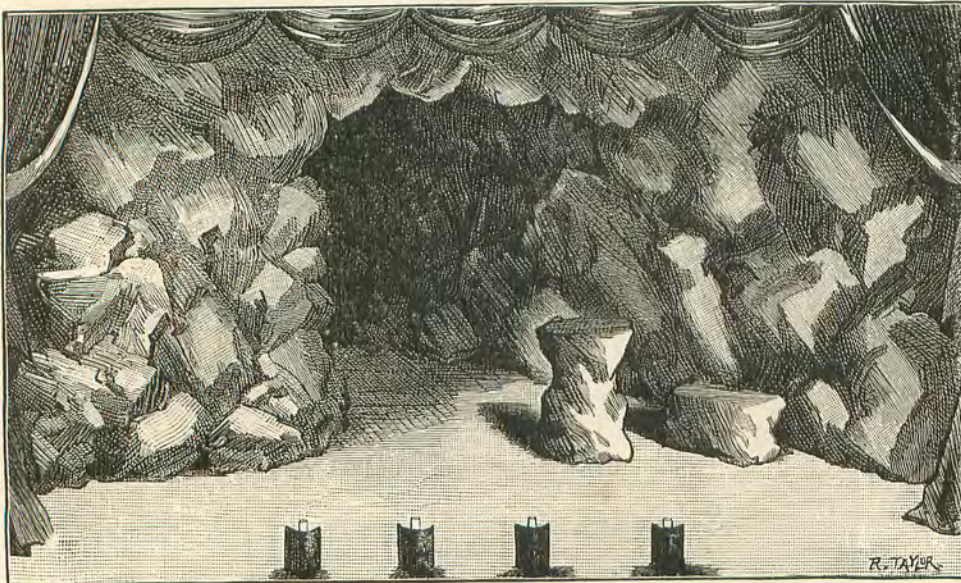
Nor tried to beat me down to get
it cheap;

Some wanted foes bewitched,
enchanted, banned,

And have through me revenge
by magic planned;

And some young ladies wished
their fortunes told:

Then none would cross their hands
with less than gold.



THE GROTTO.

But my love philtres no one else could touch,
All lovers said there were not any such;
So sure and certain no one could withstand them,
No matter whom you dosed, 'twas sure to land them.

I didn't even have to advertise,
But got four shillings small, and six large size.

And ladies oftentimes would me engage
For their "At Homes," since I was quite the rage;

And those *réunions* where I did not show
Were not considered *chic*, but awful slow.
I used to tell folks' cards, or puddings cook
In hats, or in the misty future look,
As written on the palm of some fair hand;
Or tables I would cause to dance and stand
On naught. In short, I made myself of use
The guests so limp and *blasé* to amuse.
But times are changed. Love philtres now
don't sell;

Folks fancy they can make love just as well
Themselves. Now no one is enchantment wanting,

Since ladies in these days are all enchanting.
And as for magic—every boy in jackets
Now buys it by the shillingsworth in packets,
So common is it. As for palmistry,
Most people know much more of it than me—

Than I do, I should say. My grammar's bad—

But so is business, which is much more sad.
By table-turning a good sum I've earned:

The tables now, alas! on me are turned;
And with me spirit-rapping's a dead letter,
And its returns are not a rap the better.

And I, a wizard of the highest class,
Am, as I said, reduced to such a pass
I'm forced an Almanack to write and edit,
And even that some people want on credit.

I, Zadkiel, astrologer and seer,
Brought down to this! It's heart-breaking!
And here

My printer writes—(taking out letter, and reading)—

"Send on some 'comic pars'

To brighten up the stuff about the stars,
Which no one reads; also at the same time
You might include some topical smart rhyme,
And half a dozen jokes; the thing's too flat."
Jokes in astrology! (*Knock heard.*) Oh,
dear! What's that?

The rates, no doubt—(*knock*)—or p'raps the
income-tax;

They levy that, alas! on almanacks. (*Knock.*)
They're in a hurry. (*Knock.*) I'd best see
who is it

Intent on paying this—(*knock*)—knockturnal
visit.

(*Rises, goes to back, looks out, then hurries
back, resumes his cap, and opens volume on
his knee.*)

(*Aside.*) A customer! A good impression
made

At first is half the battle in my trade.
(*Aloud, solemnly.*) Enter, whoe'er thou art,
these mystic rocks;

Thy *blows* should stamp thee as the equi-
knocks.

(*Enter a neat maid-servant, JENNIE. She
is out of breath. ZADKIEL does not raise his
head.*)

JENNIE. Oh! mister—sir—your worship!
(*Aside.*) Terror thrills—

ZADKIEL. My name is Zadkiel. On the
Grampian Hills

My father— No, he doesn't.
[*Raises his head and looks at her.*]

JENNIE (*screaming*). Oh!
He's uglier far than a November guy!

ZADKIEL. What would you? But I know
your grief, fair maid:
You're crossed in love, and come to me for
aid.

I've just the thing—

JENNIE. Your honour—mister—sir—

ZADKIEL. I'm Zadkiel (*taking up bottle*).
My world-famed love philtre,
It's swift—

JENNIE. Oh, sir—

ZADKIEL. In action, and quite sure,
Six doses will most stubborn cases cure.

JENNIE. But, Mr. Zadkiel, I am not—

ZADKIEL. I see:
It's highly thought of by the facultee.

JENNIE. But I don't want a—

ZADKIEL. Perhaps not, but it wise is
To be prepared. I have it in two sizes;
The small, four shillings, and the large one
six;

One bottle of the latter's sure to fix
The heart of any youth as fast as glue—
Now come, I'll say *ten bob* if you'll take
two?

JENNIE. No, Mr. Zadkiel! no. Such
things I scorn;

You seem to take me for a maid forlorn.
I'm come from mistress, whose distress is
great;

She says she's sure you'll pity her sad state,
And p'raps will help her.

ZADKIEL. What is she to me?
But, first of all, just tell me who is she?

JENNIE. Why, Mrs. Greyden!

ZADKIEL. What, of "Merlyn"?

JENNIE. Yes.

ZADKIEL. And she, you say, is now in
great distress?

JENNIE. And wants your help.

ZADKIEL. Then hers it is instanter;
Go, bring her here at once. Be off—Trot—
Canter!

[*Exit JENNIE at back of cave.*]

Of course I'll help her. She ne'er fails to buy
My Almanack, and reads it too; so I
Will do my best her troubles to allay.
I wonder what has caused them, by the way.
Ah! here she comes—

JENNIE (*speaking without*).
I calls it a disgrace

To look for ladies coming to this place.

Enter Mrs. GREYDEN and JENNIE.

ZADKIEL (*rising and bowing*). Madam,
your humble servant to command.

Mrs. GREYDEN. Oh, Mr. Zadkiel, do you
understand?

I'm in a fix, most awkward and most sad.

JENNIE. Yes. Missus's look-out is down-
right bad.

Mrs. GREYDEN. Jennie, be still!

ZADKIEL (*to Jennie*). Young woman,
cease your chatter.

(*To Mrs. Greyden*). Madam, at once in-
form me what's the matter.

Mrs. GREYDEN. Why, this. My guests
have come, and now—oh, dear!

Old Father Christmas has not; and last year
He brought the presents, as no doubt you
know.

JENNIE. It's what I calls a very pretty go.

Mrs. GREYDEN. Jennie, be quiet! (*To
Zadkiel*). What am I to do?

The shops are closed, and so I come to you,
And ask—

ZADKIEL. But, madam, I do not keep
toys.

I've nothing here for either girls or boys,
Or even grown-up people. I'm afraid
A sad mistake in this case you have made.

Mrs. GREYDEN. Oh, don't say so! You've
surely potent charms?

JENNIE. Of course he has, mum—he's
got them in swarms.

ZADKIEL (*to Mrs. Greyden*). No charms
of mine with your charms can compare.

Mrs. GREYDEN (*severely*). I don't want
compliments, but helping, sir.

(*Coaxing.*) Now, do be kind, and play a
friendly part.

Invoke your skill, and exercise your art.

JENNIE. Yes, do some hankey-pankey.
Presto!—Fly!

ZADKIEL (*to Jennie*). Cease, Chatter-
box! (*To Mrs. Greyden*). Yes, madam,
I will try.

But I perform must weave a potent spell.

(*Mrs. Greyden and Jennie start back.*)

Nay, tremble not, and all may yet be well.
Upon this rock the while a seat pray take.
(*To Jennie*.) And you, young woman, no
remarks must make.

(*Mrs. Greyden sits, with Jennie standing
beside her. Zadkiel raises a flame in the
hollow of the rock in the middle of the cave.
He then draws a magic circle round it with
his wand, doing everything most impressively.
Then, standing behind, with his wand in his
left hand, he raises his arms over the flames,
and chants in a slow, solemn tone—*)

Winds and storms that rage, be still!
Peace! all elements of ill.
Thunder rolls, and Tempest shrieks,
Silence all! 'Tis Zadkiel speaks.

See the lambent flames arise,
Mystic rites to solemnise.
Into them some "thought" we throw—
(*drops in packet of coloured fire*),
Thought for others, high and low;
Add to it some little "care"—(*drops in
another packet*);

"Trouble," too, we do not spare—
(*another*).

See the bright flames upward swell—
Works the charm, and all is well.

"Self-denial" add to these—(*another*),
And a "heartfelt wish to please"—
(*another*);

"Genial kindness," "mirth," and "fun"
—(*several*)—

The weaving of the spell is done.
See the bright flames upward swell—
Works the charm, and all is well.

Rocks and stones, your nature change—
(*waving arms and wand*);
Suffer transformation strange;
Yield your wealth to waiting hands!
It is Zadkiel commands!

It's finished, madam; I have done my best
To set your grim disquietude at rest.
These stones you'll find are more than they
appear;

Present them to your friends, and have no fear.

Mrs. GREYDEN. Oh, Zadkiel, my
thanks—

Zadkiel thereupon, with a magnificent wave
of the hand and a bow, retired to the back
of the cave, and Jennie, picking up the
seeming rocks and stones which were lying
on the floor, resting against the sides, after
calling out the name inscribed on each,

handed them to Mrs. Greyden, who in turn handed them over the rope to the fortunate recipients, and he or she very quickly found that, owing no doubt to Zadkiel's mystic art, the apparent stony exteriors readily gave way, and revealed inside some pretty or useful gift. And in this way the presents were distributed. But even when they were all gone many people lingered, wishing to inspect more closely the really most natural-looking rock-work; and now, as well as during the presentation, the rope was found most useful in preventing a too close pressure, which had been such a serious drawback the previous year in the case of "King Christmas."

As soon as Mrs. Greyden was again amid her guests, who had retired downstairs in readiness for the conjuring, which, with a supper, formed the remainder of the entertainment, she was greeted with a volley of questions.

"How did you manage that beautiful cave, Mrs. Greyden?" and it is with a view of answering that question in a practical manner for the benefit of you girls who were not present, that this description has been written. It may be that some among you may wish to give an entertainment like Mrs. Greyden's, and I can assure you that you could not well have a more effective one, and that without the expenditure of much money, as far as the scenic effect is concerned. Of course I can only describe how this one was done—mind, was done, so it can be done again—and I must leave it to your ingenuity to make any needful alterations that may be necessary, owing to the different shape of the room or surroundings, in which you propose to construct your cave. The following ground-plan gives you the shape of our bow window as indicated by the dark lines. The first thing done was to



wedge a piece of timber of three inches depth by one and a half inches width (shewn by the dotted lines and marked A, A, A) right across the room between the opposite walls, about four inches below the ceiling; if this is done carefully no damage need happen to the walls, and no nails need be driven in. Another piece, which can be a little less heavy, should be carried from A to the curtain poles: this is also shewn by dotted lines, and marked B, B. When these are securely fastened you can dispense with the services of the carpenter, as the rest you can easily do yourselves. The walls of the cave are shown by the waving lines D, D, D and C, C, C. In Mrs. Greyden's case the groundwork of them was formed of some cheap dark-coloured material, which would afterwards do to make poor children's petticoats and frocks of. You must first of all ascertain the height of A and the curtain poles from the floor, which we will say is ten feet; the material must then be cut into lengths of ten and a half feet, and tacked together. You must also find out how many of such joined widths you will require to form the sides D, D, D and C, C, C, carrying C well within the strut B, B.

Now, then, fasten securely the top of one of these sheets to A, A and B, B, and the top of the other at one end of A, and along the curtain poles, allowing them to hang down loose. You will now have the rough form of the cave, with

the opening between the end of D and C. Behind D, D, D, Zadkiel, Jennie, and Mrs. Greyden remained concealed until the time came for their respective appearances. Next get a large number of sheets of brown paper—the bigger the sheets the better, and they need not all be the same colour or texture. Crumple up a sheet in your arms, allowing it to form what folds it will; then, with a big needle and a very large needleful of thread, tack it on to the hanging material anywhere. This part of the work is best performed by two girls, one standing each side of the cloth and passing the needle through the brown paper and material to each other. You will find a very few stitches will be sufficient to secure the "rock." Treat another sheet in the same manner, and secure it, but do not be particular about it concealing the ground-work entirely; the rougher the work is the better. Continue in this way until your walls are covered with "rocks." You will be surprised how quickly this will be done if there are two or three pairs at work. To form your roof get some more of the material, sufficient to cover the space bounded by A, A in the front, B, B on one side, and C, C, C on the other, and cover this in like manner with rocks. You will best do this while it hangs on a clothes-horse, as it is more easily got at. When it is covered fasten cords to it at various parts along the edges, and by them secure it to A, A, B, B, and the curtain poles, allowing it to sag in the centre, or raising one side or the other, as you may think looks natural.

Now, then, with carpet nails fasten down the lower extremities of the sides D, D and C, C to the floor, pulling them further out into the cave in some places than in others: your extra half-foot will allow of your doing this. You will thus obtain a rough and rugged appear-

ance for your walls which you could not have if they had been stretched on frames. You had better next form with curtains a series of festoons, fastening them with tacks to A, A, A. This gives a finish to the scene, and by cutting off the rockworks suggests to the mind of your audience that it may continue upwards to an indefinite height.

Your next proceeding will be to obtain some very dark colour-wash—blue or maroon, but it must be dark, and mixed with size—and with it paint all the hollows and crannies in the rocks. Dash the colour on with no sparing hand: the rougher the work the more effective you will find it; and if you like, with a much lighter stone colour, you can touch up the more prominent portions. It is best to cover the floor of your cave with old sacking: it looks "sandy," and a few dry fern leaves lying about heightens the effect. For Zadkiel's seat we used an old tea-chest, covering it with brown paper, but stuffing large lumps of other paper between the chest and its covering, to take off its square look. And this is also applicable in doing up the presents. Wherever the article consists of some regular shape, spoil its symmetry by bunches of other paper pushed in under the covering: of course no string must be used, but in its stead sealing-wax. Their appearance will also be greatly added to by the addition of a little paint. The rock for the incantation ceremony we

constructed by the aid of one of those metal washhand stands standing on three legs. We covered it with brown paper, much crumpled, of course leaving the basin at the top open, and in the basin was one of those spirit lamps used by ladies for heating their curling irons. A box of silent matches was also left beside it, and Zadkiel, standing for a moment between the rock and the audience, with his back towards them, had no difficulty in kindling a flame without recourse to black arts. And this brings us to Zadkiel himself. As in the case of "Father Christmas," his representative must be some one who possesses an idea of acting, for his part is a long one, and towards the end affords scope for the display of histrionic powers if he possesses any. Let him rehearse the incantation scene again and again, throwing himself into it heart and soul until he gets a thorough grip of it, and he will find on the night the effect produced will repay his previous exertions. His dress is easily managed; a red flannel dressing-gown, with a border of mystic signs cut out of black paper, and tacked or gummed on, will answer admirably. The cap can be formed of cardboard, and covered with red flannel, and a border of fur. The long black wig can be hired at any hairdresser's; the eyebrows must be large and bushy, and should be made of black crêpe hair, to be obtained at the hairdresser's, and fastened on with spirit-gum. For his sallow complexion I would advise the use of grease paint, also to be obtained from the hairdresser's. It is sold in sticks of various colours, and is applied by rubbing the stick all over the face, and then softening down with the finger; the wrinkles can be marked out with a dark red or brown stick of the same, and softened down as requisite. To obtain the curious green light in the eyes get a sheet of green foil (price twopence) at a tinsel shop, and with a pair of scissors cut out two crescents large enough to fit on the upper eyelids—you may have to trim them a little before you get them to fit properly—and then, shutting each eye in turn, apply them with spirit-gum, and hold them on for a minute, when they will be quite secure. As the eyelids move the foil catches the light, and produces an effect that puzzles those who are not in the secret. For the coloured fires in the incantation scene you had better buy a packet of "drawing-room coloured fire," supposed to be without smoke or smell, at any good pyrotechnist's, and make up little packets of it the size of a very small marble in tissue paper, which at the proper times you drop into the flame of the spirit lamp. One word more to Zadkiel, and a most important one. Don't hurry the incantation. Take it very slowly: give each packet time to go off before adding the next ingredient to the charm. Be mysterious, impressive, and solemn. As to the other two characters; the hostess will of course appear in her evening costume, and Jennie should be dressed as a neat parlour-maid, in a black dress, with white bib apron and cap. It will be as well if both of them apply a little rouge, and Jennie can put a dark line round her eyes close to the eyelashes, as this heightens the brilliancy of the eyes.

And now I think I have given all instructions necessary. The remaining requisites are heads screwed on the right way, willing and clever hands, a determination to make the affair a success, and, last of all, rehearsals—rehearsals—rehearsals, until it goes like clockwork. From the length and fulness of these instructions some girls may imagine the matter to be a very difficult one, but I can assure you it is not so, and what little trouble it may cause you will be amply repaid by the pleasure and entertainment you will give your guests. And now, wishing you every success, I leave you to brown paper, colour-wash, and needle and thread.