

DOBSONIAN CHRISTMAS GIFTS.

BY THE AUTHOR OF "A GENERAL SMASH," ETC.

"'Twas the night before Christmas, when all through the house,
Not a creature was stirring, not even a mouse. . . .
And mamma in her kerchief, and I in my cap,
Had just settled ourselves for a long winter's nap."

THIS much of the old Christmas story was extremely true of the Dobsons at the particular time I am going to tell you about, for it was the night before Christmas, having just struck eleven on the parlor mantel-piece by the clock that made so much noise about all its performances. You could hear them distinctly in the room overhead—and Mr. and Mrs. Dobson wore respectively kerchief and cap—presuming the words to designate the masculine and feminine of the same noun—Mrs. Dobson's with a high crown, and nicely fluted, tied beneath her chin; Mr. Dobson's of many-colored silks curiously netted together, with a lengthy tassel depending on one side. Fortunately the mice kept quiet, for—whisper it softly—the lady being of a certain, or, in other words, *uncertain* age, when wooed and won by her present lord, retained a spinster's lively horror of "mice and men," so that no napping would have been possible had the little animals referred to felt inclined for a nocturnal ramble; and you may be sure, when Mrs. Dobson was wakeful, Mr. Dobson's chances for slumber were reduced to a veritable minimum.

I have omitted some of the intermediate lines of the poem, because there were no little Dobsons nestled snug in their beds, while visions of sugar-plums danced in their heads, and, consequently, no stockings were hung "by the chimney with care, in hopes that St. Nicholas soon would be there." An elongated brown cotton stocking, belonging, no doubt, to some one, and a short, blue woollen sock, the property perhaps of some one else, had been produced and taken into consideration, but the proceeding was finally voted nonsensical by the wise old people, who feared being the cause of concealed mirth to Betty the housemaid should those extremes in the hose department be seen solemnly hanging beneath the chimney for St. Nicholas to fill. These ancient lovers were very childish, at times, and I fancy it was with considerable regret the stockings were at length quietly returned to their respective drawers. They

had had their little talk after the light had been put out, and Mr. Dobson taken the flying leap necessary to land him in the heap of feathers that, with an old-fashioned love of comfort they patronized instead of hair mattresses; they had said good-night and "turned over," in fact, had settled themselves for a long winter's nap, when—yes, the clatter came, but not the miniature sleigh and reindeer—it was a loud rap on the front door. Of course the good people were considerably startled. To them, in their quiet way of life, eleven o'clock seemed like a very mysteriously late hour; any one out at eleven and coming to their house for a call was a thing incredible, and not to be entertained for a moment.

"What's that?" said Mr. Dobson.

"Speak softly, dear," whispered the lady.

"They don't *knock* softly," he answered.

"I suppose I must go down and see what it is. Ugh!"

This exclamation was not wholly uncalled for, as, be it understood, it was a very cold night, and there was no fire in the room; Mr. Dobson had just got nicely warmed in bed, and not being equipped in full walking costume—he had neglected to put on his necktie and gloves—he dreaded the exposure to the chill air.

"My love, I positively declare you shall not go!" cried his wife. "It isn't safe—and in your condition, too! Think of the pains in your knees, the neuralgia in your left shoulder—besides, it may be thieves."

Now, Mrs. Dobson having for many years had sole control of her own life and limbs, was very apt to think, since they shared their flesh and bones in common, she had, and of right should have, equal control over the life and limbs of Mr. Dobson, who generally permitted such control unless the cause seemed urgent. In this instance the cause so seemed, and he showed a celerity in his movements in leaving his resting-place that was quite astonishing in a man of his years, for he thought if the thing had to be done, it was one of those that had better be done at once, since jumping out of bed on a cold winter's night presents more horrors to the imagination the longer the idea is dwelt upon, as some among

my readers may certify if they will recall the remembrance of a refractory window-shutter and their sensations as they lay and hoped (need I say how vainly?) it would fasten itself either backward or forward, and they remain undisturbed. Mr. Dobson knew very well thieves would not make so noisy an entrance, and felt no fears on that score; but lumbago presented terrors he dreaded to face—or back. "At any rate, look out of the window, Ebenezer, and see who it looks like."

So Ebenezer threw up the sash. The moon on the crest of the new-fallen snow gave the lustre of midday to objects below; but still the doorway being in shadow naught to his wondering eyes appeared. He summoned the individual to speak by calls of "Who's there?" and "What do you want?" but apparently nobody wanted anything, or somebody wanted nothing, or most probably nobody was there. This was eminently unsatisfactory. Then Mr. Dobson saw clearly it was a case admitting of no delay, and declared he must "put something on" and go down. Poor Mrs. Dobson's terror revived, she seemed singularly averse to his leaving her, and finally asserted it must be a baby that some one was going to leave at their door, "and the idea, Ebenezer, of our taking a baby in this time of night—or any other time for the matter of that. Get you in bed again, husband, and don't mind 'em."

Husband, however, stoutly averred it was quite impossible to think of leaving a poor little baby out there all night—it would freeze before morning; and if it really was a baby, he would take it to the poor master in the morning; they need not keep so undesirable a Christmas gift. It almost seemed that Mr. Dobson was unwarrantably anxious to go down. Then it was that his wife seeing it must be, and remembering, doubtless, that it was her duty to cherish and help him in health as well as to obey him, asserted if some one must go down, she'd be that some one, for it really could not be thought of that he should, when he had a plaster on his back at that very moment.

"See! I'll just throw this wrapper around me, slip my feet in your shoes, run down and peep out; you, meanwhile, standing on the stairway keeping watch."

In a trice she was ready, and started off before Mr. Dobson had time to enter a protest; and forasmuch as she had on his shoes,

there were insuperable objections to his crossing the lower entry, therefore, he was content with stationing himself half way down the stairs, and watching his spouse with great admiration for her self-immolation and suddenly-acquired courage. But ah! poor Mrs. Dobson was a heroine in undress. Little did he guess of the flutterings of that heart as she crossed the hall and laid her hand on the door-knob. However, she cast a glance back at her liege lord, so encouragingly near, bravely drew the bolt, and looked forth.

In this position of affairs let me pause to give you a description of the *dramatis personæ*; their appearance is peculiarly striking, and I must ask you to picture them to your imagination with the help of my pen and ink sketch.

Mrs. Dobson is decidedly lineal in her development, with here and there an inclination showing itself after acute angles. Her crinoline being a story higher, on the bedpost, no artificial rotundity lends gracefulness to the flow of her not ample draperies. Her bonnet *de nuit*, rather in the style of the latest bonnets *de jour*, looks like a little pigeon-house stuck on a tall pole, and her wrapper evinces a constant tendency to fly open, which she combats vigorously. Mr. Dobson's shoes are so large for her that dexterity of no small amount is required to keep them beneath her feet, and this lends a peculiar appearance to her style of walking as seen from behind, which, were her spectator other than he is, would elicit volumes of applause and laughter.

Mr. Dobson's appearance is always ridiculous. His formation is globular. Not to enter into the anatomy of the subject, I simply state that he protrudes in all directions. He is short both ways, and, like the deceitful little pitchers and bottles of that description, he holds a great deal. His features show unsuspected lines of beauty when examined, not according to Hogarth, but curves nevertheless. His forehead, which is low and broad, bumps out, and then there is a curve till you reach the end of his nose—an inverted curve. His mouth twists in all sorts of ways; but when you get to the ends, they turn up, but you are a long time getting there. His chin is nothing but indentation, and the dimples and lines over his cheeks remind one of the childish game—the name of which I forget—which is played on a slate, and requires numerous and mysterious dots to be made;

the pencil starting from a certain point, winds around all the spots and gets back to the beginning again without crossing the same place twice; the track so traced resembles wonderfully Mr. Dobson's complexion, not because his face is thin, but because he is so fat he has to gather it up to keep it within the required limits. His hair sticks out beneath his cap like the ruffle of paper around a candle, and his ears always look as if they were standing on tiptoe to listen. His eyes being very round, and his eyebrows arched more than the requirements of beauty exact, his *tout ensemble* is that of a man who is *making a face*, and you are irresistibly inclined to make one in return; but when Mr. Dobson intends to look serious, he only succeeds in looking so very much funnier, that any attempt to keep from laughing is quite hopeless, the incongruity between his style of features and the expression is so great. His attire is in the extreme of simplicity; but I leave it untouched upon, for he could not find his necktie, and his gloves were still in his bureau. His expression is one of great anxiety, and bending forward, with one hand on the banisters, as Mrs. Dobson gives that preparatory look backward, the tableau is at once extremely unique and *vivant*.

"I hope she won't see it," he mutters.

At first she does not; but at length she exclaims: "Yes, here is a basket! I verily believe it is a baby after all." She stoops down, examines the contents cautiously, and then retreats inside and locks the door.

"It is a baby, I'm afraid, for I felt straw and cotton, as true as I live. And now, Mr. Dobson, what would you do?"

She evidently expected a somewhat lengthy discussion to ensue; but on the other hand he seemed to consider it quite unnecessary, for he replied coolly: "Come back to bed by all means; it's quite cold," and he looked really almost relieved.

But the baby—you said it would freeze."

"I've thought better of that. Most likely it is a baby, but, if so, somebody is waiting outside, and they'll know soon enough we haven't taken it in, and then they won't leave it there." After a moment's pause, with an animated countenance, he continued: "It strikes me, Lelina, this is probably some confounded joke of the neighbors. Don't you see? sending a baby to you and me. Likely enough it's a hoax; and isn't a real

baby at all, and they are on the watch to laugh at us, if we don't show them we can see through a thicker stone-wall than that, any day."

This was quite convincing to Mrs. Dobson, and she willingly reascended the stairway, remarking only she thought it a very poor joke. First in, she was soon tucked down most comfortably. "Ebenezer, why don't you get in and put out the light, and not stand shaking there?"

"I think—perhaps—my dear, I'll go down and get warmed by the dining-room fire. I've got thoroughly chilled; and I noticed quite a warm light shone out in the hall."

"Nonsense! You'll get warm quick enough if you get where you should. The dining-room fire went out more than half an hour ago; there isn't a spark big enough to warm your toe."

It seemed to Mr. Dobson that his Lelina looked almost suspiciously at him. "Well, well, never mind, then!" and out went the light, and in went the submissive Dobson, but with strenuous efforts he tried to keep his eyes open, for, thought he, "when she gets asleep I'll just run down and take the basket in. There's no use in its being left out all night. I don't think it is quite safe."

But the adventure had made Mrs. Dobson restless; and while he with great exertions tried to banish sleep, she vainly sought to yield herself to its embraces; and so it happened that when at length she found oblivion, and testified it by a long and unmistakably heavy breath, his exhausted nature could endure no more, and in one minute more Morpheus's fingers were on his closed eyelids—not to be removed till the daylight dawned. Then with a start he awakened. His first thought was of that basket, and his first act to look at Mrs. Dobson. She was still sleeping peacefully; and, rising with the utmost caution, he stepped on tip-toe out of the room, leaving the door ajar. The pale glimmer of early dawn shed a mysterious gray light over everything, just sufficient to guide his steps. He reached the bottom of the stairway in safety, and commenced crossing the hall, still watching every footstep with the most anxious solicitude, that no loose board or unwary stumble rouse the sleeping beauty overhead. But suddenly he pauses. Through the half opened door of the dining-room, in the dim light, he clearly distin-

guishes the figure of a man. At first he thinks he has been seen, and his limbs tremble beneath him, but in a moment he becomes aware that the man's back is towards him; and, with great presence of mind, he turns quietly around and retraces his steps with equal care and nicety. The Fates are propitious; the wife of his bosom lies wrapped in unconscious slumbers still. The heroic Dobson lays his hand with trembling excitement upon his pistol on the mantel-piece, and then bravely marches back to the encounter. Unluckily, in his nervous haste, he trips at the first step, but recovers his balance, and no one seems to have heard the noise, for when he reaches the doorway again he sees the figure still in the same position. He raises the pistol, fires, and at the same moment hears the voice of Mrs. Dobson calling: "Ebenezer, what *are* you about?"

Awakened by the noise he made in his second exit, she had rushed out to see where he was going, and arrives just in time to behold him strike an attitude, and send a ball through the unconscious robber. Even in moments of intense excitement, habit will assert its control, and, before looking to see the effects of his fire, Mr. Dobson turns his horror-stricken countenance towards the surprised face of his wife.

"I'm afraid I've killed him—he doesn't move!" said he, in an awed tone of voice.

With a woman's quickness Mrs. Dobson comprehends the situation at a glance, and replies, while her face expresses at the same moment pity, amusement, and regret. Pity for Mr. Dobson's evidently terrified depression of spirit, amusement at his mistake, and regret at the consequences. "Why, Dobby!"—she always called him "Dobby" when she wished to administer comfort, and testify her sympathetic affection—"why, Dobby, you are shooting at your Christmas presents; and I've no doubt but that you have put a hole through the pretty dressing-gown—silk lining and all, maybe."

By this time she had descended to his side; and together they walk into the room, which is not yet entirely divested of its horrors to Mr. Dobson's disturbed vision; it is not till his wife has thrown back the blinds, and let in a little more of the Christmas daylight, that he sees it is no worse than she says. There stands the fire-screen with the cashmere dressing-gown thrown around it; a

smoking cap perched on top, and a beautiful pair of embroidered slippers on the floor in front of it. "There, Dobby; these are my Christmas gifts to you, and may you take comfort in them, for I've no doubt I can mend the holes nicely."

This restores him to his senses; and he returns his wife's warm embrace a hundred fold. Thus standing admiring the bright colors, and talking of the promised comfort of these things, it is some minutes before Mrs. Dobson recollects to ask what brought him down at such an unwarrantably early hour, shooting at the presents Santa Claus brings him, instead of waiting till the proper time to see them, when no such misfortune could have happened.

"Why, my dear, that reminds me I came to see after that basket and baby, you know. Just open the door and see if it's there." Hereupon Mr. Dobson chuckled most facetiously, as if there was a mighty good joke somewhere around.

Curiosity predominating over all fears of a hoax, and the daylight rendering the opening of the door no longer terrible, and with now no secret to conceal from her husband, she looks forth, and, sure enough, there stands the basket still. It appears to be very heavy; but nevertheless the usually gallant Dobson offers her no assistance as she carries it in. Cautiously she pulls aside the paper and peeps in, then a sudden beam of intelligence and delight shoots over her countenance, and with a rush she has her arms around her Ebenezer's neck, and is thanking him with all a woman's vehemence. She has him at a disadvantage as far as his comfort is concerned; for he had unwisely seated himself to enjoy his laugh in turn, but with so tight a clasp around his throat he can only return gasps for the affectionate utterances of his wife.

"You dear, good old fellow! Just what I wanted! But to think of leaving them out there all night!"

At length he finds a chance to say: "Why you see, deary, you wouldn't let me take that baby in while you were awake, and you were so confoundedly long getting asleep, I hadn't a chance till morning."

Then they fall to examining their respective gifts again. Mrs. Dobson setting the pretty china tea-set all out on the table, and wiping each piece with affectionate care,

while Mr. Dobson is actually trying on all the articles given him, and pronouncing each and every one an exact fit. At length, with a pang of remorse, he remembers the damage he unwittingly had done; but on searching no hole can be seen, and finally they find the ball safely lodged in the fireplace.

"Well, you wouldn't have killed him if it had been a robber, after all," said Mrs. D.

"No;" he returns, a little disappointedly, "that's so. But it's the first time I ever fired at a man, and I was so afraid I might kill him, it made my hand a little shakey—and then, besides, I took aim in a hurry."

"For my part I'm glad you did. It would have been a thousand pities to have had a darn on that, when it is just made up, particularly if it had come on the red silk facing."

Mr. Dobson acknowledges that; but, with manly inconsistency, very much wishes his giving proofs of being a good shot might be compatible with no damage to his dressing-gown.

Betty's movements up stairs recall to them the fact that they are "not fit to be seen," and bring this scene to a close. With a last, long, lingering look at the pretty things, they swiftly go on the light fantastic toe to bed again, for breakfast will not be ready for two hours yet; there simultaneously they remember it has not been said, and call out, "Merry Christmas."

Thus it was Mr. and Mrs. Dobson exchanged their gifts; and now, having told my story, to my kind readers I say: "Merry Christmas to all, and to all a Good-night!"

A HAPPY HOME.

A celebrated man in one of his admirable speeches once observed: "That although it has been the pleasure of our Maker in a world which is a world of trial and transition, and not the ultimate destiny of mankind—though it has been the pleasure of our Maker to subject a great portion of the human race to trials and privations to enable them to qualify themselves for the future state that awaits them, yet Providence has not been niggardly in the distribution of those qualities which are calculated to secure happiness to those who conduct themselves well upon this earth. All the good qualities of human nature, the qualities of mind and of heart, everything that tends to dignify our species, and to en-

ble men to distinguish themselves in the condition in which they have been placed—these qualities have been sown broadcast over the human race, and are as abundantly dispersed among the humblest classes, as they are among the highest classes in the land. The first thing that parents have to do is to see that their children are well and properly educated; that they are early instructed, not merely in book-learning, in reading and writing, and acquirements of that kind, but instructed in the precepts which indicate the difference between right and wrong, and that they are taught the principles of religion, and their duty towards God and man. Now, the way in which that can be done is by the father and mother building up their household upon that which is the foundation of all excellence in social life—I mean a happy home. No home can be happy if the husband be not a kind and affectionate husband, and a good father to his children."

MY FAIRY AT THE BALL.

(To Little HETTIE ALLSTON MAGILL.)

BY P. H. PETERS.

Did you see my little fairy!
As she tripped so light and airy,
Through the limpid, dazzling light
Of the hall?

With her glossy ringlets flying,
And her light heart flut'ring, sighing,
And her eyes so sparkling bright—
At the ball!

My sweet fairy of the ball?

Did you see her toss those ringlets,
Driving grief away on winglets,
As she shook her pretty head
Light and free?

And her pretty gaiters peeping—
Time to merry music keeping—
Spinning time on golden thread
In her glee!

Pretty fairy of the ball? ;

Did you see her smiling brightly,
Sweeping like a nymph so lightly
Through the merry, merry crowd,
So unweary?

Did you watch my little posy,
Put her hands in mine so cosy?
And didst wonder I felt proud
Of my fairy!
Of my fairy at the ball?

Honor's a good brooch to wear in a man's hat at all times.