A group of people posing for a photo

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THE CHILDREN'S BOOK OF CHRISTMAS STORIES

By Various

Edited by Asa Don Dickinson and Ada M. Skinner

PREFACE

Many librarians have felt the need and expressed the desire for a select

collection of children's Christmas stories in one volume. This books

claims to be just that and nothing more.

Each of the stories has already won the approval of thousands of

children, and each is fraught with the true Christmas spirit.

It is hoped that the collection will prove equally acceptable to

parents, teachers, and librarians.

Asa Don Dickinson.

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younger children; those marked with a two stars (\*\*) are better suited

to older children.)

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I. CHRISTMAS AT FEZZIWIG'S WAREHOUSE

CHARLES DICKENS

"Yo Ho! my boys," said Fezziwig. "No more work to-night! Christmas

Eve, Dick! Christmas, Ebenezer! Let's have the shutters up!" cried old

Fezziwig with a sharp clap of his hands, "before a man can say Jack

Robinson...."

"Hilli-ho!" cried old Fezziwig, skipping down from the high desk with

wonderful agility. "Clear away, my lads, and let's have lots of room

here! Hilli-ho, Dick! Cheer-up, Ebenezer!"

Clear away! There was nothing they wouldn't have cleared away, or

couldn't have cleared away with old Fezziwig looking on. It was done

in a minute. Every movable was packed off, as if it were dismissed from

public life forevermore; the floor was swept and watered, the lamps were

trimmed, fuel was heaped upon the fire; and the warehouse was as snug,

and warm, and dry, and bright a ballroom as you would desire to see on a

winter's night.

In came a fiddler with a music book, and went up to the lofty desk and

made an orchestra of it and tuned like fifty stomach-aches. In came Mrs.

Fezziwig, one vast substantial smile. In came the three Misses Fezziwig,

beaming and lovable. In came the six followers whose hearts they broke.

In came all the young men and women employed in the business. In came

the housemaid with her cousin the baker. In came the cook with her

brother's particular friend the milkman. In came the boy from over

the way, who was suspected of not having board enough from his master,

trying to hide himself behind the girl from next door but one who was

proved to have had her ears pulled by her mistress; in they all came,

anyhow and everyhow. Away they all went, twenty couple at once; hands

half round and back again the other way; down the middle and up again;

round and round in various stages of affectionate grouping, old top

couple always turning up in the wrong place; new top couple starting

off again, as soon as they got there; all top couples at last, and not a

bottom one to help them.

When this result was brought about the fiddler struck up "Sir Roger de

Coverley." Then old Fezziwig stood out to dance with Mrs. Fezziwig. Top

couple, too, with a good stiff piece of work cut out for them; three

or four and twenty pairs of partners; people who were not to be trifled

with; people who would dance and had no notion of walking.

But if they had been thrice as many--oh, four times as many--old

Fezziwig would have been a match for them, and so would Mrs. Fezziwig.

As to her, she was worthy to be his partner in every sense of the term.

If that's not high praise, tell me higher and I'll use it. A positive

light appeared to issue from Fezziwig's calves. They shone in every part

of the dance like moons. You couldn't have predicted at any given time

what would become of them next. And when old Fezziwig and Mrs. Fezziwig

had gone all through the dance, advance and retire; both hands to your

partner, bow and courtesy, corkscrew, thread the needle, and back again

to your place; Fezziwig "cut"--cut so deftly that he appeared to wink

with his legs, and came upon his feet again with a stagger.

When the clock struck eleven the domestic ball broke up. Mr. and Mrs.

Fezziwig took their stations, one on either side of the door, and

shaking hands with every person individually, as he or she went out,

wished him or her a Merry Christmas!

II. THE FIR-TREE\*

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HANS CHRISTIAN ANDERSEN

Out in the woods stood a nice little Fir-tree. The place he had was a

very good one; the sun shone on him; as to fresh air, there was enough

of that, and round him grew many large-sized comrades, pines as well as

firs. But the little Fir wanted so very much to be a grown-up tree.

He did not think of the warm sun and of the fresh air; he did not care

for the little cottage children that ran about and prattled when they

were in the woods looking for wild strawberries. The children often came

with a whole pitcher full of berries, or a long row of them threaded on

a straw, and sat down near the young tree and said, "Oh, how pretty he

is! what a nice little fir!" But this was what the Tree could not bear

to hear.

At the end of a year he had shot up a good deal, and after another year

he was another long bit taller; for with fir-trees one can always tell

by the shoots how many years old they are.

"Oh, were I but such a high tree as the others are!" sighed he. "Then I

should be able to spread out my branches, and with the tops to look into

the wide world! Then would the birds build nests among my branches; and

when there was a breeze, I could bend with as much stateliness as the

others!"

Neither the sunbeams, nor the birds, nor the red clouds, which morning

and evening sailed above them, gave the little Tree any pleasure.

In winter, when the snow lay glittering on the ground, a hare would

often come leaping along, and jump right over the little Tree. Oh, that

made him so angry! But two winters were past, and in the third the tree

was so large that the hare was obliged to go round it. "To grow and

grow, to get older and be tall," thought the Tree--"that, after all, is

the most delightful thing in the world!"

In autumn the wood-cutters always came and felled some of the largest

trees. This happened every year; and the young Fir-tree, that had now

grown to a very comely size, trembled at the sight; for the magnificent

great trees fell to the earth with noise and cracking, the branches were

lopped off, and the trees looked long and bare; they were hardly to be

recognized; and then they were laid in carts, and the horses dragged

them out of the woods.

Where did they go to? What became of them?

In spring, when the Swallows and the Storks came, the Tree asked them,

"Don't you know where they have been taken? Have you not met them

anywhere?"

The Swallows did not know anything about it; but the Stork looked

musing, nodded his head, and said: "Yes, I think I know; I met many

ships as I was flying hither from Egypt; on the ships were magnificent

masts, and I venture to assert that it was they that smelt so of fir.

I may congratulate you, for they lifted themselves on high most

majestically!"

"Oh, were I but old enough to fly across the sea! But how does the sea

look in reality? What is it like?"

"That would take a long time to explain," said the Stork, and with these

words off he went.

"Rejoice in thy growth!" said the Sunbeams, "rejoice in thy vigorous

growth, and in the fresh life that moveth within thee!"

And the Wind kissed the Tree, and the Dew wept tears over him; but the

Fir understood it not.

When Christmas came, quite young trees were cut down; trees which often

were not even as large or of the same age as this Fir-tree, who could

never rest, but always wanted to be off. These young trees, and they

were always the finest looking, retained their branches; they were laid

on carts, and the horses drew them out of the woods.

"Where are they going to?" asked the Fir. "They are not taller than

I; there was one indeed that was considerably shorter; and why do they

retain all their branches? Whither are they taken?"

"We know! we know!" chirped the Sparrows. "We have peeped in at the

windows in the town below! We know whither they are taken! The greatest

splendour and the greatest magnificence one can imagine await them. We

peeped through the windows, and saw them planted in the middle of the

warm room, and ornamented with the most splendid things--with gilded

apples, with gingerbread, with toys, and many hundred lights!"

"And then?" asked the Fir-tree, trembling in every bough. "And then?

What happens then?"

"We did not see anything more: it was incomparably beautiful."

"I would fain know if I am destined for so glorious a career," cried

the Tree, rejoicing. "That is still better than to cross the sea! What

a longing do I suffer! Were Christmas but come! I am now tall, and my

branches spread like the others that were carried off last year! Oh,

were I but already on the cart. Were I in the warm room with all the

splendour and magnificence! Yes; then something better, something still

grander, will surely follow, or wherefore should they thus ornament me?

Something better, something still grander, MUST follow--but what? Oh,

how I long, how I suffer! I do not know myself what is the matter with

me!"

"Rejoice in our presence!" said the Air and the Sunlight; "rejoice in

thy own fresh youth!"

But the Tree did not rejoice at all; he grew and grew, and was green

both winter and summer. People that saw him said, "What a fine tree!"

and toward Christmas he was one of the first that was cut down. The axe

struck deep into the very pith; the tree fell to the earth with a sigh:

he felt a pang--it was like a swoon; he could not think of happiness,

for he was sorrowful at being separated from his home, from the place

where he had sprung up. He knew well that he should never see his

dear old comrades, the little bushes and flowers around him, any more;

perhaps not even the birds! The departure was not at all agreeable.

The Tree only came to himself when he was unloaded in a courtyard with

the other trees, and heard a man say, "That one is splendid! we don't

want the others." Then two servants came in rich livery and carried the

Fir-tree into a large and splendid drawing-room. Portraits were hanging

on the walls, and near the white porcelain stove stood two large Chinese

vases with lions on the covers. There, too, were large easy chairs,

silken sofas, large tables full of picture-books, and full of toys worth

hundreds and hundreds of crowns--at least the children said so. And the

Fir-tree was stuck upright in a cask that was filled with sand: but no

one could see that it was a cask, for green cloth was hung all around

it, and it stood on a large gayly coloured carpet. Oh, how the Tree

quivered! What was to happen? The servants, as well as the young ladies,

decorated it. On one branch there hung little nets cut out of coloured

paper, and each net was filled with sugar-plums; and among the other

boughs gilded apples and walnuts were suspended, looking as though they

had grown there, and little blue and white tapers were placed among the

leaves. Dolls that looked for all the world like men--the Tree had never

beheld such before--were seen among the foliage, and at the very top

a large star of gold tinsel was fixed. It was really splendid--beyond

description splendid.

"This evening!" said they all; "how it will shine this evening!"

"Oh," thought the Tree, "if the evening were but come! If the tapers

were but lighted! And then I wonder what will happen! Perhaps the other

trees from the forest will come to look at me! Perhaps the sparrows will

beat against the window-panes! I wonder if I shall take root here, and

winter and summer stand covered with ornaments!"

He knew very much about the matter! but he was so impatient that for

sheer longing he got a pain in his back, and this with trees is the same

thing as a headache with us.

The candles were now lighted. What brightness! What splendour! The

Tree trembled so in every bough that one of the tapers set fire to the

foliage. It blazed up splendidly.

"Help! Help!" cried the young ladies, and they quickly put out the fire.

Now the Tree did not even dare tremble. What a state he was in! He was

so uneasy lest he should lose something of his splendour, that he was

quite bewildered amidst the glare and brightness; when suddenly both

folding-doors opened, and a troop of children rushed in as if they would

upset the Tree. The older persons followed quietly; the little ones

stood quite still. But it was only for a moment; then they shouted so

that the whole place reechoed with their rejoicing; they danced round

the tree, and one present after the other was pulled off.

"What are they about?" thought the Tree. "What is to happen now?" And

the lights burned down to the very branches, and as they burned down

they were put out, one after the other, and then the children had

permission to plunder the tree. So they fell upon it with such violence

that all its branches cracked; if it had not been fixed firmly in the

cask, it would certainly have tumbled down.

The children danced about with their beautiful playthings: no one looked

at the Tree except the old nurse, who peeped between the branches; but

it was only to see if there was a fig or an apple left that had been

forgotten.

"A story! a story!" cried the children, drawing a little fat man toward

the tree. He seated himself under it, and said: "Now we are in the

shade, and the Tree can listen, too. But I shall tell only one story.

Now which will you have: that about Ivedy-Avedy, or about Klumpy-Dumpy

who tumbled downstairs, and yet after all came to the throne and married

the princess?"

"Ivedy-Avedy!" cried some; "Klumpy-Dumpy" cried the others. There was

such a bawling and screaming--the Fir-tree alone was silent, and he

thought to himself, "Am I not to bawl with the rest?--am I to do nothing

whatever?" for he was one of the company, and had done what he had to

do.

And the man told about Klumpy-Dumpy that tumbled down, who

notwithstanding came to the throne, and at last married the princess.

And the children clapped their hands, and cried out, "Oh, go on! Do go

on!" They wanted to hear about Ivedy-Avedy, too, but the little man

only told them about Klumpy-Dumpy. The Fir-tree stood quite still and

absorbed in thought; the birds in the woods had never related the like

of this. "Klumpy-Dumpy fell downstairs, and yet he married the princess!

Yes! Yes! that's the way of the world!" thought the Fir-tree, and

believed it all, because the man who told the story was so good-looking.

"Well, well! who knows, perhaps I may fall downstairs, too, and get a

princess as wife!" And he looked forward with joy to the morrow, when

he hoped to be decked out again with lights, playthings, fruits, and

tinsel.

"I won't tremble to-morrow," thought the Fir-tree. "I will enjoy to

the full all my splendour. To-morrow I shall hear again the story of

Klumpy-Dumpy, and perhaps that of Ivedy-Avedy, too." And the whole night

the Tree stood still and in deep thought.

In the morning the servant and the housemaid came in.

"Now, then, the splendour will begin again," thought the Fir. But they

dragged him out of the room, and up the stairs into the loft; and here

in a dark corner, where no daylight could enter, they left him. "What's

the meaning of this?" thought the Tree. "What am I to do here? What

shall I hear now, I wonder?" And he leaned against the wall, lost in

reverie. Time enough had he, too, for his reflections; for days and

nights passed on, and nobody came up; and when at last somebody did

come, it was only to put some great trunks in a corner out of the way.

There stood the Tree quite hidden; it seemed as if he had been entirely

forgotten.

"'Tis now winter out of doors!" thought the Tree. "The earth is hard and

covered with snow; men cannot plant me now, and therefore I have been

put up here under shelter till the springtime comes! How thoughtful that

is! How kind man is, after all! If it only were not so dark here, and

so terribly lonely! Not even a hare. And out in the woods it was so

pleasant, when the snow was on the ground, and the hare leaped by;

yes--even when he jumped over me; but I did not like it then. It is

really terribly lonely here!"

"Squeak! squeak!" said a little Mouse at the same moment, peeping out

of his hole. And then another little one came. They sniffed about the

Fir-tree, and rustled among the branches.

"It is dreadfully cold," said the Mouse. "But for that, it would be

delightful here, old Fir, wouldn't it?"

"I am by no means old," said the Fir-tree. "There's many a one

considerably older than I am."

"Where do you come from," asked the Mice; "and what can you do?" They

were so extremely curious. "Tell us about the most beautiful spot on the

earth. Have you never been there? Were you never in the larder, where

cheeses lie on the shelves, and hams hang from above; where one dances

about on tallow-candles; that place where one enters lean, and comes out

again fat and portly?"

"I know no such place," said the Tree, "but I know the woods, where the

sun shines, and where the little birds sing." And then he told all about

his youth; and the little Mice had never heard the like before; and they

listened and said:

"Well, to be sure! How much you have seen! How happy you must have

been!"

"I?" said the Fir-tree, thinking over what he had himself related. "Yes,

in reality those were happy times." And then he told about Christmas

Eve, when he was decked out with cakes and candles.

"Oh," said the little Mice, "how fortunate you have been, old Fir-tree!"

"I am by no means old," said he. "I came from the woods this winter; I

am in my prime, and am only rather short for my age."

"What delightful stories you know!" said the Mice: and the next night

they came with four other little Mice, who were to hear what the tree

recounted; and the more he related, the more plainly he remembered all

himself; and it appeared as if those times had really been happy

times. "But they may still come--they may still come. Klumpy-Dumpy fell

downstairs and yet he got a princess," and he thought at the moment of a

nice little Birch-tree growing out in the woods; to the Fir, that would

be a real charming princess.

"Who is Klumpy-Dumpy?" asked the Mice. So then the Fir-tree told the

whole fairy tale, for he could remember every single word of it; and the

little Mice jumped for joy up to the very top of the Tree. Next night

two more Mice came, and on Sunday two Rats, even; but they said the

stories were not interesting, which vexed the little Mice; and they,

too, now began to think them not so very amusing either.

"Do you know only one story?" asked the Rats.

"Only that one," answered the Tree. "I heard it on my happiest evening;

but I did not then know how happy I was."

"It is a very stupid story. Don't you know one about bacon and tallow

candles? Can't you tell any larder stories?"

"No," said the Tree.

"Then good-bye," said the Rats; and they went home.

At last the little Mice stayed away also; and the Tree sighed: "After

all, it was very pleasant when the sleek little Mice sat around me and

listened to what I told them. Now that too is over. But I will take good

care to enjoy myself when I am brought out again."

But when was that to be? Why, one morning there came a quantity of

people and set to work in the loft. The trunks were moved, the Tree was

pulled out and thrown--rather hard, it is true--down on the floor, but a

man drew him toward the stairs, where the daylight shone.

"Now a merry life will begin again," thought the Tree. He felt the fresh

air, the first sunbeam--and now he was out in the courtyard. All passed

so quickly, there was so much going on around him, that the Tree quite

forgot to look to himself. The court adjoined a garden, and all was in

flower; the roses hung so fresh and odorous over the balustrade, the

lindens were in blossom, the Swallows flew by, and said, "Quirre-vit! my

husband is come!" but it was not the Fir-tree that they meant.

"Now, then, I shall really enjoy life," said he, exultingly, and spread

out his branches; but, alas! they were all withered and yellow. It was

in a corner that he lay, among weeds and nettles. The golden star of

tinsel was still on the top of the Tree, and glittered in the sunshine.

In the courtyard some of the merry children were playing who had danced

at Christmas round the Fir-tree, and were so glad at the sight of him.

One of the youngest ran and tore off the golden star.

"Only look what is still on the ugly old Christmas tree!" said he,

trampling on the branches, so that they all cracked beneath his feet.

And the Tree beheld all the beauty of the flowers, and the freshness in

the garden; he beheld himself, and wished he had remained in his dark

corner in the loft; he thought of his first youth in the woods, of the

merry Christmas Eve, and of the little Mice who had listened with so

much pleasure to the story of Klumpy-Dumpy.

"'Tis over--'tis past!" said the poor Tree. "Had I but rejoiced when I

had reason to do so! But now 'tis past, 'tis past!"

And the gardener's boy chopped the Tree into small pieces; there was a

whole heap lying there. The wood flamed up splendidly under the large

brewing copper, and it sighed so deeply! Each sigh was like a shot.

The boys played about in the court, and the youngest wore the gold star

on his breast which the Tree had had on the happiest evening of his

life. However, that was over now--the Tree gone, the story at an end.

All, all was over; every tale must end at last.