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Illustration from *Godey's*, December 1850

TWO CHRISTMAS POEMS

Virginia Mescher

We hear a great deal about Victorian Christmas celebrations; read accounts of Christmas in period newspapers and letters. In reading period literature, there are accounts of Christmas and Christmas stories in in *Godey's* and *Peterson's*, *Harper's Weekly*, as well as in other newspapers and magazines. Below are two poems that appeared one year apart and present two entirely different experiences of Christmas.

The first poem is from the December, 1861 issue of *Godey's*. While not exactly the same sentiments of Clement Moore's "Night Before Christmas" it is still a classic.

THE NIGHT AFTER CHRISTMAS.

"The following is an amusing parody upon Clement Moore's unequalled [sic] "Night before Christmas:"

"Twas the night after Christmas, when all through the house
Every soul was abed, and as still as a mouse;
The stockings, so lately St. Nicholas' care,
Were emptied of all that was eatable there.
The Darlings had duly been tucked in their beds---
With very full stomachs, and pains in their heads.

I was dozing away in my new cotton cap,
And Nancy was rather far gone in a nap,
When out in the nurs'ry arose such a clatter,
I sprang from my sleep, crying- --"What is the matter?"
I flew to each bedside---still half in a doze---
Tore open the curtains, and threw off the clothes;
While the light of the taper served clearly to show
The piteous plight of those objects below;
For what to the fond father's eyes should appear
But the little pale face of each sick little dear?
For each pet that had crammed itself full as a tick,
I knew in a moment now felt like Old Nick.

Their pulses were rapid, their breathings the same,
What their stomachs rejected I'll mention by name---
Now Turkey, now Stuffing, Plum Pudding, of course,
And Custards, and Crullers, and Cranberry sauce:
Before outraged nature, all went to the wall,
Yes---Lollypops, Flapdoodle, Dinner, and all;

Like pellets which urchins from popguns let fly,
Went figs, nuts and raisins, jam, jelly and pie,
Till each error of diet was brought to my view,
To the shame of Mamma and Santa Claus, too.

I turned from the sight, to my bedroom stepped back,
And brought out a phial marked "Pulv. Ipecac,"
When my Nancy exclaimed---for their sufferings shocked her---
"Don't you think you had better, love, run for the Doctor?"
I ran---and was scarcely back under my roof,
When I heard the sharp clatter of old Jalap's hoof.
I might say that I hardly had turned myself round,
When the Doctor came into the room with a bound.
He was covered with mud from his head to his foot,
And the suit he had on was his very worst suit;
He had hardly had time to put *that* on his back,
And he looked like a Falstaff half fuddled with sack,
His eyes how they twinkled! Had the Doctor got merry?
His cheeks looked like *Port* and his breath smelt of *Sherry*,
He hadn't been shaved for a fortnight or so,
And the beard on his chin wasn't white as snow.
But inspecting their tongues in despite of their teeth,
And drawing his watch from his waistcoat beneath,
He felt of each pulse, saying ---"Each little belly
Must get rid."---here he laughed---"of the rest of that jelly."
I gazed on each chubby, plump, sick little elf,
And groaned when he said so, in spite of myself;
But a wink of his eye when he physicked our Fred
Soon gave me to know I had nothing to dread.
He didn't prescribe, but went straightway to work
And dosed all the rest, gave his trousers a jerk,
And, adding directions while blowing his nose,
He buttoned his coat; from his chair he arose,
Then jumped in his gig, gave old Jalap a whistle,
And Jalap dashed off as if pricked by a thistle;
But the Doctor exclaimed, ere he drove out of sight,
"They'll be well by to-morrow ---good-night, Jones,
good-night!"

Godey's, December, 1861

A number of years ago, while looking at wartime newspapers on microfilm, I found the second poem. It appeared in *The Southern Illustrated News* on December 27, 1862 and reflected the status of Christmas in the war torn South in 1862. It, too, is loosely taken from Moore's "The Night Before Christmas." Usually, only portions of M'Crimmon's poem appear in secondary sources but seldom has the entire poem been published. It is an example that no matter the what existing conditions, the importance of Santa still lived in the hearts of children.

SANTA CLAUS

Mary A. M'Crimmon.

'Twas colder than Zero on Christmas eve night,
When far off in Lapland, the great "Northern Light"
In streams of wild beauty illuminated the skies,
Like joy when it sparkles from innocent eyes.
Old Santa Claus, seeing the hour at hand
When children get sleepy all over the land,
Put eight tiny reindeer to one little sleigh,
And seizing a bundle, he started away ---
For over the mountain and over the snow,
As light as a feather and swift as a roe.

At last on our chimney he drew up his team,
And stole out as silent and soft as a dream,
Lest hearing his footsteps on top of the house,
The children, all sleeping "as snug as a mouse,"
Might wake up and catch him with pockets and hat
Stuffed full of nice candy, and much more than that -
Nuts, raisins and apples, and all sorts of toys--
Exactly the thing for the girls and the boys.
As light as a feather he came down the flue,
That seemed to grow wider to let him get through;
And there in a corner, all ranged in a row,
Were four little stockings, as white as the snow.
He smiled when he saw them, and winked his old eye,
But waited a moment, and then passed them by,
To peep through the curtains of two little beds,
Where, wrapped in sweet slumber, lay four little heads;
And he read in the faces of each little pair,
Who'd acted the wisest throughout the past year.
If one had been naughty, and told a white fib ---
Another got angry and tore up her bib ---
If *he* had his parents neglected to mind,
Or *she* to her playmates been rude or unkind,

From them he'd have taken to give to the rest,
For "Santa Claus" always gave most to the best.

But these little fellows, it seems, had done well,
For how much he gave them I hardly can tell ---
To one he gave candy, a drum and an apple;
Another a pony -- a beautiful dapple ----
Birds, baskets and dollies, with sweet flaxen curls,
Fruits, flowers and ribbons, he left for the girls ---
If either was slighted, I cannot tell which,
For all received something ---and no one a *switch*.
"Good night, little darlings," old Santa then said,
And shaking with laughter, he turned from the bed,
And mounting the chimney, he started to go
Far over the mountain and over the snow.

This happened one Christmas. I'm sorry to write,
Our ports are blockaded, and Santa, to-night,
Will hardly get down here; for if he should start,
The Yankees would get him unless he was "smart."
They beat all the men in creation to *run*
And if they could get him, they'd think it fine fun
To put him in prison, and steal the nice toys
He staid to bring to our girls and boys.
But try not to mind it ---Tell over your jokes ---
Be gay and be cheerful, like other good folks;
For it you remember to be good and kind,
Old Santa next Christmas will bear it in mind.

The Southern Illustrated News, December, 1862