

VARIOUS

HARPER'S YOUNG
PEOPLE, DECEMBER 23,
1879

Various

**Harper's Young People,
December 23, 1879**

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SANTA CLAUS AT HOME—ABOUT TIME TO START.

THE BRAVE SWISS BOY

[Begun in No. 1 of Harper's Young People, November 4.]

VII.—A GLIMPSE OF PARISIAN LIFE

The bright rays of the morning sun filled the room when Walter awoke from his long and refreshing sleep, to gaze in astonishment at the rich and beautiful furniture that adorned the apartment. Silk curtains, mirrors that reached to the ceiling, beautiful carpets, attractive pictures in gilt frames—all was new and dazzling to the unsophisticated mountain youth. He was still gazing in wonder at all these glories, when Mr. Seymour, who had slept in the next room, suddenly opened the door.

"Jump up, Walter," said he. "Breakfast is ready, and my friend wants to speak to you; so be as quick as you can."

"I shall be ready in a few minutes, sir," he replied, as, springing out of bed, he washed and dressed himself, and respectfully greeted the two gentlemen, who sat enjoying their coffee in an adjoining room.

At Mr. Seymour's invitation Walter helped himself to breakfast; and when he had finished his meal, looked up inquiringly at the stranger.

"Well, then, Walter," said he, in a kindly tone, "tell me in the first place what you intend to do, now that you have got your money back?"

"Oh, that is very easily answered, sir," replied Walter. "I shall buckle the belt round my waist again, and return home to-day."

"I thought that was your intention, Watty," said Mr. Seymour; "but it would be much safer and far easier to send the money through the post. You will then have no further risk of being robbed, and Mr. Frieshardt will be sure to get it in a day or two. As regards yourself—"

Mr. Seymour hesitated, and his friend took up the conversation. "Yes, Walter, you must stay here for the present," said he, "and not dream of leaving me—at least for a long time."

Walter was taken aback. What could the stranger mean? Unable to comprehend the motive of such a remark, he looked in confusion first at one, then at the other, and was greeted only with a hearty laugh.

"I am very much obliged to you for suggesting how I should send the money home," said the lad; "and it was certainly very strange that Mr. Frieshardt did not think of that, for it would have saved all this trouble with Seppi. But what, sir, am I to do here? What is there to prevent my returning home?"

"A proposal that my friend Mr. Lafond has to make to you," replied Mr. Seymour. "My friend is in want of an active and trustworthy servant, and thinks that you would suit him well. I think you should take the situation, Walter, for you will be looked upon rather as a confidential attendant than as a servant, and you will be well paid into the bargain. In a few years you will have earned money enough to provide comfortably for your father in his old age."

The last words decided Walter. If he could only relieve his father's declining years from care and anxiety, he was content to give up his home for a time, and therefore agreed to accept the proposal. The contract was soon arranged, and Walter entered upon his new duties the same day. He wrote a long letter to his father, explaining the reason of his remaining in Paris, and comforting him with the assurance that when he returned home he would bring plenty of money with him. By the same post he sent a bank draft to Farmer Frieshardt equivalent to the value of the cattle money; and a few days after removed into Mr. Lafond's splendidly furnished mansion. Mr. Seymour did not accompany his friend, having to leave Paris to continue his travels.

Thus Walter, who had suddenly risen from the position of a poor drover to that of the principal servant and favorite of a rich young Parisian, found no reason to regret the change that he had made. Mr. Lafond treated him in the kindest and most friendly way, so that he soon became thoroughly attached to him. But in the course of a few weeks he observed certain traits in the character of his new employer that occasioned him both sorrow and anxiety, and almost made him regret that he had not returned to his quiet but innocent home. Although a kind-hearted man, Mr. Lafond was weak-

mindful and changeable; and like many other wealthy young men without any occupation, he was addicted to pleasure and dissipation, and spent whole nights at the gaming table, to the ruin of both his health and morals. As he was of a delicate constitution, these excesses soon produced a very marked effect upon him, and did much to shatter his health.

Early one morning Mr. Lafond came home, after a night of gambling, looking paler and more exhausted than usual. Walter, who had been sitting up for him, was terribly alarmed at the appearance which he presented. "Oh, my dear sir," said he, with a deep sigh, as he gave him his hand out of the carriage, "how grieved I am for you!"

Mr. Lafond stared at Walter with his glassy eyes, and tried to speak, but could only utter a few disconnected words that were quite incomprehensible. Besides this, he was so unsteady on his feet that he was obliged to lean on Walter to prevent himself from falling. The faithful servant was terribly shocked to find his master so intoxicated as to be almost deprived of his senses, and lost no time in getting him to his room that his distressing and disgraceful condition might not become known to the rest of the household. After undressing him, which cost a great deal of trouble, Walter got his master to bed, and then sat down, and became lost in thought.

It was not until late in the day that Mr. Lafond woke from his troubled sleep, and was surprised to find Walter sitting by his bedside. "Poor fellow!" he said, in a good-natured tone, "I'm afraid I kept you waiting long for me last night. You are a faithful servant, and shall have your wages raised immediately."

"I am very much obliged to you, sir," said he; "but I can not take more of your money. I have only waited here to request my discharge from your service."

Mr. Lafond stared at the young man with surprise. "What!" he exclaimed; "you want to leave me! What has put that in your head? Has any one here done anything to make you uncomfortable?"

"No, sir, no one," was the quiet but firm reply. "I have met with nothing but kindness since I have been in your house, and you have been more than generous to me; but I can't bear to stay here and see you digging your own grave. It breaks my heart, sir; and I would rather wander barefoot back to my own mountains than witness it longer."

"Why, Walter, I'm afraid you're turning crazy," exclaimed his master, angrily. "Don't let me hear any more of this nonsense! What can it matter to you whether I die soon or not? At any rate you must stay with me, and give up such foolish notions."

Walter shook his head. "No, sir; I must go," he replied. "I can be of no use here. It makes me quite miserable to see how you waste your money in the gaming houses, and ruin your health by overindulgence in wine. If my caring for you were not sincere, it would be a matter of no consequence to me whether you went to destruction or not; but," he added, while tears started to his eyes, "I trust, sir, you will pardon me for saying that I can not look on carelessly while you are ruining yourself; and so I hope you will let me go."

The reckless gamester was quite moved at the devotion and faithfulness of his servant. Springing from bed, he wrapped himself in his dressing-gown, and walked hastily to and fro in the apartment for a few minutes in silence. At last he paused before Walter and grasped his hand. "You are a straightforward, warm-hearted fellow," he exclaimed. "But the more I am convinced of that, the less disposed am I to part with you. Will you not stay with me?"

"No, my good master, I can not," answered Walter, firmly.

"Not even if I promise to turn over a new leaf, and neither to drink nor gamble any more from this day?"

Walter was in a measure reassured by these words, and his eyes were lit up with a new hope. "Ah! if you really will do that, sir!" he exclaimed. "That alters everything; and I shall be as overjoyed to stay with you as I should have been sorry to leave you."

"Then that is settled," said his master, in a serious tone. "I am obliged to you for speaking so faithfully to me. I know that I have been living in a foolish way; but I will be different for the future. That you may rely upon."

Walter's joy was so great at hearing this unexpected resolution that he nearly burst into tears. Unhappily, however, he was soon to experience the disappointment of all his hopes.

For a fortnight Mr. Lafond kept his promise faithfully; but at the end of that time he again yielded to the old temptation, and after a night of revelry returned home in broad daylight in a state of complete helplessness. The servant renewed his entreaties and warnings; reminded his master that the physician had declared that his existence depended on his leading a sober life, and obtained from him a renewal of the broken promise. But alas! it proved as vain as before. In a few days all his hopes were again crushed, and his prayers and entreaties were only answered by his master with a shrug of the shoulders.

"You know nothing about it, Walter," said he. "The temptation is so strong, that one can't be always resisting it."

"But it is your duty to resist it, sir; and you can succeed if you will only make up your mind to do so."

"It's too late now," replied the other, with a faint smile. "I have fought and fought, and been beaten at last. I shall give up fighting now."

"Are you really in earnest?" cried Walter, seriously.

"I am really in earnest," replied Mr. Lafond.

"Then I must indeed quit your service, sir. I will not stay here if I can not save you from rushing headlong to destruction."

"Silly fellow!" replied his master, testily. "What more would you have? It will be for your direct advantage to stay with me. Look at my condition. The doctor was quite right in saying that I couldn't live another year. Remain here for that short time, and you shall be well paid for your services. I will take care not to forget you in my will."

The young Switzer could not restrain his emotion at hearing his weak-minded but good-natured master talk in such a careless way about death. Unable to speak, he turned to leave the room, when Mr. Lafond called him back.

"Have you no reply to make to me?" he demanded, in an offended tone.

"Nothing more than this, sir—that your doctor assured me that you might live for ten, twenty, or even thirty years longer, if you could only be persuaded to live in a sober and reasonable way. Oh, my dear sir," he exclaimed, "do give up these habits that are ruining body and soul, and I will devote my whole life to you!"

"No use," was the gloomy reply. "If I were to make new resolutions, they would only be broken, as the others have been. The doctor is quite mistaken in his opinion. I suppose I must fulfill my destiny. So let the matter drop, Walter."

"Anything can be done if one is only determined," persisted the young man, with entreaty in his tone.

His master turned away and shook his head. "Too late, too late. I haven't the moral courage or determination."

"Then may God have mercy upon you!" replied the servant, solemnly. "This is no longer a place for me."

Swayed on the one hand by a sense of duty to himself, and on the other by pity for his terribly misled master, Walter sorrowfully quitted the apartment, and after packing a few things, returned to take his final leave. Mr. Lafond, however, would not bring himself to believe in the reality of such a sudden and determined resolution, and used every argument to induce the lad to change his mind. He even begged him as a personal favor to remain, but Walter persisted in his determination; nor

could the most lavish offers of emolument induce him to stay and be a helpless spectator of the ruin of one whom he was unable to save.

"If I were only as determined as you are," sighed Mr. Lafond, "how much better it would be for me! But now it is too late. Farewell, then, Walter, if you have made up your mind to quit my service. But though you leave me, it is not necessary that you return to your mountain home. I received this letter from my uncle, General De Bougy, who lives in Rouen. The old gentleman is in want of a steady and trustworthy servant, and asks me to send him one, so I think the best thing you can do will be to go there for a twelvemonth. You will find him a better master than I have been; and if you are really determined to leave me, you might do worse than enter his service. I feel sure you will be comfortable."

Walter shook his head. "I shouldn't like to go into another house, sir, after the experience I have had in your service."

"But you will be serving me, Walter, if you go and assist my uncle in his old age. Recollect, I only ask you to go for a year. It is the last request I have to make. Surely you won't refuse?"

"Well, sir, I will go for a year, since you urge it so strongly," assented Walter, who could no longer resist his master's appeal. "When shall I start?"

"When you please. You will be welcome there at any time."

"Then I will set out at once, sir; the sooner our parting is over, the better."

"But if it is so painful to you, why go away at all? You know how glad I should be for you to stay."

"And you know, sir, why I am obliged to go," replied Walter, firmly. "Pardon me, dear sir, for speaking any more on the subject; but if you only had had the resolution to—"

"I'll make another trial, Walter," said Mr. Lafond, with a smile that contrasted strongly with his sunken and wasted features. "You shall hear from me in three months," he continued; "and perhaps — Well, we shall see. Good-by, and my best wishes go with you!"

Walter grasped the hand which his master extended, and kissed it fervently. "God bless and preserve you!" said he, with tears in his eyes. "If prayers, earnest prayers for you, can be of any help, you will be saved."

"Farewell, Walter. You have been a faithful servant," exclaimed Mr. Lafond, with painful emotion. "God be with you!—perhaps we shall never meet each other again."

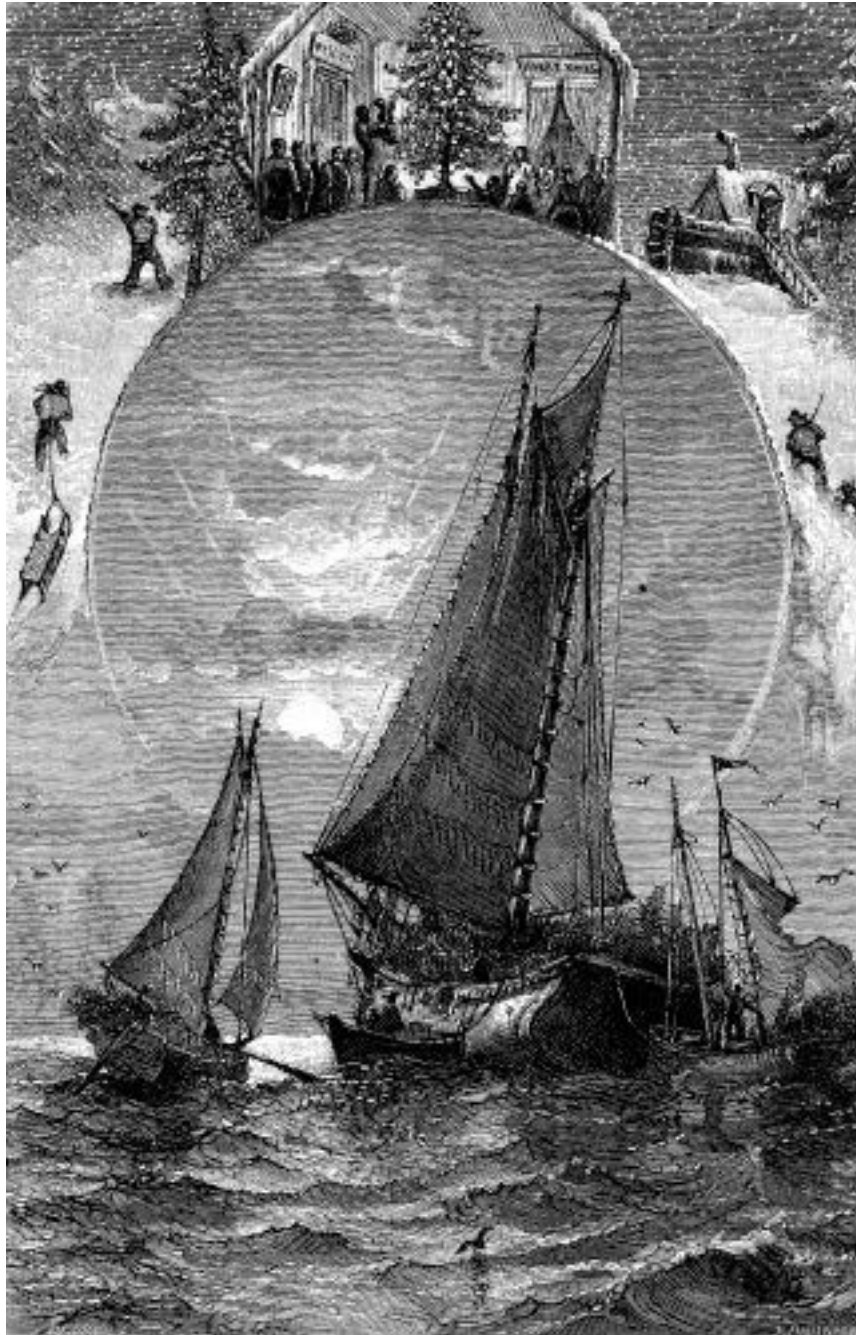
So they parted. Walter went by the first conveyance to Rouen to the house of General De Bougy; and his former master sunk into profound grief as he dwelt upon the affection and solicitude which the young Switzer had shown toward him. "Only a year sooner," he mused, with torturing anguish, "and I might have been a saved man! Now, alas! thou hast come too late, noble and generous heart!"

[to be continued.]

THE BEAUTIFUL CHRISTMAS GREEN

One of the pleasantest pastimes of the whole year for country children is gathering Christmas green. This is done before the very cold weather begins, otherwise the beautiful club-mosses and ground-pines would be frozen solid in the damp soil of the swamps and woods, or the whole would be covered with a snow carpet, broken only by rabbit and squirrel tracks. The freshest green for Christmas trimming is found in damp meadows or on springy hillsides, where it nestles in the moist earth, overshadowed by thickets of alders and birches. It grows in the forests too; not so much among pine-trees, as the dry carpet of fallen needles is less nutritious than the loam produced by the accumulations of dead leaves of oak, maple, and beech trees.

There are many kinds of ground evergreens, most of them members of the *Lycopodiaceæ*, or club-moss family. There is the creeping club-moss, the cord-like stem of which, sometimes yards long, hides among the dead leaves, and sends up at intervals graceful whorls of bright green. Tiny bunches of short white roots run down in the damp mould, where they find nutriment for the plant. If you work your finger under the stem, and pull gently, it is wonderful to see the long and beautiful wreath slowly disentangle itself from the forest floor, disturbing hundreds of little wood-beetles, which scurry away to hide again among the woodland rubbish. There are two kinds of creeping green very common in all moist wooded lands at the North—the kind with leaves rising in whorls, and that with a stem covered with bristle-like spikes. This last variety has leaves, not very abundant,—which resemble a sprig of young fir, and is sometimes called "ground-fir." It is of a deep rich green color, but not so graceful for trimming as the other kind. Besides the creeping green, there are many varieties of what children call "tree-green," independent little plants rooted deep in the mould, which send up a single stalk about eight inches high. Some of these are such perfect little trees as to appear diminutive copies of the firs and pines towering far above them, and are called "fir club-moss." A pretty evergreen to mix with the more feathery varieties is the *Chimaphila umbellata*, or prince's-pine. It has bright shining dark green leaves, which have a very bitter taste, and is sometimes called bitter wintergreen.



BRINGING HOME CHRISTMAS GREEN.—Drawn by J. O. Davidson.

As all these ground varieties need to be gathered before ice and snow begin, often weeks before Christmas, care must be taken to keep them from drying. They should be heaped up in some cool, damp place, where they will not freeze, and should be sprinkled plenteously every day. The boys make frames in the form of crosses, stars, wreaths, or letters, and the girls find a pretty pastime in tying on the greens. As fast as the designs are finished they must also be laid away and kept damp until Christmas. Woodland mosses, holly leaves and scarlet berries, and dried everlasting flowers are pretty to mix with the green. Branches of hemlock and young firs for Christmas trees are cut as near Christmas-time as possible. If a room is to be made into a bower of hemlock boughs, they should not be fastened up until the morning of Christmas-eve, as the heated air of the house loosens the flat, tooth-shaped leaves from the branch, and the least movement sends them in clouds to the floor. Any one who has tried to sweep them from the carpet after Christmas, will prefer some other variety of green for trimming another year.

The immense amount of green brought into New York city the week preceding Christmas can scarcely be estimated. Viewing the hundreds of young firs in the markets, and the enormous numbers of wreaths and other designs, it would seem as if the forests and swamps had been stripped to such an extent that nothing would be left for another year; but so prodigal is Nature of her beautiful club-mosses and her aromatic pines, that what is gathered for holiday trimming amounts to little more than a weeding out of superfluous growth. Many of the greens sold in the New York market come from New Jersey. Schooners bring them from all along the coast, freight-cars come loaded with the beauty of the inland hills, and huge market carts trundle their precious burden from the near-lying forests and damp meadows. Although it is prohibited by law to cut young trees from the barrens along the coast, as the growth of pines keeps the sand from drifting, many small coasting vessels drop into the bays and inlets around Sandy Hook and other parts of the Jersey shore a little before Christmas-time, and send their crews ashore by night to secure a cargo to bring to New York.

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