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The Divell's Chrystmass.



THE DIVELL'S CHRYSTMASS.

It befell that on a time ye Divell did walk to and fro upon ye earth, having in his mind full evill cogitations how that he might do despight; for of soche nature is ye Divell, and ever hath been, that continually doth he go about among men, being so dispositioned that it sufficeth him not that men sholde of their own frowardness, and by cause of the guile born in them, turn unto his wickedness, but rather that he sholde by his crewel artifices and diabolical machinations tempt them at all times and upon every hand to do his fiendly plaisaunce.

But it so fortuneth that this time wherein ye Divell so walked upon ye earth was ye Chrystmass time; and wit ye well that how evill soever ye harte of man ben at other seasons, it is tofilled at ye Chrystmass time with charity and love, like as if it ben sanctified by ye exceeding holiness of that feast. Leastwise, this moche we know, that, whereas at other times envy and worldliness do prevail, for a verity our natures are toched at ye Chrystmass time as by ye hand of divinity, and conditioned for merciful deeds unto our fellow kind. Right wroth was ye Divell, therefore, when that he knew this ben ye Chrystmass time. And as rage doth often confirm in ye human harte an evill purpose, so was ye Divell now more diabolically minded to work his unclean will, and full hejeously fell he to roar and lash his ribald legs with his poyson taile. But ye Divell did presently conceive that naught might he accomplish by this means, since that men, affrighted by his roaring and astonied by ye fumes of brimstone and ye sulphur flames issuing from his mouth, wolde flee therefrom; whereas by subtile craft and by words of specious guile it more frequently befalls that ye Divell seduceth men and lureth them into his toils. So then ye Divell did in a little season feign to be in a full plaisaunt mind and of sweet purpose; and when that he had girt him about with an hermit's cloak, so that none might see his cloven feet and his poyson taile, right briskly did he fare him on his journey, and he did sing ye while a plaisaunt tune, like he had ben full of joyous contentation.

Now it befell that presently in his journey he did meet with a frere, Dan Dennyss, an holy man that fared him to a neighboring town for deeds of charity and godliness. Unto him spake ye Divell full courteysely, and required of him that he might bear him company; to which ye frere gave answer in seemly wise, that, if so be that he ben of friendly disposition, he wolde make him joy of his companionship and conversation. Then, whiles that they journeyed together, began ye Divell to discourse of theologies and hidden mysteries, and of conjurations, and of negromancy and of magick, and of Chaldee, and of astrology, and of chymistry, and of other occult and forbidden sciences, wherein ye Divell and all that ply his damnable arts are mightily learned and practised. Now wit ye well that this frere, being an holy man and a simple, and having an eye single to ye blessed works of his calling, was presently mightily troubled in his mind by ye artifices of ye Divell, and his harte began to waver and to be filled with miserable doubtings; for knowing nothing of ye things whereof ye Divell spake, he colde not make answer thereto, nor, being of godly cogitation and practice, had he ye confutations wherewith to meet ye abominable argumentations of ye fiend.

Yet (and now shall I tell you of a special Providence) it did fortune, whiles yet ye Divell discoursed in this profane wise, there was vouchsafed unto ye frere a certain power to resist ye evill that environed him; for of a sodaine he did cast his doubtings and his misgivings to ye winds, and did fall upon ye Divell and did buffet him full sore, crying, "Thou art ye Divell! Get thee gone!" And ye frere plucked ye cloake from ye Divell and saw ye cloven feet and ye poyson taile, and straightway ye Divell ran roaring away. But ye frere fared upon his journey, for that he had had a successful issue from this greivous temptation, with thanksgiving and prayse.

Next came ye Divell into a town wherein were many people going to and fro upon works of charity, and doing righteous practices; and sorely did it repent ye Divell when that he saw ye people bent upon ye giving of alms and ye doing of charitable deeds. Therefore with mighty diligence did ye Divell apply himself to poyson ye minds of ye people, shewing unto them in artful wise how that by idleness or by righteous dispensation had ye poore become poore, and that, soche being ye will of God, it was an evill and rebellious thing against God to seeke to minister consolation unto these poore peoples. Soche like specious argumentations did ye Divell use to gain his diabolical ends; but by means of a grace whereof none then knew ye source, these men and these women unto whom ye Divell spake his hejeous heresies presently discovered force to withstand these fiendly temptations, and to continue in their Chrystianly practices, to ye glory of their faith and to ye benefite of ye needy, but to ye exceeding discomfiture of ye Divell; for ye which discomfiture I do give hearty thanks, and so also shall all of you, if so be that your hartes within you be of rightful disposition.

All that day long fared ye Divell to and fro among ye people of ye town, but none colde he bring into his hellish way of

cogitation. Nor do I count this to be a marvellous thing; for, as I myself have herein shewn and as eche of us doth truly know, how can there be a place for ye Divell upon earth during this Chrystmass time when in ye very air that we breathe abideth a certain love and concord sent of heaven for the controul and edification of mankind, filling human hartes with peace and inclining human hands to ye delectable and blessed employments of charity? Nay, but you shall know that all this very season whereof I speak ye holy Chrystchilde himself did follow ye Divell upon earth, forefending the crewel evils which ye Divell fain wolde do and girding with confidence and love ye else frail natures of men. Soothly it is known of common report among you that when ye Chrystmass season comes upon ye earth there cometh with it also the spirit of our Chryst himself, that in ye similitude of a little childe descendeth from heaven and walketh among men. And if so be that by any chance ye Divell is minded to issue from his foul pit at soche a time, wit ye well that wheresoever ye fiend fareth to do his diabolical plaisaunce there also close at hand followeth ye gentle Chrystchilde; so that ye Divell, try how hard soever he may, hath no power at soche a time over the hartes of men.

Nay, but you shall know furthermore that of soche sweete quality and of so great efficacy is this heavenly spirit of charity at ye Chrystmass season, that oftentimes is ye Divell himself made to do a kindly deed. So at this time of ye which I you tell, ye Divell, walking upon ye earth with evill purpose, become finally overcome by ye gracious desire to give an alms; but nony alms had ye Divell to give, sith it is wisely ordained that ye Divell's offices shall be confined to his domain. Right grievously tormented therefore was ye Divell, in that he had nought of alms to bestow; but when presently he did meet with a beggar childe that besought him charity, ye Divell whipped out a knife and cut off his own taile, which taile ye Divell gave to ye beggar childe, for he had not else to give for a lyttle trinket toy to make merry with. Now wit ye well that this poyson instrument brought no evill to ye beggar childe, for by a sodaine miracle it ben changed into a flowre of gold, ye which gave great joy unto ye beggar childe and unto all them that saw this miracle how that it had ben wrought, but not by ye Divell. Then returned ye Divell unto his pit of fire; and since that day, whereupon befell this thing of which I speak, ye Divell hath had nony taile at all, as you that hath scene ye same shall truly testify.

But all that day long walked ye Chrystchilde upon ye earth, unseen to ye people but toching their hartes with his swete love and turning their hands to charity; and all felt that ye Chrystchilde was with them. So it was plaisaunt to do ye Chrystchilde's will, to succor ye needy, to comfort ye afflicted, and to lift up ye oppressed. Most plaisauntest of all was it to make merry with ye lyttle children, sithence of soche is ye kingdom whence ye Chrystchilde cometh.

Behold, ye season is again at hand; once more ye snows of winter lie upon all ye earth, and all Chrystantie is arrayed to the holy feast.

Presently shall ye star burn with exceeding brightness in ye east, ye sky shall be full of swete music, ye angels shall descend to earth with singing, and ye bells—ye joyous Chrystmass bells—shall tell us of ye babe that was born in Bethlehem.

Come to us now, O gentle Chrystchilde, and walke among us peoples of ye earth; enwheel us round about with thy protecting care; forefend all envious thoughts and evil deeds; toche thou our hearts with the glory of thy love, and quicken us to practices of peace, good-will, and charity meet for thy approval and acceptation.

1888.

[End of *The Divell's Chrystmass* by Eugene Field]