CHRISTMAS
TALES BY
SOLOMON SOBERSIDES

MARSHALL 1821

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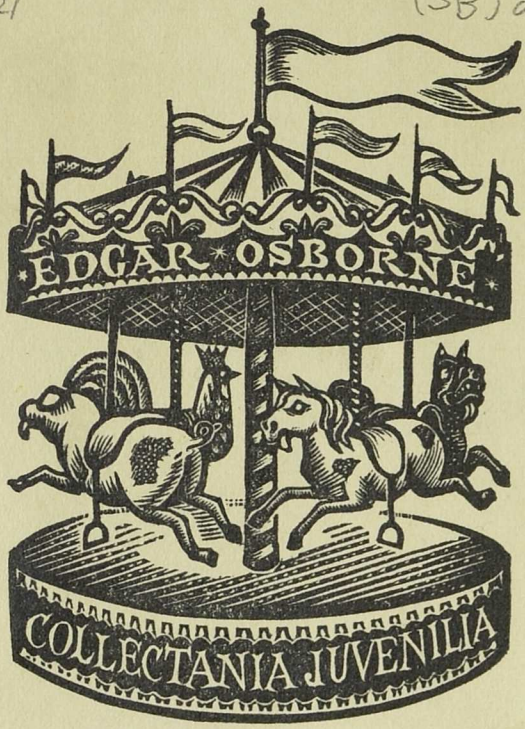


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FRONTISPIECE.

*See* page 5.

*See* page 8.

# CHRISTMAS TALES;

FOR THE

## Amusement and Instruction

OF

*YOUNG LADIES AND GENTLEMEN*

IN

WINTER EVENINGS.

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By SOLOMON SOBERSIDES.

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The cheerful sage, when solemn dictates fail,
Conceals the moral counsel in—a Tale.

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# CHRISTMAS TALES.

## STORY I.

I AM at last safely arrived in Holland, and have taken the first opportunity to give you a relation of the adventures that detained me so long in foreign countries.

In my return from the Indies I had some affairs with a Spanish merchant; which while I was managing in one of their sea-ports, there came a Spanish ship, that had taken a rich Turkish prize, with several Turks and Moors prisoners, whom he offered to sale as slaves. I never had any traffic of this kind from any view of interest; but, from a motive of compassion, I had purchased liberty for many a miserable wretch, to whom I gave freedom the moment I had paid his ransom.

Among the captives newly taken, there was one distinguished by the richness of his habit, and more by the gracefulness of his port. He drew all my attention; of which he appeared sensible, and still directed his looks to me: our souls seemed to greet one another, as if their intimacy had been of a long standing, and commenced in some pre-existent period. There was something in the air of this young stranger superior to adversity, and yet sensible of the present disadvantage of his fate. I felt for him an emotion soft as the ties of nature, and could not but impute it to the secret impression of some intelligent power, which was leading me to a height of generosity beyond my own intention, and by an impulse of virtue on my soul directing it to the accomplishment of some distant and unknown sign of providence. The heavenly instigator came with a prevailing force, and I could not but obey its dictate.

The price set on this captive was ex-

travagantly high, and such as would be a vast disadvantage to my present affairs to part with. However, I listened to the gentle monitor within, and paid the corsair his full demand.

As soon as I had conducted the youth to my lodgings, I told him he was from that moment free; the price I had paid was for his friendship and liberty.

'Then you have confined me by the most lasting engagements,' replied the stranger. 'I might have broke through any other restraint; but I am now your voluntary slave, and dare trust you with a secret yet unknown to the Spaniard. My name is Orramel, the only son of a wealthy Bassa in Constantinople; and you may demand what you will for my ransom.

'You will soon be convinced,' said I, 'there was no mercenary intention in this action. The amity I have for you is noble and disinterested; it was kindled by a celestial spark, an emanation from the Divine clemency, and terminates in

nothing below your immortal happiness. And were you inclined to examine those sacred truths which would lead you to great felicity, and to share my fortune in a free and happy nation, the wealth of the Indies should not buy you from my affections; but if it is your choice to return to the customs and religion of your country, you are absolutely free, without attending any terms for your release.'

With a friendly but dejected look, he told me, it was impossible for him to dispense with his filial obligations to an indulgent parent; but he positively refused his freedom till he had given intelligence, and received an answer from his father; which he soon had, with orders to tell me, I might make my own terms for his son's ransom. I desired him to acquaint his father, I required nothing more than the liberty of all the Christian slaves he had in his possession; hoping, by this disinterested conduct, to leave a conviction on the mind of my

young friend in favour of Christianity. He could persuade me to receive nothing but a little present, and left me with some apparent concern.

It was some months after he was gone before I could finish my negotiations in Spain; but as soon as they were dispatched, I embarked for Holland. We had not been a week at sea before the ship was taken by a Turkish pirate, and all the men in it carried to Constantinople to be sold for slaves. My lot fell to a master, from whom I was like to find the most barbarous treatment: however, I was resolved to endure my bondage till I could give intelligence to my friends in England to procure my ransom. I was fixed not to give Orramel an account of my distress, till I was in circumstances not to need his kindness, nor expect a retaliation of my own. But Heaven had kinder intentions by bringing me into this adversity, nor left me long without redress. As I was talking in a public place to one of my fellow slaves, Orramel

came by. He passed beyond me; but instantly returning, looked on me with great attention, till some melting sorrow dropt from his eyes; when, making inquiry of some that were near, to whom I belonged, and being informed, without speaking a word to me, he flew to my new master, paid his demand for my ransom, and immediately conducted me to his house, where he welcomed me with the warmest marks of affection. He spoke, he paused, and was in the greatest perplexity to find language suitable to the sentiments of his soul.

'My brother!' said he, 'my friend! or, if there are more sacred ties in nature or virtue, let me call you by some gentler appellation. We are now united by the bands of celestial amity, one in the same holy faith, and hope of a glorious immortality. Your charity rescued me from a worse than the Spanish slavery—from the bondage of vice and superstition! Your conduct banished my prejudices to the Christian name, and made

way for the entrance of those heavenly truths to which I now assent. But this is a secret even to my own domestics; and whether such a caution is criminal, I am not yet able to determine.'

With what rapture, what attention, did I listen to this language! I blessed the accents that told me my friend, my Orramel, had embraced the Christian faith. An angel's song would have been less melodious. I looked upward, and, with a grateful elevation of mind, gave the glory to the Supreme Disposer of all human events. The instinct was from above, that first moved me to ransom this young captive; thence was the spring of my compassion. It would be vanity, it would be the most criminal arogance, not to ascribe this action to the assisting Deity.

The illustrious Orramel made it his joy, his study, to evince his affection. He told me, his father had died since we parted in Spain; and that he left three daughters, that he had by several wives.

He offered me the choice of his sisters, if I had any thoughts of marriage, and promised a dowry with her to my content. One of them, he said, was pri-

vately bred a Christian by her mother, a beautiful woman of Armenia. I was pleased with the proposal, and impatient to see my fair mistress. In the mean time he made me a present of several rich habits, and two negroes to attend me.

The next day he conducted me to a fair summer-house, whither he sent for

his sisters, who were all so very handsome, that I was distressed with my own liberty, nor knew where to chuse, had not a principle of piety directed me to the young Armenian; who was not superior to the rest, but there was a decorum in her behaviour which the others wanted. She had more of the politeness and modesty of European women, to whom you know I was always partial. My choice was fixed; and the more I conversed with my mistress, the more reason I had to approve it. We were privately married by a chaplain belonging to the British envoy. My generous friend gave her a fortune which abundantly repaired all my losses; and, after a prosperous voyage, I am safely landed in Holland.

I have sent you this relation, as a memorial of my gratitude to Heaven, whose clemency has returned me more than measure for measure, and largely recompensed that liberality it first inspired.

## STORY II.

Ebouli Sina, a sage dervise, had passed the night in the house of a poor woman, who had exercised all the duties of hospitality towards him. He was touched with the unfortunate condition to which she was reduced, and, resolving to succour her in her misfortunes, he loosened a stone from out of the wall of the house, and pronouncing some words over it, placed it again where it was before, and pierced it with a little pipe, at

the end of which he put a cock, then said to the woman, as he returned her his thanks, and bid her adieu, 'My good mother, whenever you are in want of necessaries, turn this cock, and draw out as much wine as you please; take the quantity that is necessary for your own use, and carry the remainder to the market. Be assured that the source will never fail; and all I exact of you is, not to unloose the stone, nor to look at what I have put behind it.' The good woman promised she would not, and during some time observed what the holy man had recommended to her. She gathered riches; affluence and plenty soon reigned in her little family. At length curiosity became so strong within her, that she submitted to its dictates; she displaced the stone, and found nothing behind it but one single grape: she then replaced it in the same order she found it, but the wine ran no more.

Thus was she, by satisfying her idle curiosity, punished by the same want she before experienced.

## STORY III.

A DERVISE, venerable by his age, fell ill in the house of a widow, who lived in extreme poverty in the suburbs of Balsora. He was so touched with the care and zeal with which she had assisted him, that at his departure he said to her, 'I have remarked that you have wherewith to subsist upon alone, but that you have not enough to share it with your only son, the young Abdallah; if you will trust him to my care, I will do all that is possible to acknowledge in his person the obligations I have to you.'

The good woman received his proposal with joy, and the dervise departed with the young man.

Abdalla a hundred times testified his gratitude to him; but the old man always said to him, 'My son, it is by actions that gratitude is proved; I shall see, at a proper time and place, whether you are as grateful as you profess to be.'

One day, as they continued their travels, they found themselves in a solitary place; and the dervise said to Abdalla, 'We are now at the end of our journey.' The dervise, striking a light, made a small fire, into which he cast a perfume; he then prayed for some moments; after which the earth opened, and the dervise said to him, 'Thou mayest now enter, my dear Abdalla: remember, it is in thy power to do me a great service, and that this perhaps is the only opportunity thou canst ever have of testifying to me thou are not ungrateful. Don't be dazzled by what thou wilt find there; think only of seizing an iron candlestick with twelve branches, which thou wilt find close to a door, that is absolutely necessary to me.'

Abdalla promised every thing, and descended boldly into the vault; but, forgetting what had been so expressly commanded him, whilst he was filling his vest and his bosom with the gold and jewels which this vault inclosed in prodigious heaps, the opening by which he entered

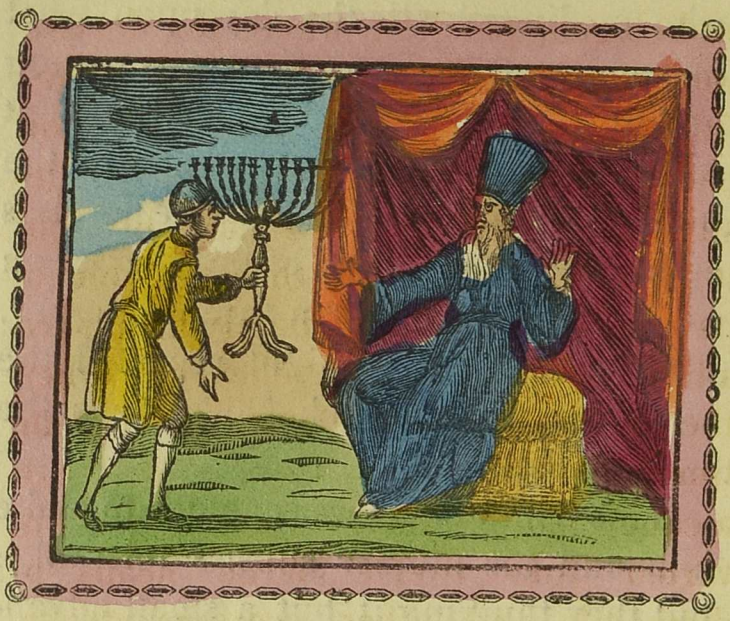
closed of itself; he had, however, presence of mind enough to seize on the iron candlestick. He searched many ways to get out: at length, after much pain and inquietude, he was fortunate enough to find a narrow passage, which led him out of his obscure cave, though it was not till he had followed it a considerable way that he perceived a small opening, covered with briars and thorns, through which he came out.

He looked on all sides to see if he

could perceive the dervise, but not seeing him, nor remembering any of the places through which they had passed, he went on as fortune directed him, and was extremely astonished to find himself before the door of his mother's house. She immediately inquired after the holy dervise. Abdalla told her frankly the danger he had run to satisfy his unreasonable desires. He afterwards shewed her the riches. Whilst they contemplated these treasures with avidity, and, dazzled with their lustre, formed a thousand projects in consequence of them, they all vanished away before their eyes. It was then that Abdalla sincerely reproached himself with his ingratitude and disobedience: as he did thus, he placed the candlestick in the midst of the room. When night was come, without reflecting, he placed a light in it, and immediately they saw a dervise appear, who turned round for an hour, and disappeared, after having thrown them an asper, or small Turkish coin. Abdalla,

who meditated all the day upon what he had seen the night before, was willing to know what would happen the next night, if he put a candle in each of the branches; he did so, and twelve dervises appeared; they turned round also for an hour, and each of them threw an asper. He constantly every night repeated the same ceremony, which had always the same success.

This trifling sum was enough to make him and his mother subsist tolerably; but they thinking it but a small advantage they drew from the candlestick, he resolved to carry it back to the dervise, in hopes that he might obtain of him the treasure he had seen, or at least what had vanished from his sight, by restoring him a thing for which he had testified so ardent a desire. He was so fortunate as to remember his name, and that of the city where he dwelt. He took leave of his mother, and departed immediately with the candlestick, which furnished him with necessaries on the road. When he



arrived at Magrabi, his first care was to inquire in what house the dervise dwelt. He got intelligence, and repaired thither immediately, and found fifty porters who kept the gates of his palace, each having a staff with a head of gold in their hands. The palace was filled with slaves and domestics: in fine, the court of a prince could not expose to view greater magnificence.

Abdalla then inquired for the dervise. He was soon conducted to an agreeable

and elegant pavilion, where the dervise was seated. 'Thou art but an ungrateful wretch,' said he to him; 'if thou hadst known the true use of this candlestick, never wouldst thou have brought it to me: I will make thee sensible of its true virtue. Immediately he placed a light in each of its branches; and when the twelve dervises had turned for some time, he gave each of them a blow with a cane, and in a moment they were converted into twelve large heaps of diamonds and other precious stones. 'This,' said he, 'is the proper use to be made of this miraculous candlestick; 'but to prove to thee that curiosity was the only occasion of my search for it, here are the keys of my magazines, tell me if the most insatiable miser would not be satisfied with them.'

Abdalla obeyed him, and examined twelve magazines, which were so full of all manner of riches, that he could not distinguish what merited his admiration most. Regret at having restored the

candlestick and not finding the use of it, pierced the heart of Abdalla: the dervise seemed not to perceive it, but on the contrary loaded him with caresses. When the eve of the day which he had fixed for his departure was come, the dervise said to him, 'Abdalla, I owe thee a mark of my gratitude for taking so long a journey with a view of bringing me the thing I desired: thou mayest depart; thou shalt find to-morrow, at the gates of my palace, one of my horses to carry thee; I make thee a present of it, as well as of a slave, who shall conduct to thy house two camels loaded with gold and jewels.

Abdalla said to him all that a heart sensible to avarice could express, when its passion was satisfied, and went to lay down till the morning arrived, which was the time fixed for his departure. During the night he was still agitated, without being able to think on any thing else but the candlestick, and what it produced. He determined at length to

seize on the candlestick, which was not difficult, the dervise having trusted him with the keys of the magazines; he knew where the candlestick was placed; he

took it, and hid it at the bottom of one of the sacks, which he filled with pieces of gold, and other riches he was allowed to take, and loaded it as well as the rest upon his camels, and after returning the dervise his keys, departed with his horse, his slave, and two camels.

When he had gone some days journey,

he sold his slave, resolving not to have a witness of his former poverty, nor of the source of his present riches; he bought another, and arrived without any other obstacle at his mother's. His first care was to place the loads of the camels and the candlestick in the most private room in the house; and in his impatience to feed his eyes with his great opulence, he placed lights immediately in the candlestick. The twelve dervises appearing, he gave each of them a blow with all his might; but he had not remarked, that the dervise when he struck them had the cane in his left hand. Abdalla, by a natural motion, made use of his right, and the dervises instead of becoming heaps of riches, immediately drew from beneath their robes each a formidable club, with which they struck him so hard and so often, that they left him almost dead, and disappeared, carrying with them all his treasure, the camels, the horse, the slave, and the candlestick.

## STORY IV.

A POOR villager complained to Mahamoud, sultan of Damascus, that a young Turk of distinction had broke into his house, and insulted him so, that he was forced to abandon it, with his wife and family, to the shameful abuses of this bold intruder, who afterwards escaped, and remained unknown.

The sultan, very much moved, charged the sufferer to come immediately, and give him notice, if ever that Turk should repeat the insult; which he did three days after, and the poor man came and threw himself at the feet of the sultan, and complained accordingly. Mahamoud, taking a few attendants, immediately went with him. It was night when they came to the house; but the sultan ordered all the lights to be put out, then rushed boldly in, and with his sabre cut the ravisher in pieces; after which he ordered a torch to be lighted,

and looking on the face of the malefactor, immediately, with an air of joy, fell down on the ground, and praised God. When he rose, he bid the man of the house bring him what victuals he had, which was only some stale brown bread and butter-milk, of which the sultan eat and drank heartily; and then being ready to return, at the poor man's request, explained all these mysterious circumstances as follows: 'You must know,' said he, 'that upon hearing these complaints, and the description you gave

me of the criminal, I concluded he could be no other than my own son; therefore, lest my eyes should suborn my heart, and the tenderness of nature enervate the arm of justice, I resolved, through the undistinguishing veil of night, to give it scope; but when I beheld it was not he, but only an officer of my guard, I fell down with gladness, to give thanks unto God that my offspring had not in this affair deserved my wrath, nor met with my vengeance: and, after all, I asked what provision you had at hand to satisfy my hunger, and repair this fleshly frame, which my resentment would not suffer me to gratify, either with sleep or sustenance, from the moment I heard this accusation, till I had punished the author of your wrongs, and shewed myself worthy of my people's obedience; for this one example shall make it known among them, that you have a prince, under whom there is no sufferer so mean who need fear to be denied redress, nor no offender so great as may hope to escape punishment.

## STORY V.

Hacho, a king of Lapland, was in his youth the most renowned of the northern warriors; his martial achievements remain engraved on a pillar of flint in the rocks of Hanga, and are to this day solemnly carolled to the harp by the Laplanders, at the fire with which they celebrate their nightly festivities. His temperance and severity of manners were his chief praise. In his early years he never tasted wine, nor would he drink out of a painted cup. He constantly slept in his armour, with his spear in his hand; nor would he use a battle-axe whose handle was inlaid with brass. He did not, however, persevere in his contempt of luxury, nor did he close his life with honour.

One day, after hunting the gulos, or wild dog, being bewildered in a solitary forest, and having passed the fatigues of the day without any interval of refresh-

ment, he discovered a large store of honey in the hollow of a pine. This was a dainty which he had never tasted before, and being at once both faint and hungry, he fell greedily upon it. From this unusual delicious repast he received so much satisfaction, that at his return home he commanded honey to be served up at his table every day. His palate by degrees became refined and vitiated; he began to lose his native relish for simple fare, and contracted a habit of indulging

himself in delicacies; he ordered the delightful gardens of his castle to be thrown open, in which the most luscious fruits had been suffered to ripen and decay, unobserved and untouched, for many revolving autumns, and gratified his appetite with luxurious desserts. At length he found it expedient to introduce wine, as an agreeable improvement, or a necessary ingredient to this new way of living; and having tasted it, he was tempted by a little to give loose to the excesses of intoxication. His general simplicity of life was changed; he perfumed his apartment by burning the wood of the most aromatic fir, and commanded his helmet to be ornamented with beautiful rows of the teeth of the rein-deer. Indolence and effeminacy stole upon him by pleasing and imperceptible gradations, relaxed the sinews of resolution, and extinguished his thirst of military glory.

Whilst Hacho was thus immersed in pleasure and repose, it was reported to

him one morning, that the preceding night a disastrous omen had been discovered, and that bats and hideous birds had drank up the oil which nourished the perpetual lamp in the temple of Odin. About the same time a messenger arrived to tell him, that the king of Norway had invaded his kingdom with a formidable army. Hacho, terrified as he was with the omen of the night, and enervated with indulgence, roused himself from his voluptuous lethargy, and recollecting some faint sparks of veteran valour, marched forward to meet him.

Both armies joined battle in the forest where Hacho had been lost after hunting; and it so happened, the king of Norway challenged him to single combat near the place where Hacho had tasted the honey. The Lapland chief, languid, and long unused to arms, was soon overpowered; he fell to the ground, and before his insulting adversary struck his head from his body, uttered this exclamation, which the Laplanders still

use as an early lesson to their children: 'The vicious man should date his destruction from the first temptation. How justly do I fall a sacrifice to sloth and luxury in the place where I first yielded to those allurements which seduced me to deviate from temperance and innocence. The honey which I tasted in this forest, and not the king of Norway, conquers Hacho.'

THE END.

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