

12 A CHRISTMAS BALLAD

(Anonymous)

In the far-off Polar seas,
Far beyond the Hebrides,
Where the icebergs, towering high,
Seem to pierce the wintry sky,
And the fur-clad Esquimaux
Glides in sledges o'er the snow,
Dwells St. Nick, the merry wight.
Patron saint of Christmas night.

Solid walls of massive ice,
Bearings many a quaint device,
Flanked by graceful turrets twain,
Clear as clearest porcelain,
Bearing at a lofty height
Christ's pure cross in simple white,
Carven with surpassing art
From an iceberg's crystal heart.

Here St. Nick, in royal state,
Dwells, until December late
Clips the days at either end,
And the nights at each extend;
Then, with his attendant sprites,
Scours the earth on wintry nights,
Bringing home, in well-filled hands,
Children's gifts from many lands.

Here are whistles, tops and toys,
Meant to gladden little boys;

Skates and sleds that soon will glide
O'er the ice or steep hill-side.
Here are dolls with flaxen curls,
Sure to charm the little girls;
Christmas books, with pictures gay,
For this welcome holiday.

In the court the reindeer wait;
Filled the sledge with costly freight.
As the first faint shadow falls,
Promptly from his icy halls
Steps St. Nick, and grasps the rein:
Straight his coursers scour the plain,
And afar, in measured time,
Sounds the sleigh-bells' silver chime.

Like an arrow from the bow
Speed the reindeer o'er the snow.
Onward! Now the loaded sleigh
Skirts the shores of Hudson's Bay.
Onward, till the stunted tree
Gains a loftier majesty,
And the swirling smoke-wreaths rise
Under less inclement skies.

Built upon a hill-side steep
Lies a city wrapt in sleep.
Up and down the lonely street
Sleepy watchmen pace their beat.
Little heeds them Santa Claus;
Not for him are human laws.
With a leap he leaves the ground,
Scales the chimney at a bound.

Five small stockings hang below;
Five small stockings in a row.
From his pocket blithe St. Nick
Fills the waiting stocking quick;
Some with sweetmeats, some with toys,
Gifts for girls, and gifts for boys,
Mounts the chimney like a bird,
And the bells are once more heard.

Santa Claus! Good Christmas saint,
In whose heart no selfish taint
Findeth place, some homes there be
Where no stockings wait for thee, --
Homes where sad young faces wear
Painful marks of Want and Care,
And the Christmas morning brings
No fair hope of better things.

Can you not some crumbs bestow
On these children steeped in woe;
Steal a single look of care
Which their sad young faces wear;
From your overflowing store
Give to them whose hearts are sore?
No sad eyes should greet the morn
When the infant Christ was born.

Sources:

Harper's Weekly, December 31, 1864.