

A CHRISTMAS MYSTERY.

BY HELEN J. ADELL.

One Christmas evening, long ago—
Just how long I forget—
The tinkle of Santa Claus ran low,

He pulled his beard and scratched his head,
And set his cap awry.
"Here are things in the world," he said,

"That money cannot buy—
Things needful as one's daily bread;
This year those gifts I'll try."

He brought to many a household band
To make the night more bright;
To work-oven frames, through all the land,

To the blessed bowl of rest.
An opening rose bud, sweet as June,
So true one poor sufferer's woe;

TOLD AT NIGHTFALL.

It was a stormy September evening.
Guy Urquhart and my respected self—
Charles Edgington, painter—were sitting

in the study, over a bottle of wine.
The little villa at Erasmie, near Rome,
High over the rounded tops of woods

now lurid in the red setting sun.
Beneath a leaden sky the gloomy Campagna
Stretched like a dead sea, and

with its far run out the disc, a portentous
blood-red ball, slowly, slowly sinking.
Guy and I had been old friends and

school-fellows in England. He was two
or three years older than myself, but
that had made his friendship for me all

the tender, and mine for him reverential.
Besides, I had looked on Guy as a kind
of original young saint. I had

always felt rather wickered in his company,
because he really seemed quite
naturally, never to do anything wrong,

angel, half-devil, they say. But your
angel and devil seem to share their
office on the most curious terms of

mutual forbearance. They seem to
take you turn and turn about, in
watches, as it were. Your angel never

torments you, or interferes with
his mode of enjoying himself, his
Wal-purgis nights with his man; and your

devil, with equal politeness, never
intrudes himself on the angelical prayer-
meetings. They could not possibly

come in contact without disturbing the
harmony of the system; but they seem
to agree to differ, like certain polite

married couples."
Urquhart took his pipe from his
mouth, and blew out a long smoke

wreath. Then he leaned head and
shoulders out of the window and
stared at the moon, now like

a dot of blood on the livid horizon,
till even that crimson speck was absorbed.
Then he brought himself back to his

former position in a corner of the
rickety old sofa, and from that dusky
corner spoke.

"You looked a fine fat fish there,
my young friend, with your moral-critic-
ism. You sagaciously really deserves

padding for having snapped up such
good head of game. Still, you don't
know how the devil got into me; do

you? He had hardly set claw
on your friend when we were boys to-
gether, and I rather the better boy of

the two.
You may well say that, old fellow!
At that time (and what a little time

ago it is, after all!) you really seemed
incapable of evil, or even of compre-
hending it. You trusted everybody

implicitly, because you yourself were
"An ass!" roared Urquhart. "And
now listen!"

So, as the night fell, and "the case-
ment slowly grew a glimmering square"
in the blackness, Urquhart's tale was

fourteen months ago I was lodging
for the summer in a farm-house in a
village, no matter where. The only

house there belonging to gentilefolk,
except the wretched old parsonage, was
Squire Ringwood's. It was a big, stu-
pid-looking mansion, on a hill, staring

down on the town, and with the pebble
tendrils huddled together below,
and the burly Squire himself was for

all the world like his house, as he sat on
his tall horse and looked down pomp-
ously over his vast waistcoat at a

frightened crew of village children.
The Squire had an ugly, sickly wife
and a fat, fat child, and they had a burble

companion that was an angel of beauty.
When Capt. Ringwood left of speaking
I looked up, meaning to say something,

but forgot what it was, and only stared
at him silently.
"Was a fair, slight young man

about thirty, with handsome, thin fea-
tures, and large, light brown whiskers.
His hooded eyes looked at me with the

same good-natured, but his face that
had been expressed in words, in his
fashionable, affected way.

"At last I recollected what I had been
going to say, and told him I wished to
be left alone. He silently took out his

card, laid it on the chimney piece, and
went out.
"don't know how many hours I re-
mained lying on the sofa with my eyes

shut, in that strange torpor; but it was
one night when I opened them and found
my wife standing by me. She had light-

ened the candles on the chimney piece,
and was stooping down over me. She
started upright as my eyes opened, but

she did not seem to be surprised.
"Who are you?" she asked, in a
gentle, sorrowful way, said he, in a

passionately. "This woman has treated
you very badly. Still, you know, you
have only yourself to thank. Your

conduct has been quite inconceivably
rash, you know—
"Who are you?" I repeated, staring

at him bluntly.
I am Capt. Edward Ringwood.
This woman, as you see, is my wife. I

became acquainted with her, but you or
two before you first saw her. I assure
you I knew nothing of your love affair

or proposed marriage. If I had known
in time, I should certainly have consid-
ered it my duty to warn you of the aw-
ful blunder you were making. When I

was about to go to my room, I saw
her sitting on the sofa, and she was
weeping. I went to her, and she told

me that she had been deceived. I
thought she was joking, but she was
not. She had been deceived by a man

who had been deceiving her for years.
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