

**THE  
PRACTICAL JOKE;  
OR THE  
CHRISTMAS STORY OF UNCLE NED.**



Welcome, merry Christmas and New-Year! prized by children above all other days in the year. Ye are associated with pleasant recollections of old Santa Claus and sugar-plums—with bright visions of a cheerful fireside, merry games, pleasant stories, and happy, smiling faces. First comes Christmas Eve, when each young face beams with eager curiosity and delightful anticipation—all wondering and guessing what they shall find in their stockings next morning; while the eldest sister, with looks of mystery and of importance, shares her mother's councils, and helps to distribute the precious stores. Soon they are in bed, anxious to sleep off the long hours, dreaming of rocking-horses and doll-babies, tea-sets, wooden soldiers, and all the other delights of the toy-shop.

I never heard of a lazy child on a Christmas morning. The idle and the industrious are all up, "bright and early." The well-filled stockings are eagerly inspected, good wishes and pretty or useful presents given and received, and various plans proposed for the day's amusement. Night comes too soon for the tireless lovers of fun, who go unwillingly to bed, consoling themselves that one week more will bring New-Year.



Dear children, long may such innocent delights crown the year; and, in the midst of all, forget not the children of the famishing poor, who have no Christmas pleasures to look forward to; whose parents toil for their daily bread and scanty apparel all the year, and have no time nor means to provide themselves or their children with the comforts and luxuries you enjoy. Each one can spare a little to minister to the enjoyment of those poor suffering children, many of whom, perhaps, have no fathers to provide for them, some of them not even a home to shelter them. Share with them your abundance, and the blessings of the poor shall rest upon you. And now, my patient little readers, for the story.

One Christmas night we were all gathered around a cheerful fire in the old-fashioned parlor. Father, mother, sisters, brothers, uncles, aunts, and cousins, were all there. The blazing pine knots sent a cheerful light into every nook and corner of the big room; the ponderous presses, and quaint old desk and bookcase, reflecting the warm glow from their polished surfaces.

The straight, high-backed, mahogany chairs had been sadly knocked about in a game of blind-man's-buff, and looked as much out of place as a prim old maiden aunt in a game of romps. Nut-shells and apple-parings, kiss-papers and mottoes, strewed the broad hearth, and gave pretty good token of the evening's cheer. The clock had just struck ten, and we youngsters were warned that it was bedtime, when there arose a loud call for a story. A story from Uncle Ned! We might all sit up to hear a story, if Uncle Ned would tell one.



He, good soul, never refused a kind request in his life, and we felt quite safe for the next half hour. I think I see him now, with his trim leg encased in a fine home-knit stocking—his bright shoe-buckles, and neat drab small-clothes—his queer-looking continental hat, with his gray locks appearing beneath it, and his hands resting upon the head of his silver-mounted cane.

The chairs were set in their places, stragglers called in, and all were seated in silence to hear.

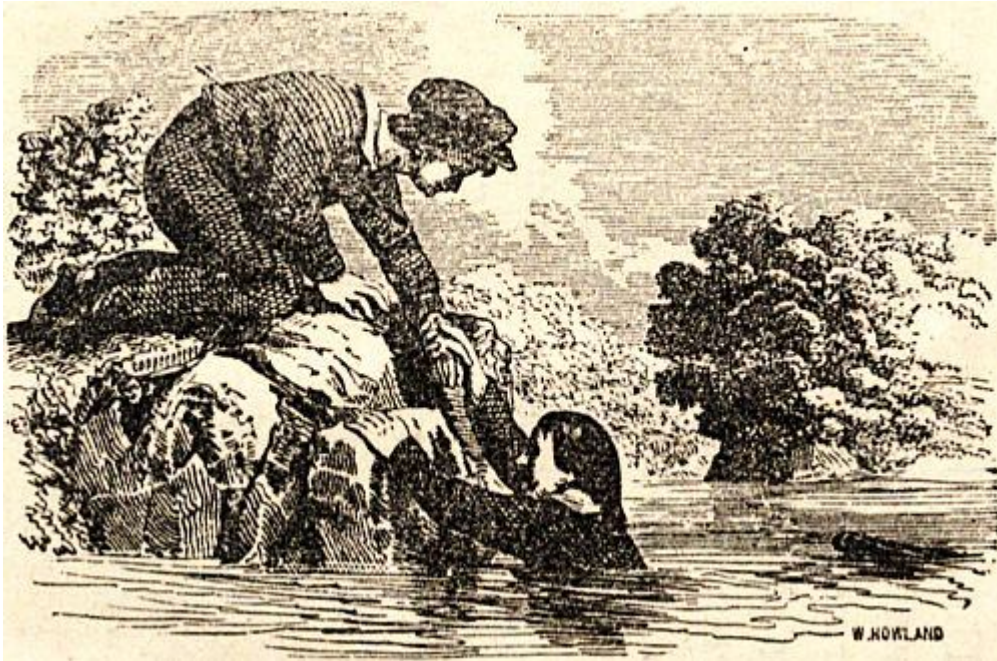


### **UNCLE NED'S STORY.**

"Many years ago, when I was a slip of a lad like Tom there"—"Why, uncle," cried little Willy in amazement, "did you say you were no bigger than Tom? Were you ever as little as Tom, uncle?"—"Hush, Willy," said Tom, a well-grown boy of fourteen, "I'm sure you need not make such a wonderment at that; I am not so very small, and I expect to be as big as Uncle Ned when I'm a man. How naughty of you to interrupt the story!"



"Well, Willy," said Uncle Ned, "I don't suppose I look much now as if I had once been a slender lad, with a soft fair brow, and rosy cheeks; but I was as full of fun and frolic as the best of you. I will tell you how I once came near losing my own life and that of a friend and playmate, by my love of mischief. It was a Christmas night. We were gathered round the fire just as we now are, cracking nuts, eating apples, and telling stories, when I proposed to Jack Thornton, and his little brother, that we should go for a skating frolic to 'the pond,' a beautiful sheet of water about a quarter of a mile distant. Instantly we were in motion, looking up our skates and mittens. Off we started, in high glee, promising ourselves fine fun on the ice. The moon shone brilliantly—every object could be seen with perfect distinctness. The little pond, which was supplied with the purest spring water, looked like a sheet of silver, sparkling in the moonlight. I well remember looking down through the clear and beautifully transparent ice, and seeing the pond-lilies, with their broad leaves of tender green, mingled with rushes and long grass, while the little fish danced like beams of silver-light in the clear water. The pond was of no great extent, but toward the middle it was quite deep, and formed a fine broad sheet of ice for skating.



"I remembered having seen the day before an air-hole near a rock on the opposite shore. I had tried the ice near it, and found it strong enough to bear my weight; and concluding that by this time it was quite thick enough to bear two or three, I determined to play a trick upon Jack, who was exceedingly good natured, but a great brag. Nobody could outwit him, he thought. 'Come, Jack,' said I, 'follow me, and I will take you where you are afraid to go.'—'I afraid!' said he, 'catch me afraid—I can go anywhere you can—go ahead!' Away we shot, like swallows, toward the fatal air-hole. 'Follow me,' I cried; 'keep up with me if you can.' Thus stimulated, Jack kept close in my rear. My object was to avoid the air-hole myself, and just give one of Jack's legs a ducking, without doing him any further injury. We wheeled in circles round and round, until, making a quick sweep, and calling upon him to keep close, I dexterously made a slight curve so as to avoid the hole, but down went poor Jack, one leg and foot quite buried in the freezing element. It was a favorite trick with the knowing ones, and was never taken amiss. But in this case the joke was carried too far. Jack pulled and struggled to draw out his foot, when suddenly the ice gave way, and down he sank into the deep water. I knew he could not swim—neither could I. I was aware it would not do to attempt to get him out by going near him on the ice, as our efforts would only crack the ice and throw me in too. But, as quick as thought, I ran on shore, threw off my skates, went to the edge of the rock, where fortunately he was within my reach, and, after many unsuccessful attempts, I succeeded in drawing him out. Poor Jack was almost exhausted; but I got him home, and he was undressed and put to bed. A severe fit of sickness followed from the cold he took that night. Aunt Dorothy always insisted that his sickness might have been prevented, if she had been permitted to give him a dose of her hot-drops, which she always kept by her—a specific for all complaints. But the physician who was called positively forbade it. Physicians do not like to have persons who are ignorant of the nature of diseases, and their proper remedies, tampering with the human frame. Although in some instances they may relieve in mild attacks, they often do a great deal of harm by giving favorite quack medicines, indiscriminately, for all complaints. However, by good nursing, Jack soon got well; and we received a good lesson, which I have never forgotten, in the almost fatal termination of the 'practical joke.'"

