

XMAS · EVE · A T · · ROMNEY · HALL ·

WRITTEN ·
· AND ·

ILLUSTRATED
· WITH ·
· PENCIL DRAWINGS ·
BY · JESSIE
MACGREGOR

· LONDON ·

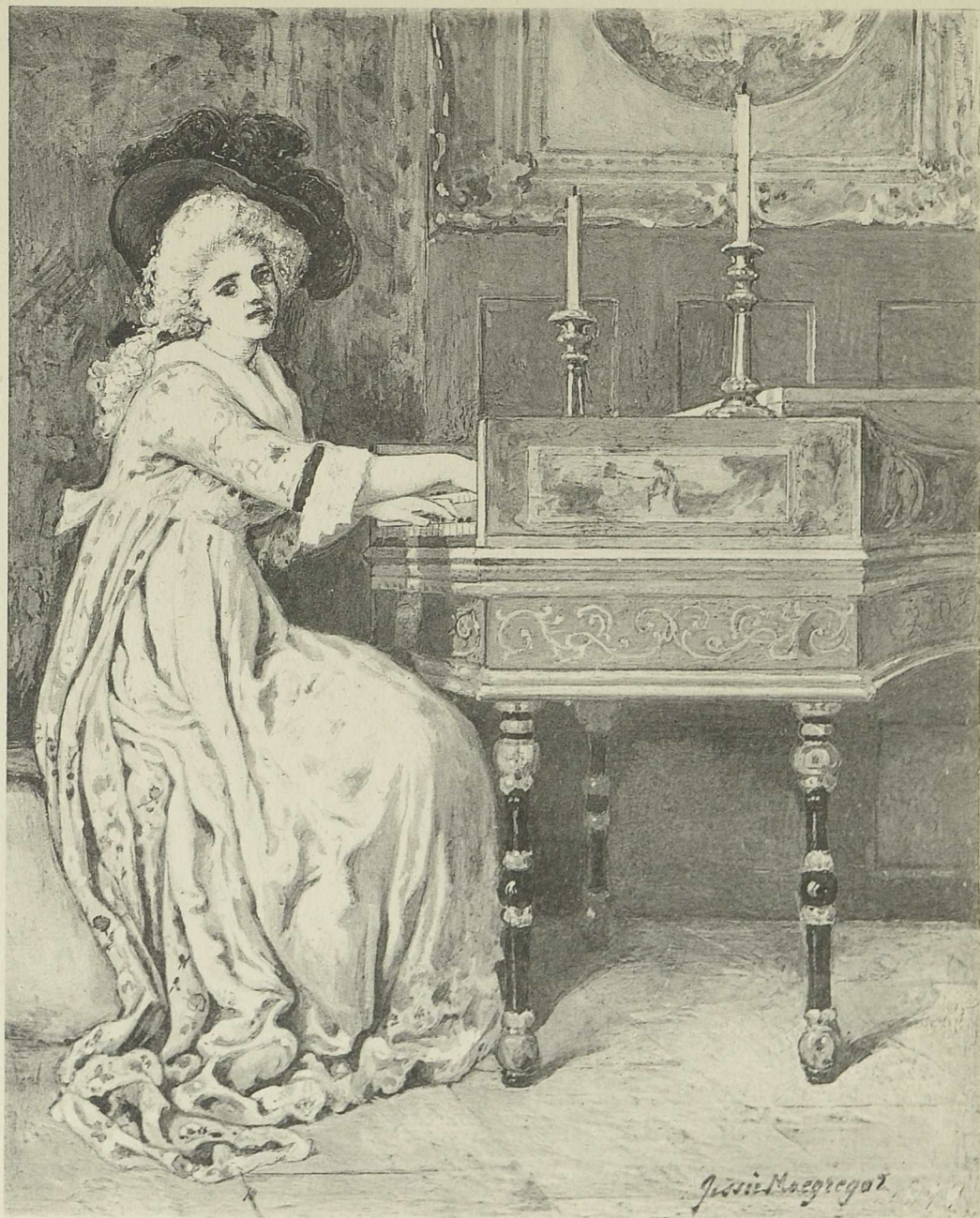
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· VIGO · STREET · IN · THE · WEST ·



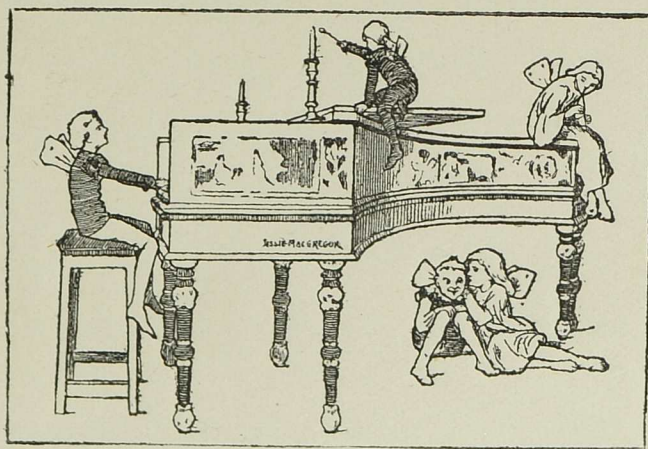
To Dearest Joyce
with love & best wishes
from Auntie Doris.

Christmas 1920.

CHRISTMAS EVE AT ROMNEY HALL



CHRISTMAS EVE AT ROMNEY
HALL: WRITTEN, AND ILLUS-
TRATED FROM PENCIL DRAW-
INGS, BY JESSIE MACGREGOR



❧ LONDON: ELKIN MATHEWS
VIGO STREET IN THE WEST. 1900

TO MY SISTER ELLA

THIS LITTLE BOOK IS LOVINGLY DEDICATED

THE rose-coloured realities of childhood are the tales we elders lightly tell. These are pondered and called for again and again; then Fancy steps in and embroiders Fact, until its aspect is new and beautiful past all telling. Things inanimate are endowed with life, pictures long dwelt upon vividly impress, portraits become personalities.

Small wonder, then, that when Fact, and Fable, and Memory all encounter in a moonlit land of dreams, wherein a little child is likewise wandering, strange things should come to pass.

JESSIE MACGREGOR.

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CHRISTMAS EVE AT ROMNEY HALL

I

A **BROKEN** spinet silent fills
A nook in Romney Hall ;
For years no hand has touched its keys
Nor lit its tapers tall :
Dust lies where dainty fingers played
For those who danced sedately,
Who paced the mazy minuet
With measured steps and stately.

A^T this were dreamy love songs sung,
In summer twilights dim ;
Here hung the merry mistletoe,
Here rose the Christmas hymn.
But they who sang and danced are dust,
Though history speaks their merits,
Sole scion of their ancient race,
Child Christopher inherits.

THEIR deeds are quaintly carved in stone,
They shine in painted glass,
Their likenesses live on the walls,
Or monumental brass ;
And Christopher soon learnt to love
Such relics of their graces,
To kiss his hand, and doff his cap,
To their pale pictured faces.

THE first, the lady with the ruff,
So fair, with dimpling smiles,
Was maid of honour to Queen Bess ;
A poet was Sir Miles :
He made a song of mirth and wine
Which made King Charles to love him,
But languished long in exile drear ;
His lady hangs above him.



SIR Rupert fell at Marston Moor,
The noblest of his race ;
Here, painted with his favourite mare,
With Vandyke's courtly grace.
The boy oft rides his rocking-horse,
Pretending it is larger,
And thinks himself at Marston Moor
Upon that gallant charger.

THE next, who often comes in dreams
To tenderly caress,
Does with her mild reproachful gaze
His wayward moods repress ;
Then wistful eyes of baby blue
He to her picture raises,
For when he's naughty, Hester sighs ;
When good and happy, praises.



HER radiant smile and queenly grace,
—Sole child of Earl Carew—

Her flowered gown and satin skirt,

'Twas Gainsborough who drew.

A famous beauty, Hester was,

To her belonged the spinet,

The key is lost, and Judith says,

Her voice is locked within it,

THAT when, in watches of the night,
It cracks, and groans, and creaks,
It is the captive soul within
Thus passionately speaks.
For here the Lady Hester sang
As gaily as the linnet,
But sorrow came, and then she played
Slow dirges on the spinet.

NURSE Judith has a fancy fine,
Bewitching tales can tell
Sir Christopher, her little charge,
Of elves, and fairy spell ;
Of Saracens and troubadours,
Of castles and of dragons ;
Of tournays and of banquets where
Men drank from golden flagons.

OF bad Sir Guy and his wild life,
She little said, but sighed,
Albeit in land of Palestine
A penitent he died ;
But when the wind blows cold o' nights,
She tells, in firelight's shining,
How Lady Dolly stole away
When guests within were dining.



UNTIL, at length, each nursery rhyme
Gains some historic sense,
The boy confusing fairy lore
With these old tales, and hence
The maid of honour to Queen Bess
Becomes poor Cinderella,
And peerless Beauty wears the shape
Of Reynolds or of Kneller.

NOW, on a frosty Christmas Eve,
Child Christopher awakes,
For wondrous music, sweet and strange,
The starry stillness breaks ;—
Forth from his little bed he creeps,
He smiles, his blue eyes glisten,
Awake he is, yet dreaming still,
He waits awhile, to listen.



"**H**ARK! 'tis the elves! may-be they dance
Through all the house below!"

He does not know that Christmas bells
Are pealing o'er the snow.

Through moonlit corridors he flits,
And never stays to wonder,

A-down the stairs he pit-a-pats,
The hall doors fly asunder!

LO and behold, in chimney-nook deep,
Little Bo Peep is lying asleep ;
Near her the Beast, in savage disguise,
 Sunning himself in Beauty's bright eyes.
Dames Goose and Hubbard, two gossips rare,
 Still are discussing that cupboard bare.
Tommy, who sang for supper and lunch,
 Chats with that reprobate sad, Mister Punch.
Kind Santa Claus, who brings children joy ;
 Innocent Riding-Hood, wee Blue-Boy ;





Lucky Aladdin, magical lamp,
Sinbad the Sailor, Blue-Beard the scamp.
Sage Puss, in Boots that reach to the knee ;
Old Father Christmas, candle-lit tree.
Jacky and Jill, with their famous pail,
Listen to Silverlocks' wonderful tale ;
Oberon, Puck, and Titania, queen,
Hop-o-my-thumb, and Jack-in-the-green.
Fair Cinderella, Godmother good ;
Little Jack Horner, Babes in the wood ;

Man-in-the-moon, who smiles down on all,
Thinking it time to open the ball.

* * * * *

HEROES of fairy tale and rhyme,
They meet in merry Christmas time,
And lightly tread that stately hall—
The dreaming boy beholding all.

THE leaping firelight gleams upon
The child's bright locks of gold,
His eyes are shining like the stars
With ecstasy untold ;
The mistletoe above his head
In green delight it quivers,
And holly dances on the wall,
With little shakes and shivers.

IN yon dim gallery aloft
Some spirit minstrel plays
Strains like to songs of dying swans,
Or bells on marriage days.
Then in the moonlight all take hands
Retiring and advancing;
Sir Rupert, stepping from his frame
On parole, joins the dancing.

FOR now the turret clock strikes twelve ;
The frosty stars are bright
The moonlight shines on suits of mail ;
The dusky hall is light.
Child Christopher in mute surprise
Marks all, but most the minute
When Lady Hester quits her frame
And gaily plays the spinet.

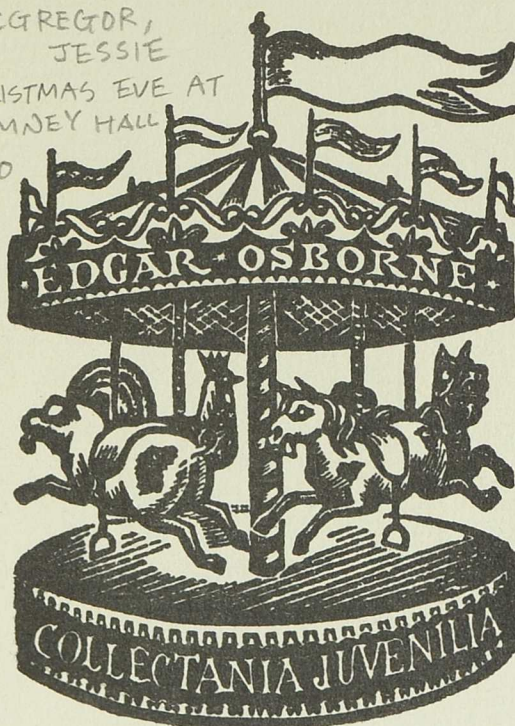
ITS waxen tapers all aflame,
No dust upon its keys,
Nor discord in its silver tones
And ancient melodies.
She plays the march of life in youth,
Marching to merry measure ;
Alas ! the minor key prevails
In later songs of pleasure.



THEN two and two, and bowing low,
All glided past the child,
Sweet Lady Hester kissed her hand,
And grave Sir Rupert smiled.
The lights are out! the revels o'er!
The happy morrow's dawning!
And sleepily he climbs to bed
In grey of Christmas morning.

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(P)
MACGREGOR,
JESSIE
CHRISTMAS EVE AT
ROMNEY HALL
1900



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