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"CHRIS'MAS TIME"

By R. T. Vann

'Mos' Chris'mas time! Well, I declar'!
I des been settin' here by de far,
Watchin' de flickerin' embers glow,
En' dreamin' uv ole times long ago.
Yes dem was times. But den, you know,
Sich times as dem cun' come no mo'—
Sich Chris'mas times.

I 'members lak 'twas des today—
En' hit mek's me young to feel dat way—
How all de folks, bofe white en' black,
Des nately kep' things in a rack.
Day riz 'fo' day an' worked twell night.
A-gitt'n' ev'rything des right
Fer Chris'mas time.

De cawn was shucked, de fodder stacked,
De tators dug, de cotton packed.
We penned de hawks, 'n' cut de wood,
En' split de kindlin' 'n' piled it good.
Yes, ev'rything was in a buzz;
'Case ev'ybody knowed it wuz
'Mos' Chris'mas time.

I tell you, chile, dey made things hum,
To have all ready when de big night come.
En' when hit come, dey done some mo'.
Dey brushed down cobwebs, 'n' scoured de flo':
De chilluns had to wash dey face,
En' git de close, 'n' put 'em in place.
En' ev'ybody done his bes';
'Eb'n' de b'lish Jim, mongst all de res'.
'Case when old Santy come dat night
'En' checked us up, ef things wan't right,
Dat Jim he feel right good 'n' strong
Dat what ole Santy foun' was wrong
He mighty ap' to nail on him.
Den far'well Chris'mas things fer Jim
Dat Chris'mas time!

En' when you heered de banjo tones,
En' Eph'm shuck de napper bones,
En' Rastus made de tin pan ring,
De dances des nately 'gun ter swing.
En' de young fokes, cut de pidgin whing.
En' de whole plantation 'gun ter sing,
Whilst de far shined in de chimbley place.
En' all de folkess laughed, becuse
'Twas Chris'mas time.

I sees 'em now. Yes dar come Sal,
Frez on to Sam, 'case she's his gal;
En' yer come Dinah sailin' by
Wid Yaller Ned. She cut her eye
Tow'da me, en' den she turn her head
En' prance away wid Yaller Ned.
But I knowed Dinah, bless you, chile!
So I des stan' right dar en' smile:
Hit's Chris'mas time!

Nex' mornin' by de break er day,
De darkies all was up 'n' away
To de Great House, whar de white folks live,
To ketch dem white folks' "Chris'mas giv'."
En' we kotch 'em all—Ole Marster 'n' Miss,
En' all de chilluns, 'n' Little Sis.
Den ev'ybody raised a shout,
En' laughed, 'n' capered, 'n' danced about,
All un us, 'scuse'n' Little Joe,
He cripple, 'n' can' walk; en' so,
Ole Miss des sot him on 'er knee,
En' tole him, sorter low, how she
Was always gwine to ten' to him;
En' den we seed her eyes git dim.

Ole Miss was mammy too, you know.
Dat mek her sorry fer Little Joe
At Chris'mas time.

Den all de cullud folks sot down,
Whilst Nancy passed de aignog 'round'.
Slah aignog! Creamy, foamy-white!
Hit tuck Ole Miss to make it right.
'Twas she-'n'ut aignog den. Fergit?
My Lawd! I tastes dat aignog yit
At Chris'mas time!

At las' Ole Marster riz en' read
All dem things what de Good Book sed:
'Bout de angels' song, 'n' de Baby King.
En' de peace on earth He come to bring.
En' den he prayed. Dat's des de way
He always done on dat fus' day
Uv Chris'mas time.

Yes, honey, hit's all right, I know,
Fer folks to feel dey's free; en' so,
Git out 'n' do de bes' dey can,
En' bull' dey homes, 'n' buy dey lan'.
But, yit, I loves de ole folks' home
Whar me an' Dinah uster roam.
En' to be sho', hit ain' no harm
To wander down dar on de farm
En' 'set aroun' when de sun is warm.
En' hear de same old crickets' charm
At evenin' time, when de sun git low,
Lak I uster hear 'em long ago,
'Bout Chris'mas time.

Dar's de same sof' win's en' de same blue skies
Roun' de place whar Marster 'n' Mistis lies;
En' Dinah too, awaitin' fer me.
En' dey's keepin' a little place dar, I see,
Dat by-en-by de ole man en' she
Mout be tergether, 'lak dey uster be
Dem Chris'mas times.

Hit's nigh on sixty year er mo'
Sense we uster set in de evenin' glow;
En' hit can' be many months befo'
De Marster'll call, en' I got to go.
En' when I 'members all my sin,
En' how no-count O'm always bin,
O'm 'most afeered to see dat day.
But den, I 'members how Ole Miss say
Dat wid Him dat don' cut no ice.
'Case He done bought us 'n' paid de price;
En' fer His chilluns, on dat day,
He'd sen' de angels to cl'ar de way.
En' 'peared to her, fum what she seen
In de Good Book, dat's des what He mean
By Chris'mas time.

So, when I clambo de golden st'ar
En' sees Bro'r Peter standin' dar,
I'll give de Name I knows will do,
'Case dat Name let Bro'r Peter th'u.
En' nigh de gate I spec's to see
My Dinah, young lak she uster be,
En' Marster 'n' Miss shake han's wid me
Lak dey uster, round' de holly tree,
At Chris'mas time.

But when I sees dat Chris'mas King,
En' hears dem hallelujahs ring,
En' de ransomed sinners raise deir hymn
Lawd, O'm gwine jine dat song sublime
Dat Chris'mas time;

