



SANTA CLAUS is the children's friend. Who he was we have little means of knowing. Authentic history is almost silent on the subject, merely stating that he was the Bishop of Myra, in Lycia, and died about the year 326. Tradition has woven many a pretty tale about him, and one runs that he appeared in the night time and secretly made valuable presents to the children of the household. What manner of person St. Nicholas was, seems subject to variation, according to the time, place or manner of regarding him. Medieval painters represent him as slender, and clad in full episcopal robes with miter and crozier. Modern painters and storytellers in England, Germany and America, give us a jovial, rubicund type of a man, with none of the features of the cleric. Kris Kringle is regarded as an alternative to Santa Claus, but he is a totally different being. Kris Kringle is simply a corruption of the German word "Christ Kindlein," or Christ Child.

Christmas is children's day; it is the day when, as Dickens says, we should remember the time when its great founder was a child himself. It is especially the day for the friendless young, the children in hospitals, the lame, the sick, the weary, the blind. No child should be left alone on Christmas day, for loneliness with children means brooding. A child growing up with no child friend is not a child at all, but a premature man or woman.

The best Christmas present to a boy is a box of tools, the best to a girl any number of dolls. When they get older and can write letters a postoffice is a delightful boon. These are to be bought, but they are far more satisfactory made at home. Any good-sized cardboard box will do for this purpose. The lid should be fastened to it so that when it stands up it will open like a door. A slit must be cut out about an inch wide and from five to six inches long, so as to allow the postage of small parcels, yet not large enough even to admit the smallest hand. Children should learn to respect the inviolate character of the post from the earliest age.

Capital scrapbooks can be made by children. Old railway guides may be the foundation and every illustrated paper a magazine of art. A paste box, next to a paint box, is a most serviceable toy. Hobby horses are profitable steeds and can be made to go through any amount of paces. But mechanical toys are more amusing to his elders than to the child, who wishes to do his own mechanism. A boy can be amused by turning him out of the house, giving him a ball or a kite, or letting him dig in the ground for the unhappy mole. Little girls, who must be kept on a rainy day, or invalid children, are very hard to amuse, and recourse must be had to story telling, to the dear, delightful thousand and one books now written for children, of which "Alice in Wonderland" is the flower of perfection.



BEGINNING at Benton City, on the Union Pacific Road, the telegraph line stretches to the north, leaps across to the Laramie mountains, and at a point opposite the great mass of earth and rock and tree, called Red Butte, it comes to a sudden stop. From this point to the fort, a distance of twenty-five miles, is the roughest portion of the way, and the skulking bands of Indians make it the most dangerous.

At the terminus of the line is a rude shanty and a soldier operator. Close by the shanty are tents of the soldiers, who are setting the poles and pushing the line along until the fort shall have electric communication with the outside world. It is December now—only two days to Christmas. There have been cold rains, snow storms, severe weather, and the soldiers are wondering why they have not been ordered back to the fort for the winter, when a mounted messenger arrives over the trail bearing the expected order. The Colonel's wife has gone East. The operator is to wire her to remain where she is until spring. When her answer is received the shanty is to be closed and the party headed for the fort. The afternoon wears away, the night comes down, and some of the soldiers are asleep when Benton City sends in its call, and follows it by a telegram reading: "The Colonel's wife started West four days ago, and ought to be there or at the fort now."

Next morning there was an arrival from the South. The Colonel's wife, riding a horse with a blanket for a saddle, dismounted at the front of the shanty, and opened the door with a cheery "Howdy do, boys!" to the operator and the Sergeant. As both men stood at "attention," she removed the hood and cloak which enveloped her, shook off the snow, and said to the Sergeant:

"I came through with hardly an hour's rest, and I'm hungry as a wolf. Tell some of the men to cook something. I'll give the Colonel a surprise."

Everybody hustled and hustled, and an hour later camp was broken, and twelve people headed for the north, the strongest man breaking the way, and the Colonel's wife bringing up the rear, with a kind word and a smile for every soldier. The trail led up a narrow valley, and the wild gale had drifted the snow until the men had to move forward in a snail's pace. At nightfall they had made just half the distance to the fort. In a thick fog all ate supper together. Said the Sergeant, as he looked in vain for the stars: "I saw Indian signs back by the camp."

"I see that you have revolvers as well as muskets," remarked the Colonel's wife. "Please give me one and extra ammunition. I'll try and not be a burden to you, at least."

INDOOR CHRISTMAS GAMES.

How the Young Folks May Find Pleasure if the Day Be Stormy.

Parlor games like chess, draughts, dominoes, etc., are too heavy for Christmas. The boys and girls want more rollicking, hip-hurrah games. A committee appointed to provide desirable amusement for a well-known charity in New York selected the following program. Ten hours were spent in selecting appropriate indoor games and pastimes, and even then no more than were actually needed were decided upon, says the New York Mail and Express. If the children can get out of doors their amusement is easy, for baseball, leap frog, hide and seek, and other games suffice, but indoors something akin to these games is wanted.

In this class is a game known as "The Country Circus." It consists in making riders, tumblers, clowns, strong men, etc., of all the children and with this improvised company giving a performance. Another good game for the house is called "Jack-of-All-Trades," in which those engaged must perform some work in the particular trade to which they are assigned by the foreman. In this game on Thanksgiving the boys and girls of an institution in Jersey cut and sewed a lot of carpet rags, made a lot of brushes, and split and bundled several cords of wood.

"The Boy Hunters," in which the children learn the names, habits, and peculiarities of the entire animal kingdom, is another good game, and "Robinson Crusoe," one of the same kind and value. All these games are active ones, require constant movement, and are meant only for the daylight. For the evening, games less boisterous must be chosen. In this class are "Aragrangs," "Authors," "History of Our Times," and shadow pantomimes. The last named, however, are the most popular and enjoyable and have so increased in favor that books written especially to show how to prepare and perform them can be had at any well-stocked book store.

Financial Transaction.

"Say, mister," said a boy who had just overtaken a market wagon after pursuing it for four or five blocks, "do you want to know who hit you in the neck with that hard snowball?"

"You bet I do," replied the man, slackening speed.

"Will ye gimme a quarter of I ketch him and bring him here?"

"Yep."

"Gimme 50 cents?"

"Yes," said the driver, lifting his whip from the socket, "but I don't give you none more'n that."

"Well, git the money ready."

"You haven't got the boy that threw the snowball yet."

"Yes, I have. That boy is me. Dad's sick, and me mother can't get work. The twins is too little ter earn anything, an' if I don't hustle there won't be any Christmas tree at our house. I'll take a lickin' any day for 50 cents."

"Sonny," said the market man, in a voice that was remarkably husky, "here's

shouted the Sergeant, and he fired his first shot. "Now, then, push out."

They had not moved ten rods before a rifle cracked and one of the men pitched forward, shot through the heart. A minute later two more bullets whistled over the men's heads. Then the little band was hidden from sight of the Indian sentinels by the blinding whirl of snow.

"They're after us, ma'am," said the Sergeant.

"They won't take me prisoner," whispered the Colonel's wife, as she held out the revolver.

"That's right, ma'am. We are headed for the fort right enough, and maybe the red friends will haul off after a bit and let us go in peace. A Merry Christmas to you, though I've seen merrier ones in my time."

For a mile or more the little party breasted the storm. Then came a sudden shot, and the red guard went down. There were seven men, and a woman at 8 o'clock. At 9 o'clock there were but five men, at 10 but four, at midnight only two. Two men and a woman—the Sergeant, the soldier-operator, and the Colonel's wife. The others had been picked off one by one, and the Indians still followed. Now and then the trio halted, knelt down, and peering into the snow-whirl, opened a fusilade which checked pursuit if it did not wound or kill.

Instinct must have guided them in that storm—Providence must have shielded them from the bullets, but the storm continued to rage and the vengeful foe to pursue, till the report of the firearms reached the ears of the sentinel at the fort. No one had yet learned what was happening, when three figures staggered up to the gate, and on into the fort, and up to the door of the Colonel's headquarters. Two of the figures held up a third between them. As he peered in the Sergeant saluted and said:

"Col. Dawson, I report myself, and I bring you a Christmas present."

And as the Colonel uttered a shout of surprise and rushed forward with outstretched arms, the brave little woman fell into them, and the two men sank down in their tracks, and those who lifted them up wet their fingers with the blood of heroes.

A handsome merry-faced woman, who is five years older—a Sergeant of infantry who limps a bit—a lone grave in which sleeps the soldier-operator—nothing more to be seen. The Colonel's wife may tell you the story—the Sergeant couldn't be coaxed to, but he can't conceal the limp,

the crew and under their very threat he put back to sea, learning at the same time he was losing his mind, for it did seem so unreasonable that when they could get into harbor that night they should put back to sea. But they put back to sea, and Capt. Pendleton said to his mate: "You call me at 10 o'clock at night." At 12 o'clock at night the Captain was aroused and said: "What does this mean? I thought I told you to call me at 10 o'clock, and here it is 12." "Why," said the mate, "I did call you at 10 o'clock, and you got up, looked around and told me to keep right on this same course for two hours, and then to call you at 12 o'clock." Said the Captain: "Is it possible? I have no remembrance of that." At 12 o'clock the captain went on deck, and through the rift of the cloud the moonlight fell upon the sea and showed him a shipwreck with one hundred struggling passengers. He helped them off. Had he been any earlier or any later at that point of the sea he would have been of no service to those drowning people. On board the captain's vessel they began to band together as to what they should pay for the rescue, and what they should pay for the provisions. "Ah," says the captain, "my lads, you can't pay me nothing; all I have on board is yours; I feel too greatly honored of God in having saved you to take any pay." Just like him.

Oh, that the old sea captain's God might be my God and yours! Amid the stormy seas of this life may we never always some one as tenderly to take care of us as the captain took care of the drowning crew and the passengers. And may we come into the harbor with as little physical pain and with as bright a hope as he had; and if it should happen to be a Christmas morning, when the presents are being distributed and we are celebrating the birth of Him who came to save our shipwrecked world, all the better, for what grander, brighter Christmas present could we have than heaven?

Now comes the glad New Year; Though fate may do her worst, She cannot blot that legend clear: "All bills due on the first!"—Atlanta Constitution.

"You haven't got \$5 about you, Jones?" "No, I haven't. Wife borrowed the last to buy my Christmas present!"—Atlanta Constitution.

and is proud of the extra stripes he has worn on his sleeves ever since that Christmas day.

He Was Surprised.

Mrs. Gazzam—I've got a box of cigars for my husband's Christmas present, which will surprise him.

Mrs. Maddox—Women don't know how to buy cigars for men.

Mrs. Gazzam—I know that, so I got Brother Jack to get them for me—Judge.

BOTH MEN STOOD AT ATTENTION.

His Reason.

It was drawing near to a very interesting season of the year. Willy was getting ready for bed. His mother looked happy.

"My dear," she said, "I am glad to see that you do not hurry through your prayers as you used to do."

"No, ma'am," said Willy, "Christmas is week after next, and I have a good many things to ask for."

Nothing Slow About Johnnie.

The boarders the turkey is so tender it takes time to carve it.

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Tommy—Did yer have a good time Christmas, Johnnie?

Johnnie—Don't yer see dat I did?

—Life.

THE PASSING YEAR.



THE CHRISTMAS TREE STATE.

Great Demand Is Annually Made on the Forests of Maine.

Not all who desire a Christmas-tree for the holiday merrymakings can sally forth, armed with a hatchet, and hew from their own acres. Therefore at each Christmas season great demand is made on the forests of Maine for young spruces.

No tree but an evergreen will do, and no evergreen but the spruce presents the delicate, feather-flat, clean-limbed branches of dark perennial shade, which throw out by contrast the brightness of the suspended presents and favors.

On Sunday, the fifth of December, 1891, ten car-loads of Christmas trees for New York were detained in the Portland yard because they were loaded so that it was impossible to work the brakes. This objection was overruled, and the sweet-smelling freight was allowed to proceed to its destination. How the cars were loaded can easily be described, but the fragrance of twenty-five thousand freshly cut evergreen trees must be left to the reader's imagination.

The ten cars, all "flats," or platform cars, were each thirty-four feet long, loaded eight feet high, and all came from the small station of Wiscasset, which lies at the head of one of the numerous bays on the coast of Maine.

At regular intervals about each car, four on each side and two at each end, were stout spruce stakes, originally Christmas trees which might have done duty at the Castle De Blunderbore. These rose to the top of the load, which was limited to a height that would clear all overhead bridges on the road.

In this space the trees were packed lengthwise, butts to the front and rear tops to the center, so compactly that the loaded car was one solid block of green. Each car held about twenty-five hundred trees, large and small, tied in bundles of four. From six hundred and fifty to seven hundred bundles were packed in a car, so that the ten car-load lot contained twenty-five thousand trees at least.

The marketing of Christmas trees is a Maine specialty. Every year speculators purchase the right to cut trees from the land owners, paying half a cent, one cent, and two cents apiece for trees from eight to twelve years old on the stump. Then the natives are hired to cut and bring them to the shipping point, where they cost the speculator from ten to twenty cents each, loaded on the car.

He might, however, have a vivid recollection of a rather lonesome ten minutes spent in hanging a woollen stocking by a fireplace, during which time his parents sat solemnly by, looking as if they did not altogether approve what he was doing.

The joy with which he might anticipate a possible gift was tempered not a little by the remembrance of one Christmas morning when he awoke eagerly, searched his stocking, and found nothing whatever in it.

Very soon, however, the real Christmas began to grow up, as it were. The most powerful agency in making its observance general was the Sunday school. At Thanksgiving, the Sunday school of thirty years ago early made choice of Christmas. "Trees" were introduced as a feature of an annual observance, and many little gifts were distributed.

It was customary to have the passages in the Gospel relating to the birth of Christ read aloud by one of the pupils of the Sunday school who could read well, and this office was greatly coveted. The chance of being selected to read these passages aloud at Christmas was a sufficient incentive to many pupils to pay particular attention to their reading lessons at school for months together.

The interest of the children in these exercises was very great from the start, and it soon drew the older people into an almost equal interest in the revival of the old festival. In a surprisingly short time Christmas had become the most important day in the year.

For Christmas, with its lots an' lots uv candies, dies, cakes and toys, Wuz made, they say, f'r proper kids, and not f'r naughty boys!

So wash yer face, and brush yer hair, an' min' yer p's and q's.

Christmas in the Past.

Christmas as the American boy or girl now knows it has not been thus always. The father of the boy or girl of to-day can well remember, if he has reached the age of forty or upward, a time when this splendid festival had practically no existence for him. In certain parts of the country, indeed, Christmas has never been forgotten. In New York City, in Pennsylvania, and in the South generally, Christmas, as well as Easter, has always been observed.

In New England, however, in many of the rural parts of New York, and in portions of the country which were settled from New England and from rural New York, Christmas was, forty years ago, but a name.

Some trace of it seemed to have survived in the occasional practice of hanging up the stocking on Christmas eve. Boys and girls often hung their stockings by the fireplace, and in the morning, if they were fortunate, there was in each stocking a store of nuts, a little candy, and perhaps a jack-knife or a thimble.

But next day—Christmas day—the boys and girls went to school as usual, and fathers and mothers went about their usual tasks. There was no holiday and no big Christmas dinner.

The one feast of the year had been eaten at Thanksgiving. The mince-pies accumulated for that festival were still making their appearance upon the family table; and the pies, and the memory of all the other good things and sports of Thanksgiving, had to serve the children of that period, as far as holidays were concerned, until Fast Day came round again.

In most of the States, indeed, the children did not even Fast Day to look forward to. There was no real holiday until the Fourth of July. For them there were picnics and two holidays in the year.

The recollection of Christmas which a person of fifty should endeavor to relate to his children would be very much like the celebrated chapter about the snakes in Ireland, which simply stated that there were no snakes in Ireland.

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The tree retail in New York for from one to five dollars each, according to their size. The same quality of tree can be purchased on the street in the city of Portland, at from twenty-five to fifty cents each, while in other parts of the State boys who wish for Christmas trees sally forth and cut them for themselves.

—Youth's Companion.

A Christmas Church Idea.