

Democratic Watchman

Bellefonte, Pa., Dec. 24, 1897.

UNCLE WILLIAM'S GIFT

A TRUE STORY RELATED BY HIS NEPHEW.

On Christmas day Uncle William received a card inscribed as follows:
William Bunting, Esq., debtor to his nephews Alexander and Fred and to his nieces Norah and Dorothea, for money expended in his behalf.....\$0 56
Uncle William paid the money at once, but he wrote to say that he should like to know how it happened that he owed us 16 cents. It was Alexander who had sent the bill in—for a boy of 12 he really is most



WE SPENT THE ODD FOURTEEN CENTS ON A WHITE JAVA MOUSE.

businesslike—and we deputed him to answer Uncle William's letter. He did so. He replied that the 16 cents was the sum spent in excess of the sum subscribed by Alexander, Fred, Norah and Dorothea for the purpose of giving Uncle William a Christmas present. Then Uncle William wanted to know how, if this was the case, it happened he never got the Christmas present from us. Alexander said that he did not feel inclined to go into any further details. He sent Uncle William back the bill properly receipted and a little note to say that the correspondence on this subject must now terminate.

Perhaps the thing does seem a little strange, but the explanation is perfectly simple, and I give it. I am Norah, and Alexander and I are twins. The other two are quite young. It was I who first had the notion that we ought to give Uncle William a Christmas present. When any of us has a notion, she or he calls a meeting of the others. That was what I did. I said that Uncle William was always giving us presents and yet we never gave him anything. It was true that he had said nothing about it, but I was sure that he must have felt it. Christmas was now near, and it would be a good opportunity for us.

This was agreed. Alexander and I each contributed 30 cents—10 cents more than Fred or Dorothea. Thus the total sum was \$1, for which a very good present might have been bought—something which would have shown uncle every time he looked at it that his nephews and nieces thought about him a good deal and tried to please him, even at some personal sacrifice to themselves. We did not decide what the present was to be at once, because Alexander said that would have been grossly irregular. We were to have committee meetings every day about it and discuss it thoroughly. Fred was appointed treasurer of the fund. He put it all in a waistcoat pocket and got me to sew the pocket up for him in case of accidents.

At the next meeting Dorothea suggested that we should buy chocolates (French) in a box. It was objected that Uncle William never ate chocolates. "No," said Dorothea, "he doesn't, but he sometimes gives them away. Then next time he wanted to give anybody any he wouldn't have to buy them." Fred thought that it would be dishonorable to give chocolates, and we agreed with him. We then decided to buy a tobacco pouch, which certainly would have been a suitable present. There are very few shops in our village, so



WHILE WE WERE HAVING BREAKFAST AT THE STATION HE DID HIS ACCOUNTS. Alexander and I took the train next afternoon to a larger town, in order to buy the pouch. Alexander was to pay everything

and to be reimbursed out of the fund. The two return tickets were 20 cents, and we had refreshments at the station which came to 16 cents. Alexander said

that this was usual and committees always had refreshments. We were left with 64 cents to spend on the pouch. However, we found that we could get very good pouches for 50 cents each. I wanted to get a black one and Alexander wanted brown. So we decided not to buy either yet, but to take the votes of the whole committee on it. We spent the odd 14 cents on a white Java mouse. We felt sure Uncle William would like it. The man in the store said that people often came in offering as much as 25 cents each for mice of that particular kind. When we got back—the mouse traveled in Alexander's pocket—we at once held another committee meeting.

Dorothea said that if Alexander and I had refreshments the rest of the committee ought to have them also. So we had chocolates—10 cents' worth. We agreed to purchase the black pouch. Fred suggested that there was just a possibility that Uncle William would not care about the mouse. Alexander said that he would telegraph about it, and did. This was the telegram:

UNCLE WILLIAM—Do you like white Java mouse? Tame. Eats anything. ALEXANDER.

In about an hour the answer came back: Most certainly not.

This caused us some consternation. It was thought better to go to town again on the morning and see if the man in the store would take back the mouse. In the meantime Fred's pocket was unpecked and the entire fund handed over to Alexander in order that he might reimburse himself. Alexander said that he would keep accounts, and if there was anything over he would get some very cheap present—perhaps a card. The pouch was, of course, now impossible.

He and I went together as before. While we were having refreshments at the station he did his accounts.

"They don't come out very well," he said rather dolefully, "but perhaps you shall be taking the mouse back just when some one is wanting to give a quarter for a real Java one."

He felt in his coat pocket as he spoke, and then he looked more doleful still. The mouse had escaped during the journey. The accounts were thus:

Expenses of first visit to town.....	\$0 56
White Java mouse.....	14
Chocolates.....	10
Telegram.....	20
Expenses of second visit.....	86
	\$1 16

"We are 16 cents to the bad," I said, "and we haven't got any present. The refreshments have come to so much this time."

"All committees and delegates of committees have refreshments," said Alexander dictatorially. "It doesn't matter. I've paid the deficit so far, but Uncle William will have to make it up. It's all his fault. If he hadn't been there, we shouldn't have wanted to be generous to him."

So we sent Uncle William the bill. He is still rather puzzled about it. Fred and Dorothea think the thing was mismanaged. I don't. No more does Alexander.

Christmas and Chess

Fiction and Facts Concerning the Origin of the Game

The oldest game known is associated with the season we now designate as holiday week. According to the Brahmins, chess was invented in the second age of the world, about the time of the shortest day of the year, by the wife of Ravan, king of Lauka, then capital of Ceylon, in order to furnish him with amusement by an imagery of war, it being supposed he was personally unable to participate in its excitements and dangers while his chief city was closely besieged by an enemy.

Similarly the Chinese annals relate that an inventive mandarin, 2,000 years ago, while on a military expedition—when the sun shone the fewest hours—whose laborious effects undermined the endurance and esprit de corps of his soldiers, devised the game of chess as an exercise which would at the same time not only amuse but inspire them with martial ardor.

The oft told story of Palamedes is but a repetition of the mandarin anecdote, only that he was then at the siege of Troy and, presumably, had many "spare moments" during those weary ten years. But it is wholly impossible for chess either to have had its beginning in the manner purporting or to have been accepted enthusiastically and intelligently by a camp of ignorant barbarous soldiery. Like friendship, it must have been "a plant of slow growth," and in its infancy represented the attacks and stratagems of two or three opposing forces. These are the fables—creations of the fancy—while the veritable history of the game may be divided into three epochs: (1) That of the ancient Hindoo game called chaturanga, which is coeval with the most ancient period of Indian chronology and extends to the beginning of the fifteenth century; (2) that lasting but 100 years, ending in the sixteenth century, up to which time the moves and powers of the chessmen remained principally as in the chaturanga, though the men were ranked in two armies instead of in four and two of the kings were transformed into queens; (3) the modern epoch in which the moves of the queen and of the bishop have been greatly extended and the privilege and practice of "casting" has been introduced. The game has consequently undergone a gradual improvement and extension as skilled opponents have brought to bear upon it their ingenuity and experience.

A Comedian's Plight.

Adventure That Befell Nat Goodwin on a Christmas Night.

The most eventful Christmas I ever passed was in 1891. We had played in Utica Christmas eve and were to leave on an early morning train for Poughkeepsie. The company caught the train all right, but it was frightfully cold and a blizzard was raging. I decided to wait for a later train, which would reach Poughkeepsie about 5 o'clock. Instead of clearing up, however, the storm grew worse, and the train that I waited for never came. It was stalled in a drift up the road somewhere. I began to realize then that it was a cold day for me in more senses than one.

I tried to hire an engine, but didn't succeed, for there was none. I finally gave it up in despair and went back to the hotel. George Appleton, my manager, was made of sterner stuff than I, however, and in about two hours had organized a party of storm bound passengers and persuaded another railroad to make up a mixed train and try to get us through to the uncompleted bridge at Poughkeepsie. We would be landed on the opposite side of the river, they said, but we could get across to the town by the ferry. The depot was about three miles outside of Utica, and it took us three hours and a quarter to reach it. There was no fire in the cars we secured, and I lit in the engine room at 8 o'clock Christmas night we were dumped out at the landing opposite Poughkeepsie. The river was full of jagged masses of ice and the ferryboats had been compelled to stop running at 6 o'clock. There was



THE GUARD WAS OBDURATE.

no possible way of crossing except by the half finished railroad bridge, and that was guarded at either end by watchmen, who had orders to allow no one to pass. Moreover, there was no approach to the bridge, whose ice clad buttress arose abruptly from the river's edge to a height of a hundred feet or more. The other passengers stopped right there and sought shelter in a neighboring hotel. I wanted to follow their good example, but Appleton wouldn't let me. He said we had gone too far to turn back then, and, besides, a sturdy small boy at the hotel had offered to show us how to climb to the bridge. He was rewarded in advance, and then we set out to battle with fate. The small boy took the lead, Appleton followed him, I made a close third, and my valet, Jack, formed a kind of rear guard to look after my remains in case of accident. Our small guide led us straight to the huge buttress of the bridge, which was built of massive blocks of stone arranged in terrace form from its broad base to its narrow apex. These terraces were about 15 feet high and covered with ice and snow. It was impossible for a man to climb them unaided, but the boy was equal to the emergency. After prowling about for a few minutes he found a ladder which had been used by the workmen. I can't begin to describe the difficulties and dangers of that climb, but at last we scrambled to the top, with clothes torn, hands bruised and bleeding. Fortunately the watchman was walking toward the middle of the bridge, and we had a chance for a good start before he could stop us.

After a short breathing spell Appleton, Jack and I began our perilous journey along the narrow footpath that stretched across the ghastly looking ironwork, but before we had reached the middle of the bridge the watchman stopped us and ordered us to go back. We pleaded and protested and argued, but it was of no use. He wouldn't even take a bribe. Hereupon the boy Jack loudly called my attention to the fact that the water looked awfully cold down below. Appleton quickly added that under certain circumstances it would make an excellent plunge bath, and I chipped in with a flippant remark about it being a 3 to 1 shot.

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and came to our rescue with grim determination in his stride. He boldly jumped down the first terrace and called upon Jack and me to follow. Jack did so, but I hesitated. That 15 feet seemed like a precipice, and the landing on the next terrace looked awfully hard and insecure. I didn't dare to jump, so I compromised by taking a kind of toboggan slide or as coattail. It wasn't as exhilarating or as fascinating as many other slides I have had, but it was quite as exciting. In this way I reached terra firma in a somewhat dismantled condition. Incidentally I bade a tearful goodbye to my trousers next day.

It was about two miles from the bridge to the opera house, and we had to foot it, because there wasn't a vehicle abroad that night. We ran most of the way to keep from freezing, and after frightening a couple of women into hysterics, because they misunderstood our hurried request for information, we arrived at the theater at a quarter past 9 and proceeded with the performance. As there was no time to change I went on just as I was, looking like a scarecrow on a Massachusetts farm. The audience was good natured, though, and readily forgave me when they learned what had happened.

During the War.

The Christmas of 1861 at the south was not so much different from those that preceded, but the Christmas of 1862 found the Confederate money at a heavy discount. Wood was \$45 per cord and turkeys \$11 each, but even at those prices many were still able to enjoy them, and there were still some toys to give the little folks. Then came the bitter year of 1863, with the fall of Vicksburg and the defeat at Gettysburg. With sad faces, harmonizing well with their dresses of coarse black stuff, the women of the south devoted themselves to picking lint and spinning and weaving for husbands, fathers, brothers and sweethearts in the field. Christmas cheer—such as could be obtained—cost a fabulous sum, for one bright golden dollar was then worth \$28 in Confederate money. Sugar was from \$5 to \$10 per pound, turkeys \$50 apiece and flour \$35 per barrel.

"Christmas, 1864—the last Christmas of war times—dawned, and what a gloomy festival it was for the people of the south," says a southern lady. "Of manufactured products we had practically none. Our hairpins were made of long, black thorns, with a ball of sealing wax on one end. We had made into dresses every scrap of available material, and now our gowns consisted of window curtains, 'homespun' and paper muslin or colored cambric that had once done duty as a lining, while our feet were incased in 'homemade' cloth shoes. At a Christmas dinner in a typical southern home that day the festive board presented a turkey that had cost \$200, a ham worth \$300, hominy and potatoes at correspondingly high prices and black molasses—as dessert—at \$60 per gallon. The Confederate dollar was then worth just 2 cents in gold. Wood was \$100 a cord, beef \$35 a pound, flour \$600 per barrel, butter \$40 per pound and sugar \$30 per pound. All was silent in the negro quarters. There was no singing or dancing there as usual. The slaves, having all heard of 'emancipation proclamation,' knew that they were free and had all scattered away. Desolation seemed to reign over everything."

An Early Christmas Drinking Song.

The following verses from the original in old Norman French are said to be the first drinking song composed in England:

Lordings from a distant home,
To seek old Christmas are we come.
Who loves our minstrelsy?
And here, unless report missay,
The graybeard dwells, and on this day
Keeps yearly wassail, ever gay
With festive mirth and glee.

Yule Cakes.

Yule dough, a kind of baby or little image intended to represent the child Jesus, made of paste, was formerly baked at Christmas and presented by bakers to their customers "in the same manner as the chandlers gave candles." They are still called Yule cakes in the county of Durham, England.

A CHRISTMAS LULLABY.

Bylow, my babe, bylow,
Here on thy mother's breast,
And, cuddled warm by her loving arm,
Drop down thy head to rest.
Poor, weary head, so filled with doubt
Of life and what it's all about!

Bylow, my babe, bylow,
Curl up in flower wise
Thy rosy feet and white limbs sweet,
My bud of paradise—
Dear, tender limbs, too frail to share
The burden e'en which babes must bear!

Bylow, my babe, bylow,
Let tired eyelids kiss,
And from thy sight shut this world's light
And thy world's light from this—
Love radiant eyes, twin stars that shine
Through darkling doubt with trust divine!

Bylow, my babe, bylow,
So alone the star of love
Long years ago, with guiding glow,
The newborn Christ above
And found an answering heavenly ray
Within the manger where he lay!

Bylow, my babe, bylow,
The star still rains its fire,
And the Master mild in the heart of a child
Bids echoing flame aspire,
And sphere and soul in concord sing,
"The King is born, and love is king!"

MARION MILLS MILLER.