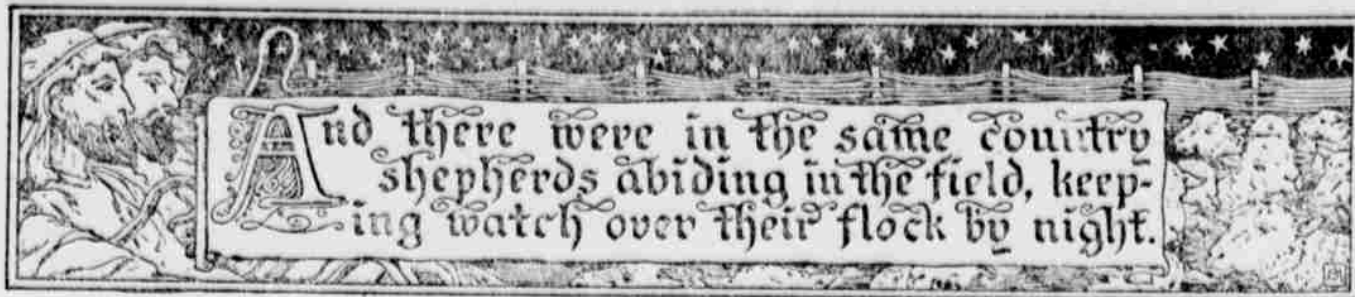




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A BIT OF CHRISTMAS

It was Christmas morning, and very, very cold. Every few minutes a trainman came through the car, watching carefully a dial-faced thermometer, and stooping to turn screws of the heating apparatus, in persistent attempts to keep the pointing finger at 70 degrees.

Despite the discomfort of close air, which was none too warm at best, the passengers in the main were joyous faces and didn't seem to consider the numerous packages and bundles an annoyance.

From a wayside station, which looked as if it had never been neighbor to any house where human being lived, a poor little girl entered and dropped into a seat, where an overcoat told that its owner was probably in the smoking car. The child did not notice this, and in her ignorance of travel, it would have made no difference if she had. She might have been eight or ten years old, but that air of self-reliance was hers, which poverty's child often acquires very young; yet there was nothing forward or "bold" in her appearance. Her dress was of the scantiest; a thin cotton gown, barely concealing the lack of suitable underwear, a little worn shoulder shawl and a battered straw hat.

When the conductor appeared the band which presented her half-fare ticket was red with cold; but the small person lifted to him a wonderfully frank face, and confidently informed him that she was going to grandma's for Christmas, and that the package she clutched in her other hand contained cookies for grandma.

The conductor smiled down at her; a pitying smile it was, as he thought of his own well fed, well clothed children, with whom he expected to eat a late Christmas dinner when his run was over. The smile lingered on his face as he passed to the next seat and saw that its occupants had heard the child's words.

Two women sat in the seat; strangers to each other, and as unlike as two persons made on the same general principles could be. One was tall, dignified, young, wrapped in costly furs, everything about her showing the person who had never lacked money or leisure. The other, stout, jolly, elderly, comfortable—a kindly and well-to-do woman. The two had traveled miles and miles, side by side, with not a word passed between them.

Now, both sat with eyes fixed on the forlorn bit of humanity in front of them. Suddenly the younger woman opened her traveling bag and took from it a soft, gray scarf shawl.

It was at least two yards long and six as wide. Folding it together she touched the little waif, saying in a low tone: "Stand up, my dear." The child obeyed, wondering, and the woman in the costly furs placed the folded shawl around the small shoulders, crossed it in front and bringing the ends to the back, pinned them securely.

"It is yours to keep," she whispered. "A Christmas present." Then, turning to the woman at her side, she said, apologetically, "I really did not need it myself." There was a link of tears in her eyes.

"Well, now," the older woman exclaimed in admiration, "you just set me to thinking! I'm really ashamed that I didn't think of doing something myself. Here, I've got two pairs of mittens for my grandson—just about her size—in my bag; and I can't wear out more than one pair in winter. Besides, I can knit another. It's nothing at all to knit mittens." She was busily undrawing the strings of an enormous silk bag, her glasses were blurred and her fingers were clumsy with haste.

"What's your name, little girl?" "Katie." "Well, hold out your hand, Katie. My! Aren't they a good fit! Here's another Christmas present to keep. And here's a frosted cake, eat it, right now, Katie. Your grandma won't need it, with all those you've got in your bundle."

"The child again obeyed. She did not say, "Thank you"—possibly she

didn't know how, but she seemed to glow all over, and her eyes returned thanks even if her timid lips did not. "I'm proud to know you, my dear," the roly-poly, comfortable woman turned now to her more cultivated neighbor. "You're right sort, I can see that, even if you are rich."

"And I am proud to know you," the other responded, almost shyly offering her hand, which was quickly buried in a big, warm grasp. "The rich are not so very different at heart, I hope."

At that instant the man of the overcoat sauntered in to resume his seat; gave a low whistle of surprise at the happy little traveler next the window; glanced at the two women, and comprehended the situation. His right hand made a quick dive into his trouser's pocket, as if to get some money; in another instant he withdrew it and reached up to the rack overhead and lifted down a large paper bundle. Taking the bundle across the aisle to an empty seat he opened it and took out a small package from among many others. Unfolding this package he brought to light a flaxen-haired doll dressed in the latest style and resplendent in a large picture hat. This he placed in the little girl's arms, saying, "From my little daughter who would rather you should have it." Then he lifted his hat courteously to the women, took his overcoat on his arm, and strode off to find a seat elsewhere. Rich little Katie!

Passengers near were buried in newspapers. The little episodes were almost unnoticed; but the angels knew that the Christmas spirit has never vanished from the earth since the time when they announced the birth of the Holy Child.—St. Nicholas.

Christmas Games.

Games for the little folks' parties these happy winter nights—how they do help along a good time! It is likely that Mother, or Grandmother, or Aunt Jane can show you some very interesting ones and also sing the little songs that are a part of the play. But here are a few that are more or less familiar to many, yet new to some; but in either event they may be used in adding to the mirth and merriment of the gathering.

Blind Man's Bluff.

Try this game by blindfolding all the players but one. Then this one should run about and touch first one and then another. The blindfolded ones cause much merriment by catching each other and making all kinds of guesses as to whom they have caught. The one who guesses right has the handkerchief taken off of his eyes, and so on, until all can see.

The Game of Jeweler.

Get some one of the older children or grown folks to act the part of the jeweler. He must bestow upon each player, in a whisper, the name of some jewel, such as sapphire, topaz, emerald, turquoise, pearl, ruby, diamond, amethyst, until all have received names, taking care that more than half receive the same name, say diamond. He announces that as each gem is called it must run into the hall, whilst he is counting ten, or they will have to pay a forfeit.

He then places a small table before the door in such a position that only one person can pass through at a time. Then he takes his place near the table and addressing the company, says: "I am the White House lady's jeweler, and she has ordered a brooch, to complete which my men are now waiting for an amethyst." The amethyst immediately jumps up and runs into the hall as quickly as possible. The jeweler then says, "I must also have a turquoise," and the turquoise responds by following the amethyst. All the others should be called before he mentions the diamond, and when that demand is made all who have received the name of diamond, rush simultaneously to the door, each thinking all the rest are acting under a mistake. The aperture being altogether too narrow for their hurried egress, the confusion causes much merriment.

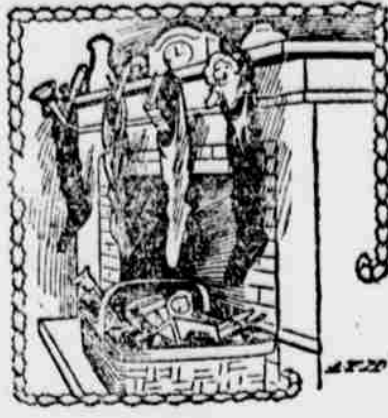
Santa Claus' Annual Visit.

Down the chimney he comes creeping; Through the nursery goes a-peeping; Hunts the stockings, great and small, Then proceeds to fill 'em all.

In the girls' go trinkets rare, Wondrous dolls with natural hair! Picture books, and ribbons bright, 'Till they fill the stockings tight.



In the boys' go balls and skates, Sometimes books and brand new slates; Drums and fifes and toys galore, 'Till they spill upon the floor.



Then with one last look about, Santa stealthily steals out, Jumps into his sleigh that's near, And comes no more 'till the next year. ANNE JAMES.



The Twenty Fourth

The clock ticks slowly, slowly in the hall,
And slower and more slow the long hours crawl;
It seems as though to-day
Would never pass away;
The clock ticks slowly, slowly in the hall—

In Bethlehem.

By CLINTON DANGERFIELD.

The cattle in their humble stalls
Turn on Him wondering eyes;
But Mary sees her little Babe
That on her true breast lies.

The wise men, bending at His feet
Bring incense, gold and myrrh;
But Mary holds an infant form
Whose life must hang on her.

His star is shining in the east,
His great archangels sing;
But Mary hears a thin young voice,
Troubled and faltering.

Her ears are deaf to angel songs,
The star she will not see;
The costly gifts before Him laid
Seem fading mistily.

And thus to heaven's host she prays—
By splendor unbeguiled,—
"Let me forget the King to-night,
And hold my own, my Child!"

Why We Have Carols.

The Christmas carols originated, it is thought in England, in the eleventh century. They were sung between the scenes of the mystery and miracle plays.

Mary's Diplomacy.

Small Mary had just written her annual letter to Santa Claus, and now turned it over to her mother for her approval. Mama read as follows:

DEAR SANTA CLAUS
PLEASE GIVE ME WHAT
EVER YOU THINK BEST
YOUR LITTLE FRIEND
MARY

Mother looked at it in some surprise. "Why, Mary," she said, "why are you leaving it to Santa Claus this year what he shall bring you? Last year you asked for three dolls, and the year before for an ironing board. Don't you know what you want this year?"

"Oh, yes," replied Mary. "I want three dolls again this year, but I thought if I told Santa so he would know the three he brought me last year are broken, and then maybe he'd be mad with me and wouldn't bring me anything this Christmas, so I just thought I'd leave it to him."—New York Press.

Genesis of Yule.

Comparatively few of the millions of persons who annually enter so heartily into the observance of Christmas give a thought to the origin of the customs they observe. Young people, the aged people and old people who take in the pleasure in decorating their homes with holly, mistletoe and other evergreens in anticipation of a reign of fun and frolic, do not, as a rule, give much thought to the Nativity, and never for a moment does any idea concerning the origin of such decorations enter their heads.

How many good souls there are who delight in the old-fashioned Christmas customs, and who once a year, at least, let themselves out to enjoy the revels of St. Nicholas' feast in the good old style, who would hold up their hands in horror were it even suggested that they were simply imitating the "wicked old pagans." Almost all our popular practices in honor of the birth of Christ have their origin in ante-Christian ones.

It is no longer a controversial point that the Christ-child was not born on the 25th or even during the month of December. We do not celebrate the actual anniversary of his birth, but the significance of the event. The observance of our modern Christmas has its foundation in a perennial custom of the ancients, from whom our forefathers took their idea of a celebration.

Later we find Christmas and Epiphany being celebrated on the same day, and still later, various dates—in March, April and December—were set aside.

It is pretty certain also that the Jewish feast of the Dedication of the Tabernacles, held toward the end of the year, influenced the selection of the 25th of December as Christmas.

About 300 A. D. a boy was born in Lycia. His parents called him Nichols, but (so the chronicles tell us), though that was a man's name, he preserved the nature of a child, for he chose "to keep virtues, meekness and simplicity, and therefore children do him worship before all other saints."

The modern child's "Santa Claus" is a Dutch contraction of "Sankt Nikolaus," "Sank'n' K'laus," and the saint's custom of giving presents secretly and in the dead of night as the development of a deed of charity he performed when he assisted by tossing three well-filled purses into their bedroom long after they had retired.

Thus, Santa Claus comes about when the children are asleep and gives them their heart's desire. St. Nicholas' day was originally early in December, but later it was confounded with Christmas.

There is an old ballad describing the saint and his customs, thus:

St. Nicholas money used to give to maidens secretly,
Who, that he still may use his wonted liberality,
The mothers of all their children on the Eve do cause to fast
And when they every one at night in senseless sleeps are cast,
Both Apples, Nattes and Peases they bring and other things besides,
As caps and shoes and petticoats, which secretly they hide,
And in the morning found, they say, that this St. Nicholas brought.

The idea that St. Nicholas was an old hoard-bearded man comes from the ancient representatives of Saturn, who was pictured a patriarch, and also from the confounding of the Christmas Saint with Father Time, who has always had his special day, on New Year's Eve, a week after Christmas.

This custom we derive from the Romans, who on the first day of the Saturnalia gave to the servants and children dolls, candles and little doll-like pasties, the exact significance of which, it is believed, had to do with those days when human sacrifices constituted a feature of the Saturnalian ritual.

The dolls were given principally to children, although their significance, it is believed, was relative to that sacrifice of human lives to the infer-

nal god which was practiced at Carthage.

Hardly was the Saturnalia over when the Pagnalia began. At this festival an altar was erected in each person's contributed money. Hence arose the custom, so an old medieval chronicler writes, for "the parents to give cakes, toys, boxes, garments, little wagons, apples, nuts, etc., to their children on Christmas Eve, and sometimes rods were added to the presents in order that the children might be the more easily ruled by fear of punishment."

To many people there is, perhaps, nothing more simply national than the Christmas mince pie, unless it be pumpkin pie on Thanksgiving Day. This gastronomic dainty has a history as old as Christmas in the north, if not older.

Its earlier known appearance was at the winter feasts of the half-Christianized Britons. It was then, and still in some parts of Great Britain, made in the form of a manger, and is supposed to represent that in which the infant Christ was laid.

The mistletoe was held in great reverence by the Druids. It was believed to be particularly and divinely healing; in fact, it was given this attribute for centuries. It had special significance as the cause of the death of Balder, the Norse Apollo, who was killed by an arrow made from its branches and given to the blind Hoder by Loki, the god of mischief. Balder was restored to life, the mistletoe tree was placed under the care of Frigs, and from that time until it touched the earth was never again to be an instrument of evil.

The present custom of kissing under the mistletoe is the outcome of an old practice of the Druids. Persons of opposite sexes passed under the suspended vine and gave each other the kiss of love and peace in full assurance that though it had caused Balder's death, it had lost all its power of doing harm since his restoration.

Despite the pagan origin of the majority of our Christian customs, they have been so much infused with the spirit of peace and good will that their original significance is completely lost, and there is an entirely different sentiment in the merry festival of to-day.

Christmas Hints.

When Choosing the Turkey.—Medium-sized turkeys really are far more tender than those gigantic birds so proudly displayed by peddlers.

Christmas Pudding.—Allow the Christmas pudding to stand for at least five minutes before turning it out of the basin to serve; it lessens the chance of its sticking.

Raisins for Plum Pudding.—Remember that muscatel raisins will give the puddings a richer flavor and better color. You can buy them cheaply if loose and not in bunches.

Currants.—When washing the currants for mince meat and Christmas pudding bear in mind that if left at all damp they cause heaviness, and if they are dried in a hurry before a quick fire their flavor is spoiled.

Let the Children Hang Up Their Stockings.—Hanging up the stocking is a custom that ought not to be allowed to perish. Certainly the child who dresses decorously and goes down to breakfast before receiving his Christmas presents is a child to be consoled with. He must lose a great deal of the enthusiasm of the hour. By all means hang up the stocking. If one wants to be modern and hygienic there is no objection to using perfectly fresh white stockings bought on purpose, and wrapping the candy and oranges in white tissue paper. Put the trifles, the jumping-jacks, the horns and the balls in the stocking, reserving the more serious gifts for the breakfast table or the tree.

In the South Christmas is celebrated as we observe Fourth of July. The presents may be of the most inexpensive character, but there will be a bountiful supply of firecrackers, torpedoes and roman candles, not forgetting the tin horn, which begins to toot on Christmas eve and continues till midnight of December 25.

