

Changing Styles in Christmas Toys



Santa Claus Assistants



The Toy Maker

By LOUISE M. COMSTOCK

COME was when the job of Santa Claus was a snap. Twelve months supervising the jolliest of elves in the manufacture of a standardized line of toys, and then a romantic evening whirling a picturesque whip over willing Donner and Blitzen, visiting friendly cottages with wide, welcoming chimneys and capacious fireplaces, stuffing sturdy, handknit stockings with wooden dolls, rubber balls and sugar plums to fill in toe, heel and extra corners. A mere nothing in those golden days even the responsibility of distinguishing between the neatly darned sock of good brother Ben and the ragged one of that rascally Willie; very few little boys but were good, and deserving of sugar plums, and easily pleased, when father was a boy!

But changing times, ushering in steam heat, kitchenettes with only two windows on a courtyard and a ventilator on the corridor to accommodate the rotund Saint, chiffon hose and a universal slavery to the great god Style, have put Santa in the big business executive class. Today we make him annually responsible for designing, constructing and distributing some \$400,000,000 worth of toys, all with a nice discrimination between the good and the poor, a careful consideration for childish tastes, and correct application of changing styles.

Children's playthings, always imitating the possessions and tools of their elders, have thus naturally from the very earliest times followed closely upon mankind's changing whims and fancies. The dolls unearthed in Egyptian tombs are made of wood and sometimes have movable arms and legs; but they all show that stiffness and emphasis upon the profile characteristic of Egyptian art. Early African dolls without heads were given to children of the Mohammedan faith, for their religion forbade the reproduction of the human features. Among the toys of early Persian children we are not surprised to find many animals, tigers with movable heads, crocodiles whose lower jaws work up and down, lions of limestone on wooden wagons for the owner to pull about, or a carved hedgehog on wheels. Roman children played with two-wheeled carts like the chariots in which their public heroes raced. Toys during the Middle Ages, if we are to judge from the few preserved for us, included knights mounted on horses modeled in clay, and slender ladies of terra cotta modeled in the elaborate costumes of the period painted in gold and brightest hues.

It is the mechanical toy, perhaps, which shows most emphatically the influence of present-day tendencies on children's playthings. From the tiniest tin automobile that winds up and darts furiously a few feet across the floor, to the \$1,000 mechanical wonder which succeeds by means of springs and electricity to simulate exactly a real cat or a whole circus parade in action—the purchase, usually, so toy dealers tell us, of rich grandparents and uncles who wish to wind up the cat and watch the circus themselves—these toys employ every invention of modern science. And they keep pace also with current interests.

Toy counters today are crowded with miniature motion picture cameras and projectors, some of them capable of carrying 500 feet of film and all of them, so they are advertised, easily managed by a twelve-year old. A few seasons ago, when a transatlantic flight was still novel enough to commend a streamer headline in all the newspapers, the mechanical airplane was in high demand, and toy golf equipment or indoor golf games dominated in the toy store at the same time that miniature golf greens began appearing in every vacant lot. Today mechanical racing automobiles and toy zeppelins are supplanting the airplane in popularity, and automobile or horse racing games, and football, are crowding out golf in indoor games. Carry-car trucks with a detachable trailer capable of transporting four small models, and delivery wagons stocked with popular trademarked wares keep this type of toy up-to-date.

While real mothers must be content with babies upon whom current styles in curly or straight hair, blue eyes or brown, have no influence, one to ten-year-old mothers can be much more particular. For styles in dolls change yearly it seems. In grandmother's day all dolls were quite grown up, the youngest of them being prim young ladies in pantalettes and artificial curls. The baby-doll, simulating a real baby, is a comparative newcomer, and even it has suffered periods of more and less popularity with changing juvenile tastes. In 1929 the flaxen haired beauty with the baby face languished unwanted on the toy counter, while the "fapper" doll, with dark bobbed hair, natty clothes and a complexion oftentimes modishly sun-tanned found a happy home. This year, thanks to the Empress Eugenie or whoever it was who revived in us a taste



for things old-fashioned and sweetly feminine, curls, dimples, long lashes and frilly wardrobes are in again. And baby dolls! Little daughter has apparently given up dreams of a career and requests of Santa Claus for this Christmas nothing more modern than a doll's house to keep in order and a realistic baby doll to be loved and nursed and dressed and redressed. Her dreams of miniature domesticity are also, it seems, more elaborate and thorough-going than those of grandmother, to whom the doll itself was all-sufficient. They include a ready-made wardrobe, for what up-to-date little girl is going to slave over a toy sewing machine, even an electric one, or prick her fingers with a grown-up needle, what with the grand styles and the bargain prices of read-to-wear dolls' clothes. And they include also electric ranges that really cook, carpet sweepers, or better yet, vacuum cleaners that really clean.

A very different type of doll, but one also indicating the influence of current tastes even on children's toys, is the caricature doll, stuffed and painted to represent characters already familiar through the talking pictures, popular juvenile books, or widely read comic strips and

SOMEBODY'S COMING

Kris Kringle is coming.
Kris Kringle is coming.
Kris Kringle is coming to town!
He wears a big pack,
On the top of his back,
And looks like a funny old clown.

Now wait just a minute:
I'll tell what is in it.
Then won't your eyes sparkle with joy!
There's something with curls
For good little girls,
And something as nice for each boy.

There are flaxen haired dollies
And all sorts of follies
To please little folks Christmas day;
There are gay horses prancing,
And Dandy Jacks dancing,
And everything fitted for play.

From Kris Kringle's chin
Hangs a plenty of tin—
Tin trumpets and watches and drums;
Noah's ark painted red,
A little doll's bed,
And soldiers with very big drums.

From out of his pockets
He'll take sugar lockets
And candies, all red, white and blue;
And there will be kisses
For nice little misses,
And sweetmeats in plenty for you.
(Aunt Clara, in the Nursery, January, 1910.)

Sunday supplement "funnies." Mickey Mouse, a foot high and true to the original to the last whisker, may not inspire a young owner with spasms of mother-love, but who would refuse a celebrated movie star warm welcome into the doll family circle? Thus Mickey Mouse, and Krazy Kat, and the rollicking Bimbo, as well as the entire Aesop's Fables gang, done up neatly in black velvet, and nine members of Our Gang, modeled in bisque and waiting for their owner to paint them as they should be painted, are important newcomers in the doll world. Orphan Annie and Skeezix and Smithy are among a number of comic strip celebrities reproduced as dolls this year. Rose O'Neill's "Kewpies" done up in flesh pink plush, make a cuddly companion for baby's crib; and from juvenile literature have been borrowed A. A. Milne's funny little bear, Winnie the Pooh, featured in a number of toys this year, and the whole Raggedy family, from Raggedy Ann down.

Ask anybody who has outgrown childhood just which toy he remembers with the greatest satisfaction, and you will find, nine cases out of ten, that it was something very simple, a set of

blocks, a rag doll, or even something which he made himself, out of spools, or tin cans. The real pleasure afforded by this type of toy persists in spite of mechanical wonders and layettes in which everything from nursing bottle to safety-pins is provided. Psychologists, however, have brought it up to date, and now present us with the term "activity toys," and point out anew the eternal value of the plaything which makes the child the actor rather than the spectator, which demands youthful ingenuity, calls forth infant imagination, exercises childish brains and muscle.

Thus we find always in style all outdoor games and playthings, from the good old bat and ball to a mechanical see-saw so constructed that it takes only one child to operate it and teeter deliciously up and down without the peril of a sudden bump when the partner at the other end disembarks. Thus also the permanent appeal of tool boxes, paints and blocks of clean paper, pencil boxes, modeling clay, building blocks or any of the elaborate construction outfits by which the youthful engineer may build bridges and skyscrapers to his heart's content. And thus the demand predicted this Christmas for cowboy boots, or toy revolvers in a holster on a wide belt, by which the small boy is suddenly metamorphosed from the terror of the fifth grade to a hero of the western plains.

Modern child psychologists have also added impetus this year to the sale of toys classed as "educational." Instruction cloaked as amusement, like a sugar-coated pill, may now be pleasantly administered in any number of playthings. When the instruction is for the very young, the educator moreover prescribed toys that are durable under normal handling, and above all, absolutely hygienic. No more fragile dolls which the lusty infant will more than likely crush with its first ecstatic hug. No more blocks from which the bright colors may be sucked by any aggressive baby, or metal toys with sharp corners or cutting edges. There is, of course, some educational advantage in giving a delicate piece of mechanism to an older child, especially if care be taken to impress upon him its proper care and use.

For the child whose tastes are already sufficiently developed to be evident, the Christmas shopper may choose from cut-out puzzles, composed of hundreds of fascinating colored blocks cut out with a jig-saw, which one labors to fit together and lo, is rewarded by a lovely map, or a famous masterpiece of painting! There are sets of chemicals done up in small vials and boxes, with directions for combining them to produce some of our commonest chemical phenomena; and construction sets by which the boy is taught the principles of the cantilever bridge or of modern step-back architecture; and electric transformers which urge their possessor to make his own electric toys.

Games, whether they profess, as many of the newer games do, to be of educational value, or merely claim to amuse, all nevertheless have a certain tendency to quicken the mind and eye, to train the muscles in automatic response. Moreover, games have this year attained a certain definite style appeal through the present popularity of "adult games." The fact that grown-ups are playing them has this year lent new attraction to many of the simplest of children's games, and made game-playing in itself a sophisticated and interesting thing to do.

Just when and why the current rage for adult games commenced nobody seems to know. Some says it is the result of the vast interest people as a whole take today in outdoor sports; when the baseball and football season is over and it is impossible to take the weekly work-out at golf or tennis, what more natural than that people should resort to their own indoor games, in their own homes? Perhaps officials of the large steamship companies, who have popularized their cruises by filling in the long days of "water, water everywhere" with deck tennis, shuffle board and table games in the smoking rooms, are responsible. At any rate, last winter people in search of amusement broke away from standard auction bridge through contract, backgammon became a dangerous rival, and, first thing we knew, pool tables appeared in the basement, tennis tables in the attic, guests were given their choice between bridge and club parcels, and the larger department and sporting goods stores installed flourishing adult game sections.

This consequently will be a Christmas of many games. Children and elders alike will drag out such old-time favorites as Flinch and Authors, or amuse themselves with the familiar electric questioner. They will familiarize themselves with famous events in history by a new game based on the History of Mankind of Van Loon, and go into convulsions, excellent to offset a heavy Christmas dinner, over an imported game called Sorry.

(© by Western Newspaper Union.)



ROSS MERVIN paused a moment before he went up the rickety stairs that led to the room where dumb "Soupy" Sam would rent him a bed for the night for the sum of ten cents.

He caught sight of a slight, girlish figure staggering along the street toward him. She stopped suddenly with groping hands. "Something wrong?" he asked gently.

"I guess—I'm blind! My eyes—" were the whispered words he caught. Her wide eyes did seem sightless to him. He took her arm quickly under his. "Perhaps it is just for the moment. I'll be glad to take you home if you tell me where to go."

She was a slight thing, and pretty under other circumstances, Ross thought. He learned in that brief but eventful walk that she had been studying art in the city, but success had not come her way. The Christmas

rush in the stores had given her an opportunity to earn money. The lights had bothered her after the strain her eyes had been under in her studying and that night on her way home darkness deeper than the night had come over them.

He suggested getting in touch with the police, but she begged him not to. "I have my rent paid until Sunday night, and if I rest tomorrow my eyes may be all right. After that—after that—"

A rigid faced landlady came to the door. In a moment Ross glimpsed the situation. The woman heard the explanation with a scowl; and he decided to wait until he had seen the helpless girl to her room. Then he said quietly:

"Look after her well, and I will see that you are paid."

"She has her room paid until Sunday night. After that the city will take care of her—unless she has the cash Sunday night. You look like a bum to me, but if you get the money, all right," the woman said shortly.

Ross smiled. "You have my number; but I'll have the money. Be good to her. She's a mere kid and up against it."

"So am I," she replied sharply. The next morning early he was at an agency. He stepped to the desk just in time to hear a man say, "That's no job for me!" and go on.

"I'll take it," Ross agreed. The clerk smiled. "This job is driving a truck for the construction company at Millburg. The truck carries explosives for their dynamiting."

For two days Ross drove the truck. Saturday night he received his two days' pay and hurried to 30 East street, paid the grim landlady rent for another week, and talked for one long happy hour with the girl he had vowed to aid. Her eyes had improved a little, and under his quiet determination she agreed to rest during the coming week.

"I—I don't see why you are so good to me," she said hesitatingly at parting.

Her hand sought his. "But—your voice out of the darkness—I know! O, I know!"

The next week, the fates seemed to take a hand in remodeling his life, and one event followed another speedily.

He looked up from his engine to see his father's fur-coated figure and hear him say:

"Lad, one of my engineer friends here spotted you and told me. It's almost Christmas. I feel that I have been unjust to you—but won't you come home?"

Ross' mind lingered on the word "Christmas," and he said simply, "I will—if I can bring some one with me. No, not my wife, but a girl I hope to make my wife."

So it came about that one eventful evening Ross bent over a pale, flower-like face and looked into dark eyes to which a great city physician had brought the blessing of sight; and she said:

"Dear, what a dream it seems! This beautiful home—and you with me! And just a few weeks ago, you and I down—"

"In the depths, sweetheart. I began to climb out the moment I saw you that night."

"And you took me with you—" the chime of far-away bells broke into her words with distant music—"what are those bells?" she asked wonderingly. He touched her lips with his. "Christmas bells, little girl, ringing out the old for us—forever!"

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