



THOUSAND pardons, but could the senor the change give for two gold pieces

John Wells jerked his newly-urged horses to a standstill and glared his annoy. ance at the heavily bearded Mexican who, with doffed sombrero, had suddenly confronted him at a point where

the Menardville road extricated itself from the scattered jacals of Fort McKavett and headed out for the open prairie. It was early morning of the 24th of December, 1895. Wells had freshly risen from an unappetizing and indigestible breakfast of grease-sodden tortillas and rancid bacon; had quarreled with the hotel keeper over his extortionate charges for the last night's lodging; was hungry; angry with the sharp sleet that came drifting against his face from the northeast; angry with the "infernal luck" that doomed him to wander over the wild prairies of southwestern Texas while the rest of mankind were happily preparing for the holiday festivities; angry at the abominable cabbage-leaf cigar which refused to yield him solace from his woes; angry with the world at large and-just at that moment -with the disreputable looking "Greaser"

before him in particular. "Two gold pieces of \$20," he growled. "Where are they? Are they counterfeit? How did you come by them?" The Mexican gravely held them forth in

his dirty palm for inspection. "They are gold, senor. They were given me by the American, Senor Black-who sends the meat of goats across the seas in

cans. The money is the price of 40 goats that I drove from the Rio Concho." Wells regarded the Mexican with a searching gaze of suspicion.

"I know Col. Bill Black, and his gold is good. But I think I know you, too. You were in the hotel just now when I paid my bill, and I think I saw you last night at the store where I bought those cursed cigars. I believe you want to learn if I have money, so you can relieve me of it farther out on the

The object of Wells' distrust threw his arms aloft in humble deprecation.

"The Sacred Mother knows-!" 'Never mind that nonsense," exclaimed Wells, roughly. "I'm no baby, and I'll take



"THEY ARE GOLD, SENOR."

chances on you and all the Greasers in Mc-Kavett. I'll give you silver for your gold; and here in this sack is more money-white and yellow-that you may have for the taking. Don't be afraid of the guns-they are never loaded-but sail in as soon as you can raise your crowd and overtake me.

The Mexican made no reply to this bland bit of encouragement, but his snaky eyes gleamed evilly from their covert of steelgray brows, as they rested upon the plump buckskin pouch nestled between the butts of a heavy shotgun and a winchester rifle. He was profuse in his thanks for the American's kindness, but Wells' only response was a short grunt as he once more drew the blankets closely around him and chirruped to his not over-willing team.

It was a long drive to Menardville, and a

longer one to the nearest railway station, the point for which Wells was now heading. Ever since the middle of November he had been driving here and there among the scattered ranches, on a collecting trip for his employers, a prominent firm of San Antonio merchants; and he was more than anxious to get back to civilization once more. He had been specessful in his mission and had remitted several large sums by express; but his collections had been heavy during the last few days, and at least \$3,000, in bills and coin, were stowed away in his pockets and in the buckskin bag at his feet. It was a large sum of money and he naturally felt the responsibility its possession involved. John Wells was by no means a coward, but he was perfectly acquainted with the country and its people, and knew that the chance of acquiring one-tenth the amount he car-ried would be sufficient to prompt many of the latter to murder. He had been particularly struck with the villainous face and suspicious demeanor of the goat-herder, and the uneasiness aroused by the little incident of the morning hung over him during the entire day.

Without making his usual noonday halt, he drove steadily on, occasionally glancing back over the dim trail, in momentary expectation of finding himself pursued. However, evening came without anything having transpired to increase his alarm, and an hour before darkness closed down upon the bleak plains he drew rein before the door of a lone ranch and, without the useless preliminary of applying for accommodations, began divesting his tired horses of the har-

As he unhooked the tugs of the off horse, a towheaded urchin of eight or nine years same strolling up from the near-by corral, crept into the buggy seat and drew the blankets over his head until only his boyish face and sparkling eyes were visible.

"What's your name, mister?" he asked, with childlike directness.

"Jack Wells. What's yours?" "Hank Grimm. I'm only Little Hank. Old Hank is my gran'paw, and he owns this ranch. The Mexicans call this 'Dos Botas' 'cause gran'paw gives the 'two-. boot' brand. Say, mister, do you know who I thought you mought be when you driv'

"Couldn't guess." "I thought mebby it was Santa Claus, but then I allow he's got more whiskers'n you have. Still, he mought have shaved." Wells admitted that Santa Claus might,

by way of a change, conclude to make his annual trip with a beard of three weeks' growth, or even a smoothly-shaven face. Further than that he couldn't, under the circumstances, blame Little Hank for looking upon all strangers with an eye of suspicion; but he thought the chances of popping his gaze on Santa Claus by daylight were extremely small. Several millions of boys, in different parts of the world, had been keeping their eyes open for years without avail, and there had come to be a popular belief that the jolly fellow with the reindeers traveled principally in the dark.

"That's the way he hit this ranch last Christmas, and I reckon he left it till about the last ranch on his rounds," remarked the boy. "He didn't leave me a thing that I wanted-nuthin' but a little tin wagon and a pound of candy. Say, mister, d'ye reckon Santa Claus ever handles windchesters?"

The appearance of the elder Hank Grimm spared Wells the necessity of answering this difficult query. The owner of the "Two Boot ranch" was a man well advanced in years, and possessed of a sturdy, erect figure, square-cut features and sky-blue eyes, that told at once of German ancestry and of past service in the armies of the old world or the new. He welcomed the traveler heartily, directed him how to dispose of his horses for the night, and then abruptly turned away and entered the house. Little Hank remained behind and, in his quaint, boyish way, superintended Wells' every

A covey of quail that had been foraging in the vicinity of the crib flushed at their approach and settled in the prairie grass a short distance away. Little Hank clamored to have one of them killed for his Christmas breakfast, and to please him, on their return to the buggy, Wells slipped a couple of bird loads in his Parker, and, when the covey rose again, grassed three plump beauties with a hasty double shot. The boy was in perfect ecstasies over his success.

"That's better'n you could do with a windchester," he remarked, in a tone denoting that he considered this the height of sossible praise. "Gran'paw says a shotgun is no good; but I reckon it depends a heap on who shoots it. I never seed but one before, and it wasn't wuth shucks. It belonged to a man from Arkansaw, and he couldn't hit the broadside of a mule."

The traveler's effects were soon transferred to the living room of the ranch, where he was introduced to the ranchman's aged wife, and found that the only occupants of the place were themselves and their precocious grandson. Grimm was a German of the old school, with true Teutonic ideas of comfort, and it seemed that unusual preparations for the evening meal had been made in honor of his visitors. All in the way of food that the ranch could offer was on the table, and, surmounting the array of snowy biscuits, ham and eggs, juicy steak and canned fruit, stood a group of ancient glass decanters, their contents shining in a gradation of colors from deep red to straw yel-

Little Hank seemed to look upon his share of the feast as an especial treat, and after it was disposed of his tongue ran more glibly than ever. At length his grandsire suspend-

ed for a moment a morsel of beef half raised to his mouth, and uttered a word of reproof. "Henry, my boy, it is not right that the children should talk and the grown ones listen. Remember, you should be very good to-night. They say that Santa Claus to bad boys is not kind.'

"But see," retorted the lad, quickly. "I was good before and what did he bring me? Nothing. I wanted a windchester and he brought me a tin wagon."

'The child would be a man before his time," put in his grandmother. "He talks of nothing but guns; and if he had them he would kill us all, and himself in the bar-

"I would be a brave soldier-like my father," said the boy, his eyes filling with

"And be killed by the Indians, as was he," responded the old ranchman. "My child, the Grimms have been soldiers since the earliest days. I have fought, in my time, with brave men to lead me on to battle, and I tell you there is nothing in soldiering-nothing but hard work and slavery and bloodshed and death. It is a dog's life; nothing more.

Later in the night, when Wells and Little Hank were snugly stowed away in the latter's bed, the question of Santa Claus and the "windchester" came up again, but no lengthy discussion followed.

It must have been sometime after midnight when Wells was partially aroused by the knowledge that some one was moving in the room, and called out to know who it

"Nobody but me-Hank Grimm. Not gran'paw, but the little one. You know-" But that was quite enough for the somnolent gentleman from San Antonio. If the sentence was finished he failed to hear its conclusion. Sometime afterwards, however. he was aroused again; and this time so thoroughly that he heard and understood the words that awoke him. They evidently came from the "living room" into which his apartment opened, and were uttered at the

top of Little Hank's childish treble. 'Thar now, Santa Claus. I've got you this time, and either that windchester comes or I downs your meat-house. No tin wagons for me this Christmas."

There was a fierce curse grittingly muttered; the sharp crack of a pistol; and then -boom! boom; -two thunderous reports almost as one, shaking the adobe walls of the ranch to their foundations. A dense volume of smoke rolled into the sleeping room, but Wells charged through it with ready rifle, reaching the outer apartment. just as old Grimm entered from another door light in hand.

Little Hank lay beneath the huge table, groaning dismally and rubbing his shoulder. Otherwise the room was unoccupied; but a



"I'VE GOT YOU THIS TIME, SANTA CLAUS."

hard dirt floor lay a freshly discharged pistol and a Mexican sombrero.

"It is robbers that have been here," exclaimed the ranchman. "It is Mexican robbers, and they have suot my boy!" Wells dived beneath the table, brought

forth the injured and placed him ten derly in a chair; but he at once struggled to | his feet. "Turn loose the dog, gran'paw, or he will git away. It's Santa Claus, and I'm blamed if he didn't miss me with his pisto right slap in my face. I never knowed afore

that Santa Claus was an Arkansaw man.' Wells turned from the excited boy and approached the open window. Below it, and directly to the right, the whitewashed walls were torn and disfigured with shot, and there were great splotches and dark, trickling streams of something like red paint shining in the light of the lamp.

He turned to the old German; his features pale but collected.

You will not need the dog," said he "The man who tumbled through that window is lying where he fell-and I think I will recognize him when I see him."

Wells was right in both his surmises. In 'layin' fer Santa Caus" Little Hank had taken a step that no midnight marauder could have foreseen. In forcing an entry to Grimm's ranch, the Mexican goat-herder, who had trailed Wells all the way from Mc-Kavett, had gone directly to his death. He lay outside the window, as he had fallen when the bulk of two loads of buckshot had struck him, and when Little Hank gazed into his dead face, its pallor more ghastly still in the lamplight, he screamed and staggered back, covering his eyes with trembling

"I don't want to be a soldier," he sobbed. "I never want to kill another man as long as

But his sturdy old granddam-descended, no doubt, from a long line of warlike Teutons-took him in her strong arms con-

"But this man was a robber, my dear. Killing was his deserts, for he came to murder us all in our sleep. You saved our lives, and now would you turn coward and make us ashamed?"

'It was not a brave deed," growled old Grimm. "The boy thought to shoot Santa Claus and killed a lazy thief of a Mexican instead. It was a bull's-eye on the wrong target and no honor is won. Still, I am glad it has happened, for it may frighten his babyish mind from this folly about soldierlife and guns."

And so Kris Kringle did not visit the ranch that night, and Little Hank had to wait for his rifle-but not, as it chanced, so very long, after all. Arriving without farther incident at his destination, Wells first care was to visit the different gunstores of San Antonio upon an errand the nature of which can be easily guessed. On New Year's Eve the McKavett stage halted at Grimm's ranch to deliver a package, and a few minutes later the heart of the younger Hank was beating high with elation. Snugly packed in a neat box lay two guns-a tiny winchester and a light breech-loading shotgun. It was a present fit for a king, and a costlier one than Jack Wells' slim purse could have stood unaided; but his employers had been told how their thousands were saved and graciously donated two per cent. of the entire amount towards rewarding the principal actor in that Christmas Eve tragedy at the "Two Boot ranch.

S. D. BARNES. THE DUTCH HOUSEWIFE.

Her Constant Desire for Cleanliness Amounts Almost to a Crase.

The Dutch woman is before and above all things a housewife. Indeed, her love of home comes very near akin to worship, and the greatest compliment that can be paid to her is to praise house that is her kingdom, says the Girls' Realm. She is famous all the world over for her remarkable cleanliness, and even in the very poor quarters of the cities, where the houses are small and crowded together, the windows are daintily decked with curtains of spotless white, the rooms well swept and tidy, the humble furniture earefully dusted and polished.

This desire for cleanliness, in fact, almost amounts to a craze, and housewives and servants alike evince a strong partiality for scrubbing, cleaning and washing. Even in well-to-do families a domestic training is considered a natural and necessary adjunct of the daughter's education, and each has certain household duties apportioned to box at last, and a silence fell upon them, as her. She is likewise taught to make her own dresses, to knit her own stockings and to keep her wardrobe in re-

Nor does she shirk these duties, as it is to be feared so many of her English sisters do; on the contrary, they are carried out faithfully, cheerfully and ar a matter of course, and it is due to this excellent training in her girlhood diys that the Dutch woman makes so model a housewife. We might go further and say that it is through this training that the Dutch girl has earned the reputation of being "free and light of heart, and a stranger to the feeling of ennui," since she is always healthfully and helpfully employed.

IN HER NIGHTGOWN.

A Slight Lingual Mistake Made by the Guatemalan Minister at Washington.

It is undeniable that foreign diplomats in Washington frequently find themselves at a loss, owing to the novelties presented to them by American customs. Even the language offers dif-

ficulties. Only the other day the Guatemalan minister was speaking to some Washington ladies of what he regarded as a remarkable social experience met with here at a reception at the capital. He had been invited to an afternoon recep-

"And do you know," he said, "the hostess received the guests in a nightgown!"

"Good heavens!" replied the ladies to whom this information was addressed. "Surely you are joking, Mr. Minister." "Not at all, I assure you," reiterated the diplomat. "It was in her night dress that we were received-low neck and bare arms!"

"Oh, you mean evening dress, do you not, Mr. Minister?" suggested one of the ladies.

"Yes, that is what I mean," admitted Senor Arriaga; "low neck and bare arms, just like the costume for the op-

era or ball." As may be imagined, the laugh was at the minister's expense. In Washington ladies quite commonly wear evening dress when giving afternoon receptions.-Boston Herald.

A CHRISTMAS SURPRISE.

How a Rejected Suitor Got Even with His Successful Rival.



O MY cousin Robert has written that he is sending us a little Christmas surprise," said Mrs. Meekmild, for the tenth time. "I felt sure that if he could once be induced to visit our happy little home he would forget that I -ab-treated him rather unkindly in eloping with you on

the very day which was to have seen me his bride. To be sure, I left a note saying that I felt I could never have made inm perfectly happy. Had he been a magnanimous person, he would have been satisfied with such a handsome apology-but he was not. "Not at all," sighed her husband, "he was most inconsiderate. He-

"However, a woman's tact has bridged the difficulty, as usual. I flatter myself that I did a clever and original thing in naming one of the twins for him. Who would be so



THE LID WAS OFF THE BOX AT LAST.

apt to appreciate such a compliment as a rich old bachelor, I'd like to know?" "No one, I'm sure. But he thawed as soon as he had seen our six little cherubs.

How he laughed when little Josiah rode on my back and playfully kicked me in the 'And how merry he was when Ariadne spilled milk on my best dress. What a pleas-

ure it must have been to witness such felic-To be sure, I am sorry that he happened to hear your remarks when my dressmaker's bil came in, but-"And I had rather that he had been out of earshot when you told me your honest opinion of a man who could not match embroidery silks better than I, after he had been married ten years. However, this is mere

given me now that you weigh twice as "Humph, I may weigh a few pounds more, but my hair is intact, and that is more

detail. I remember his rage when he found

that I had married his little fairy, as he

called you. Odd, isn't it, that he has for-

"And now he is sending us a Christmas box. I wonder what it contains? The children will be up at daylight to find out. Well, prosperity will not change us!"

"Never. Even though I am able to dress as well as our own hired girl, I shall not inthe neutness and sweetness of the sist that you write it Xmas, instead of Christmas, nor shall I call it appendicitis when little Rufus has eaten too much pie. Personally, I expect tickets to Europe."

"Tickets to Europe, and I such a poor sailor that the sight of a marine in water colors gives me seasickness! Nonsense, he has sent us the deed to a ranch in Texas. "A ranch-and I so afraid of cattle! How mean of you to think of such a thing. I'll never live on a ranch!"

"And I shall certainly not go to Europe!"
"I shall, and I'll never speak to you again. There!"

"Even your voice would not reach from Europe to Texas. But here is the express man, and you'll see that I was right.' "That I was, dear. What a huge box! I'm glad that he forgave us just at Christmas when he need not check his generosity. That trip to Europe-"
"Texas, you mean!" The lid was off the

the gifts were opened. When the last one lay before them, they flung themselves despairingly into each other's arms. "The villain said he had forgiven us!" she

"He can afford to-he is avenged!" he

groaned. For the box contained: One music box, which played only rag time; one drum, a fife, three horns, a toy piano, six packages of dynamite crackers, one Chinese gong, a toy pistol and a card, on which was written: "It ith Cousin Robert's best wishes for a very merry Christmas!"

Between the Lines.

And deign to view my humble gift; (I hate to think about its cost!) May it find favor in your sight,

(And bring about the end I seek!) Although its value is but slight (I'll have to fast at least a week!) -N. Y. World.

Easily Answered. Hojack-1 often see the Christmas goose

mentioned in Christmas stories. What is the Christmas goose? Tomdik-The Christmas goose is the man who spends more money for presents than

he can afford .- Judge. A Query. The question comes on each Christmas

morn To interrupt men's gentler mirth; Assist in bringing peace to earth?"
-Washington Star.

Dog-Faced Boy-Did yer get yer stockin' full o' good things Christmas! Living Skeleton—Yes, indeed, Dog-Faced Boy—What'd yer get? Living Skeleton-A cigarette. - Town

All It Would Hold.

As Good a Theory as Any. Tommy--What are all the men trying to get to the north pole for? Willie (scornfully)-What, don't you know, goosey? Why, Santa Claus lives there.-Brooklyn Life.

First Short Dresses.

The materials used for a baby's first short dresses are nainsook, French lawn and dimity. If it is desired to use colored dresses after the child is one year old percale in fancy stripes, pink, blue or a delicate green, may be chosen, or the same material in a plain color trimmed with ruffles of Hamburg edging .- Ladies' Home Journal.

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only to break forth again more violently than ever; S. S. S. forces out every trace of taint, and rids the system of it forever.

Mrs. T. W. Lee, Montgomery, Ala., writes: "Some years ago I was inoculated with poison by a nurse who infected my babe with blood taint. I was covered with sores and places from head to foot and in my great extremits." ulcers from head to foot, and in my great extremity I prayed to die. Several prominent physicians treated me, but all to no purpose. The mercury and potash which they gave me seemed to add fuel to the awful flame which was devouring me. I was advised by friends who had seen wonderful cures made by it, to try Swift's Specific. I improved from the start, as the medicine seemed to go direct to the cause of the trouble and force the poison out. Twenty bottles cured me completely." Swift's Specific—



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satisfied if you will allow us to furnish the necessary articles to

complete your Christmas dinner, that part of the day will be a

success, even if all the balance should be disappointed.

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