

The English language is spoken by 125,000,000 persons. But numbers do not necessarily count, for Chinese is spoken by 400,000,000. It's intelligence that talks rather than numbers.

Compensation can now be obtained in France by the victims of judicial errors. The Versailles magistrates have recently given a man, wrongly sent to prison for fourteen days, an indemnity of \$60.

An eighteen-year-old cigarette victim, a sixteen-year-old drunkard, and two ten-year-old robbers make a startling record of juvenile depravity for one day. Degeneration is playing a very strong game in this part of the world.

The great insurance companies are considering the establishment of an enormous sanitarium for the care of consumptives who develop the disease after insuring. The Argonaut speaks of it as a cold business proposition to cure or prolong the life of the policyholder, by which means money will be saved to the companies.

Ardmore, Indian Territory, has a unique fire alarm. The inhabitants are great believers in the rousing qualities of a Colt's 45 six-shooter, and on the first intimation of a fire, every man pulls his gun. Of course, it sounds like a pitched battle for a while, but it is said to have the desired effect of getting out the boys, which no end of church bell-ringing has hitherto been able to do.

The recent movement in Paris, France, to plaster the city with posters of an elevating character seems to have spread to Muskegon, Mich. In this latter city bill boards are to be used for disseminating scriptural teachings, and a society for the prosecution of the work has been recently formed. The society will also distribute hand cards bearing Biblical texts and illustrations. It was organized by a Chicago drummer.

In addition to the Red Cross and White Cross, there has just been established in Vienna a new order, to be known as the Green Cross. Its object is to give succor to Alpine climbers and excursionists in mountain regions. It originated in the Austrian Alpine Club. The intention is to establish huts on high mountains and to keep supplies and relief stores or boxes containing articles likely to be required in emergencies at conveniently located points.

Concerning the jarrah tree of Australia, which is largely used for street-paving in London and other European cities, Sir John Forrest of Australia speaks thus: "The demand for our jarrah and karri timber in London and other large cities for paving shows that probably in a short time this will be one of our greatest items of export. All along the Southwestern railway, the railway to Donnybrook, the railway to the Colliie coalfields, and the railway to Bridgetown, splendid jarrah country exists."

By order of the City Council of Toronto, Canada, a ballot was taken among the street railway employes to ascertain their sentiment on the question of raising the street cars on Sunday. Two hundred and fifty men voted. Of these 220 were against Sunday work, while thirty of the men wished "to be permitted to work on Sunday, if they desired to do so." So as public sentiment in Toronto is with the majority of the men, the city will probably retain its unique position as the only large city in North America whose street cars are not available on Sunday.

There is soon to be a new country to visit and a new way of going round the world, announces Harper's Weekly. It seems only the other day that Jules Verne's man went around in eighty days, and thought it a considerable feat. The record for circumnavigation is now sixty-six days, or thereabouts. Baron Hilkoff, the combination of American mechanic and Russian prince who was in this country recently, said that when the railroad across Siberia is finished, which, he thinks, will be in four or five years, the time of getting around will be cut in two, and from thirty to thirty-three days will suffice for it. He allows ten days to cross Siberia from St. Petersburg, ten days from Vladivostok to San Francisco, and thirteen days from there to St. Petersburg again. Early in the next century, then, the tired American may turn his face eastward when he starts on his mouth's vacation, and keep it turned that way until he gets home, just about in time to resume his work.

CHRISTMAS.

Feathery flakes are dancing, dancing,
In the gray morn's frosty gleam—
Heralds they of reindeer prancing
From the gardens of our dream—
From the bright land of the Elf-King,
Where the bon bons gaily grow
Just like sweets of summer gardens,
Where the tulips smile in row.

Feathery flakes are falling, falling,
From the skies in softest way;
And between our voices calling:
"Soon it will be Christmas Day!"
Don't you know how in the springtime,
Wint'ry snows are scattered wide
Ere the lovely purple blossoms
Dare to peep from where they hide?

Feathery flakes are sifting, sifting,
Through the chill December air—
Here, and there, and yonder drifting,
Making everything more fair;
Laying whiter folds than linen
On the houses and the trees
Softer than the richest damask
Spread our dainty guests to please.

Soon the bon bons will be falling
As the flakes have fall'n to-day
And the children will be calling
To their patron saint so gay:
"Ah! we knew when came the snowflakes
You would come, dear Santa Claus—
For we always (you remember)
Know the wind's way by the straw."

Soon the trees as fair as any
That elves have wreathed with snow,
Will be planted—O! so many!
In our better homes. And lo!
Something better far than snowflakes
Shall be hung about their green—
Candles, toys and fairy tapers
Lighting up the merry scene.

And the children dancing, dancing,
Till all tired their little feet,
Shall, with half-shut eyes up-gleaming,
Wonder: "Why is life so sweet?"
And some tender voice shall whisper—
Flake-like falling from above:
"Christmas is so sweet, my darling,
Just because its king is Love!"

THE JOY OF MARGERETTA

A CHRISTMAS STORY.

NEARLY defined shadows were falling across the aisle of the old church on the hill, the gray, lonely building that had stood there so long, amid sunshine and shadow, watching, as it were, the peaceful village in the valley below.

Above it the pine trees, green even in winter, waved their long branches restlessly in the wind and flung their weird reflections over the snow, the white, soft snow, that covered all the hillside as with a mantle of palest velvet.

And the day was beginning to close in, to spread its gray wings over the dim sky and the snow-bound world, lightened only by the warm gleam that came from many a window in the village. The afternoons were short now, said the bustling frauchen to each other, as they went about their work; but, after all, was it not the eve of the Christmas feast, and what could one expect? So the cottages were warm and cozy, and the pine logs in the

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THE FAMILY GATHERING.

tiled stoves crackled and burned away merrily, and few were the footsteps that passed over the snow outside.

As the clock in the tower chimed four, old Johann Maria entered the dimness of the church upon the hill, where soft red lights shone like far-away stars before the altar. There were a few other dark figures already there, kneeling to whisper a prayer at an old oaken prie-dieu. But they looked up as the old man came forward, and gathered together more closely. He would say the evening litany, perhaps, and they would join in the solemnly sweet responses, breathing in each heart the names of their dearly loved ones, and committing them to heaven's safe keeping for the night.

And old Johann Maria, as they had expected, kneeling in the soft halo that the lights made, began the old, old words that they knew so well, and that they followed so earnestly, while the wind wailed outside over the snow on the steep white road. And Amalie and Dorehen and Aida, girls with fair tresses and eyes blue as the skies of the Fatherland in the sweet summer-time, listened and prayed in all the fervor of youth and hopefulness and joy. Was not to-morrow the feast of the Christ-child. And had not the scrosterian



already brought beautiful wreaths of berried holly and white-veined ivy-leaves to twine round the carved pulpit and the choir-stalls? Yes, it was a time of joy and gladness, this Christmas season, and they were very, very happy. Why not so? Every one was gay and glad at Christmas time, when there were kuchen in the cottages, and little fir trees laden with presents, and sugar angels to be bought at the shops or the market in the town yonder, to remind them of the great Christmas long ago, when the angels sang over the star-lit fields at Bethlehem.

And by and by, that same evening, there would be a great service, when the priest would pray and preach, and they would all listen, oh! so intently. But now there was only the quietness of the little church, with its scent of the freshly-cut boughs, and the quavering, monotonous voice of Johann Maria repeating the old litany, as he had repeated it so many times before in the same place and in the same accents.

There was another girl in the corner, kneeling at her prie-dieu, and whispering the words of the sweet old petitions with white lips and an aching heart. Christmas brought only sorrow for her, she said to herself. There was no gladness for her to expect, no loving voice to give her the Christmas greeting, no tender lips to press her own in that love sweeter than others, even at the season of universal love.

No, all was dark and dreary—dreary as the shadows that fell upon the white snow; and while the others rejoiced and looked forward to keeping the festival her heart was heavy and her thoughts roamed back, pitilessly, painfully, to a bygone day—a day that was marked with the shadow of death.

It was Christmas time again, and the priest had preached and prayed, and given the old beautiful benediction, that floated out like a message from Heaven over the kneeling people—over her lover and herself.

Ah! her lover! He had been kneeling by her side then, with the lights flashing on his soldier's coat and his brave, handsome face, and she had heard his voice throughout all the service, in ringing, clear tones that she knew and loved so well, so truly and passionately. And she had been so happy, so very very happy, although the thought of the morrow's parting had come even now and then to her heart, with the throbbing pain of some sorrowful dream. But he had begged her to forget—to forget all the pain of parting for that one day. "Let us be happy together, sweetheart," he had said, looking into her eyes with his own, ah! filled with so much love and tenderness.

And she had obeyed him, as she always would obey the voice that was more to her than life itself, and they had been happy—perfectly, passionately happy—in their great, unfathomable love.

"What is love?" he said to her, as they walked home in the evening, watching the star gleams, like points of diamonds, flash on the dark waters of the Neekar: "What is love?" he had asked, and she had looked up to the beautiful, grave face before she answered:

"Love is the most perfect and the holiest of friendships, my beloved. It means the merging of one's self into another's being, and the living for another. It is based on sympathy, deepest and truest, and its keynote is unselfishness. It is something that cannot die, for it belongs to God, and

is given by Him to us as the best gift from His Heaven. It is holy, eternal, ever-abiding, and it is ours, yours and mine—the most perfect union of hearts, my dearest one, in the tenderest, truest sympathy."

So she had spoken, as they went down the river-bordered road together, hand in hand, with the evening wind moaning among the pines, and the Christmas chimes ringing out from the tower in the distance. And he had stooped and kissed her, kissed her over and over again with burning kisses that lingered on her lips all through the long long afterwards, when they were parted by a darker tide than even the swiftly flowing Neekar.

That was her dream of Christmas—the trust under the wings of the unseeing night; the words that he had said to her over and over again, "I love you! I love you! I love you!"—words that she never, never tired of hearing, and that he never tired of saying; and afterwards the mirth and music of the family gathering in the warm homestead, where Johann Maria told wonderful stories, and Amalie and Dorehen sang tender love-lieder or wild ballads of the mountains.

And in the faint grayness of the morning, one scene more. The soldier in his travel-stained great coat, with tears in his blue eyes, and passionate pain drawing deep lines on his pale face, and his love bidding a last good-by, while the stars paled and the tardy daylight struggled into the cottage. And, with quivering lips, she had whispered of hope, of their next meeting, of the brave deeds that he was to do, of the patient waiting that would bring them such joy at last. And he knew that she was right, that his own heart told him the same story, while he kissed his dear, dear love over and over again, murmuring the "Auf wiedersehen" that he knew would bring her comfort. "My heart's beloved, God keep you," she said, brokenly, with her sweet arms, for the last time, clinging about his



THE LAST GOOD BY.

neck, and her head pillowed on his strong shoulder.

And then she had raised her lips to his for the last, long kiss, and it was over with her heart's story, told in that one "Auf wiedersehen."

Ah! the peasant's litany was over, and the women had gone out softly, while the ripple of the girls' voices sounded already some distance down the hill.

Johann Maria had followed them, and the scrosterian had brought in a great bunch of red holly-berries to decorate the altar.

And she must go, too, passing out into the night once more. They had left her to her own thoughts, those happy girls, and she was glad of it. She knew their sympathy and loved them for it, and they would be very

tender with her all through the feast, she felt.

Even now, perhaps, Amalie was saying, "Aah! the poor Margareta! Is it not two Christmas festivals since her lover died in the war?" And the others would look grave for a moment and sigh a soft "Yes." Ah, it was true. Two long, dim years had passed away since the skirmishes on the frontier land, where, amid the dry heather and the dead bracken, they had told her that her lover had died. But that was all. They knew not where his body had been rested; they knew not whether he had suffered agony or had parted with his brave soul in the heat of the battle. All was vague, uncertain; only her lover was gone from her—gone, gone, she knew not where.

As she went down the hill road on that Christmas Eve alone some one was waiting under the shadow of the bending pine trees. Some one came forward to meet her with a quick, glad cry of joy and heart's delight. Was it a dream as the thoughts in the church yonder had been—a dream of Christmas, and of her love, her own, her life's love, but lost to her—lost? Nay, for a voice spoke to her, and dreams have no voices, they are silent and sad; and this was a living, throbbing voice, full of passion and tenderness.

"Heart's beloved! Sweet one!" he was calling her—all the old dear names that she remembered so well; and his kisses were burning once again on her lips and brow, and his eyes were telling her all the love his loyal heart bore for her. He had come back to her, to his Margareta, back to his life's love, from the very gates of death!

And, clasped to his breast, in the hush of the evening, with her tired head resting on his heart, they heard



THE RETURN.

the bells ring out for the eve of the festival—the festival of Perfect Love.

By-and-by he told her the story of his wanderings, of his supposed death, of his captivity and escape, and she listened, with her hands still locked in his and with her glad eyes fastened on his face.

And at the service time they returned thanks in the brightly lighted church on the hill, gay with holly and evergreen and the morrow's high holy day. And when the music ceased and the others went softly away, together they still knelt on, while each loving heart breathed its tender petition and whispered its thanks for the others' happiness. For the "Auf wiedersehen" had been spoken in truth, and they shall keep Christmas together.—The Lady.

Christmas of Childhood Days.

"My first thought of Christmas," says Lillie Devereux Blake, "is of the great playroom at my grandmother's, where we children gathered for our evening frolics; of the fun we had in the warmth and light, while sleek struck its icy fingers across the windows or the hoar frost covered the glass with fantastic lines of beauty; of the faces of those gathered there, so young then, that are growing old now or have faded from this world forever. Then there comes a wider vision of the Christmas of the world, of the joy bells ringing in many lands for the feast of love and good will, of the hearts made happy by the gifts, the kindnesses, the good cheer that brings light to the humblest home, so that there is hardly any being so forlorn that some ray of brightness does not reach him. Then yet again, and deeper, is the reflection of what the festival means. It is the celebration of the eternal miracle of maternity, the wonder of birth into the activities of this world, that has been in all ages and by all peoples observed at some period as an occasion for gladness; the welcome those already here give the new born soul to the brief, passionate years of human happiness and human despair that we call life."

Mother Gets Her Instructions.

If you're waking, call me early,
Call me early, mother dear,
For long before 'tis daylight
In my stocking I would peer.
If you're waking, call me early,
House me up at four o'clock;
For I want to see what Santa Claus
Has put into my sock.

DECORATING THE TREE.

How to Make a Pretty Effect in the Glowing Light.

The first step in the work of trimming the Christmas tree is to tack a square of crash to the floor under the tree. This saves the carpet from the drippings of numerous candles and the general debris which the dismantling of the tree invariably occasions.

The green tub, in which the tree should stand, supported by three cross pieces of pine nailed to the edge to hold it securely in place, is almost sure to be in the housewife's possession. Conceal this by a covering of white cotton batting, dusted thickly with coarsely powdered mica to resemble snow, says the Philadelphia Press. Or cover it with imitation green moss, which can be obtained at the shops at a trifling cost. The latter is really the better plan. It is simpler, cleaner and more effective.

The newest conceits for tree decorations are artificial fruits and vegetables, which are cunningly devised. Tied to the tree with bright ribbons, they form a pleasing contrast to the green foliage. Fairies, dressed in wonderful gowns of bright colored paper, looped with narrow bebbie ribbon are bought at a low figure. Santa Claus, who should, without fail, crown the top, is not an expensive addition.

In lighting the tree, modern science comes strongly to the fore. If there are electric lights in the house, an attachment is easily made, whereby the tree can be lighted with tiny incandescent bulbs of different colors. In case the house is without electric lights, a storage battery may be obtained at moderate cost. From this the same results are secured. This modern style of illumination removes the old-time danger of the tree catching fire from its lights, but it is also open to the objection of dispelling the romantic glow which came from innumerable candles. So the great majority of people still prefer the candles, which seem to be a part of the Yuletide.

For convenience in distributing the gifts, it is a good plan to place on each gift a number, while the mistress of the ceremonies keeps a written list of each member of the household, with their corresponding check. The distribution is usually made by the child or children for whose enjoyment the tree is arranged.

The Joys of Christmas.

One of the most blessed things about Christmas is that it makes so many people feel young, writes Edward W. Bok, in Ladies' Home Journal. It is the one season of the year when everybody feels that they can dismiss abstract thoughts, put dignity aside, forget the worries of the world, and for a time return to their youth. It always seems a pity that men try to conceal this feeling so often at Christmas. Only a few men are capable of being gracefully caught in the act of making a miniature train of cars go over the carpet. Catch them at it a night or two before Christmas, and nine out of every ten will instantly get up from the carpet, brush the dust from the knees of their trousers—for dust will get on the carpets of the best regulated homes—and immediately begin to apologize. I have often wondered why men resent being caught in this way. But a woman feels differently, and it is a blessed thing that she does.

Superstitions of Christmas.

The superstitions of Christmas are more numerous even than the observances which owe their origin to heathenish rites. Among certain European peasants the belief still prevails that on Christmas morning oxen always spend a portion of the time on their knees. This they do, according to the peasants, in imitation of the ox and the ass which, a legend states, were present at the manger and knelt when Christ was born.

In certain counties of England the idea prevails that sheep walk in procession on Christmas Eve, in commemoration of the glad tidings first announced to shepherds. Bees are also said to sing in their hives on the night before Christmas, and bread baked at that time never becomes mouldy—at least so once thought many English housewives.

The Epicure's Bird.

The eagle has the laugh on the turkey at Christmas time.—Philadelphia Record.

"Sometimes," said Uncle Eben, "de houses dat has de biggest fam'lies an' de littlest tubkey seems ter hab de mos' Christmas in 'em."—Washington Star.

The Goose—"What's the difference between the Easter gift and the Christmas turkey?" The Turkey—"I dunno." The Goose—"Why, one is dressed to kill and the other is killed to dress."—Truth.