

The Unposted Christmas Letter

Jocile Webb Pearson

THE gray day was waiting into a gray night. A white mist obscured the pine covered hills and spread itself over the valley like a vast curtain shutting out familiar objects. The shriek of a locomotive sounded ghostly and unreal, as its glaring headlights penetrated the darkness for a moment and disappeared. The doorway of the little railway station was outlined in a blaze of light as the attendant entered.

Despite the chilling blanket of mist a campfire a few hundred yards down the track crackled and glowed cheerily, bringing into sharp relief the figures of a man and boy. The latter, seated on a log, gazed moodily into the fire as the pine boughs rapidly consumed. His headless face and the healthy tan of the open road, his clothing showed its neglect. The heavy shoes, soggy with the moist earth, steamed as the heat waves beat upon them, but he was unmindful of any discomfort.

The man was grizzled and weather stained, a typical person of the out-of-doors life. For the moment he was intent on arranging slices of bacon on a flattened piece of tin, later to be slid over the red coals where a can



A Campfire Brought Into Sharp Relief the Figures of a Man and Boy.

of bubbling coffee already sent out an appetizing odor. He worked deftly, as one long used to this method of preparing meals. Occasionally he cast anxious looks at the boy, as he turned the sizzling bacon and sandwiched it between thick slices of bread. With steady hand he poured the steaming coffee into separate cans, then called to the boy:

"Sit up, Jimmy! Ye must be starved after the day's tramp. Walkin' the rails is hard work, but we're not ones for stealin' rides, we pay like gentlemen or walk, eh, lad?"

The boy started from his reverie. "Hitch hiking beats walking for rapid transit if you're in a hurry, Tim," Jimmy grinned. "Gee, that bacon smells great. I'm as hungry as a camp robber."

They ate in silence, each busy with his own thoughts. When the meal was finished, the man produced a short-stemmed pipe from an inner pocket of his heavy workman's coat, filled it, crowding the tobacco in with his thumb; then stooping he scooped a live coal from the fire and puffed a moment in quiet satisfaction, watching the boy from under his shaggy eyebrows as he added fresh logs to the dwindling blaze.

The boy, with hands thrust deep in his pockets, continued to move restlessly about. "Gee, Tim, this weather is getting on my nerves. We've had days of it, I'm beginning to want to see the sun again."

The old man laid aside his pipe. "Now, lad, suppose ye tell Tim all about it. What's botherin' ye—I've missed that whistle of yourn. What's on yer mind?"

Jimmy resumed his seat on the log. "Oh, nothing much, Tim. I guess I'm sort of cuckoo tonight, just thinking—oh, shucks! It's nothing, anyway."

"Go on, lad, I'm listenin'."

A slow color mounted to the boy's face. "It's thinkin' of Christmas, Tim. It's only three days off, and—and I've never been away before. It doesn't matter, forget it." He hastily threw a pine bough into the fire.

"Three days, ye say, lad? An' me forgettin' it. Now, where'd ye say ye come from?"

"Iowa, Tim."

"Now, do tell, I been in Iowa meself, lad, but it's a long time ago—a long time. Ye're from a farm, mebbe?"

"No, Dad's no farmer. He's a carpenter, and got along fine till hard times struck—you know how things went."

"Sure I do," Tim supplemented. "An' there wasn't much work."

"That's right, Tim, and I wasn't keen on school. I wrote a note telling Mom and Dad not to worry about me—they have three more to look out for—and I hit the trail for the great Northwest."

Tim gave him a reassuring pat. "I see, lad. An' ye're fed up on an sort of disappointed on home sick?"

"I guess that's right, Tim. But, gosh, it was thinkin' of Christmas that got under my skin. They'll all be there but me. Nobody to get the tree—that

was my job. We always had one, even in the hardest times. Mom's a corker to manage. Doesn't Christmas get you, too, Tim? Haven't you folks some where you'd like to see?"

"Mebbe, lad, an' mebbe I'd be glad to see them, than they me. Now this town, 'Podunk,' did you say it was?"

"No, it's Mobray, and the dullest town—not so hot for size, but it has about everything a fellow needs there, and the best grid team in the county. Gee, Tim, you ought to see them hustles go after that ball and smash the fire—and the crowd roaring like mad, rooting for their teams. The eager look faded—he rose abruptly.

"Guess I'll be turning in. See you later."

"Sure, lad," Tim ignored the break in the conversation. "Better bank them pine boughs under that shed over there. This drizzle will likely be snow by mornin'. I've an errand of me own to do, but I'll be back in no time. Git yer rest whilst ye kin."

An hour later the boy was awakened by a hand on his shoulder, and Tim's voice calling: "Wake up, Jimmy, I want to talk to ye."

Jimmy sat up, rubbing his eyes. "Okay, Tim, what's on your mind? Shoot."

Tim fumbled in his pocket and produced a bit of paper. "First I want to say Merry Christmas from Timothy Ryan to Mr. James Madden of Mobray, Iowa. Here it is—a ticket to ye're old home town. An' the fast train will pick ye up in exactly forty minutes. We got to get goin', lad."

"But Tim," Jimmy blinked the last bit of sleep from his eyes. He turned the paper over and over until he was convinced it was genuine. "I don't understand, Tim. How did you get this and where?"

Tim laughed merrily. "One at a time, lad. First, I got it over you at the little railway station where they sell tickets. Second, I paid for it with money, earned money I laid by when work was good."

"That's fine of you, Tim, but I can't take your money. You need it for yourself."

"Sure ye kin, lad, an' there's enough left for me—an' yer welcome to it. Ye see, Jimmy, I sort of ink to ye the day we walked into the loggin' camp. Just as they were closin' down for the winter an' we ink the trail together. An' when ye talked of Christmas, an' shucks, ye set me thinkin'. The gift is not for you alone, but for yer folks who miss ye more than ye know. Old Tim's made many a mistake, I say to myself, but this ain't one, an' mebbe it will help square some of the others."

He laid a grained hand on the boy's shoulder. "There's only one thing I'm askin', lad, an' that is: ye'll stay off the road. It's not for the likes of ye. Go home an' finish yer schoolin'."

"You're right, Tim," Jimmy replied soberly. "I've come to realize that. You've helped me to see things differently, Tim. I've got a dandy idea." His face glowed with eagerness. "Go home with me, Mom and Dad would make you welcome; and you say you have money." But the old man shook his head. "No, no, lad, I kin on the road too long. I know yer folks wud be grand to me; much obliged to ye fer thinkin' of it—I'll be gettin' along where there's housin' quarters, an' mebbe a bit of work."

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The eastbound train came to a stop. As the slender youth was climbing aboard, with a last handshake, old Tim pressed a crumpled bill into his hand. "Ye must eat, lad, an' don't lose yer ticket. Don't forget ye're ridin' like a gentleman." The old man laughed, but there was an undertone of wistfulness.

Jimmy took the money. "I hadn't thought of eatin', Tim. It is just that I'm going home. Home, Tim, and I owe it to you. I'll pay it back some day."



Tim Fumbled in His Pocket and Produced a Bit of Paper.

day—I'll tell Mom and Dad what a good pal you've been—and you promised to write. I'll be thinking of you Christmas."

"Thankee, lad, thankee. Tell yer folks howdy, an' Merry Christmas fer me."

The train roared away in the white fog. Old Tim watched till the red light disappeared and the rumble grew faint in the distance. He rubbed a moist hand across his brow. "An' he called me pal. 'Tis a fine lad he is, an' I'll be missin' him. Three days to Christmas; he'll make it." By the dim light from the station window, he pulled a worn purse from his pocket and emptied the few remaining coins into his hand. He shook his head slowly. Reaching into an inner pocket he drew forth a letter addressed to a small town in Iowa; slowly he read:

"Dear Tom: I been hankerin' to see ye an' the old home agin. I'll be comin' fer Christmas. Yer brother Tim."

He tore the letter into bits. "He's worth it," he said. "The lad will be home fer Christmas."

Old Tim smiled happily as he trudged back to camp.

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GUN COLLECTS SEA BOTTOM SEDIMENT MORE THAN MILE BELOW SURFACE

Washington. A new gun brings back from the ocean depths a record of the earth of millions of years ago was exhibited yesterday by the Carnegie Institution of Washington.

Known as a "core sampler," it provides scientists with a tool for studying sediments on ocean bottoms, which occupy nearly three quarters of the earth's surface. These sediments are known to be different from those found on dry land, being particularly high in radium content.

The gun consists essentially of a heavy steel weight which also serves as a breech. From this a 10-foot long tube is fired into the ocean bottom when the instruments reaches it. The tube is fitted with a hard steel bit and contains a sampler tube which

gathers and retains the sediment.

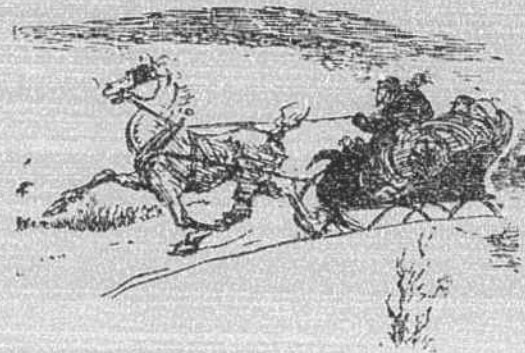
When the weight strikes the bottom after being lowered from a ship at the end of a long cable the shock sets off a charge of high-explosive powder in the same manner that a rifle is fired. The explosion drives the bit directly downward, the depth it reaches depending on the amount of powder used and the depth of the water. When necessary the bit can be driven through solid stone.

Used experimentally last summer from the ship Atlantic of the Woods Hole Oceanographic Institution, the device successfully brought back samples from depths up to more than one and one-third miles. Carnegie Institution scientists believe it can be used even at depths of six miles.

One sample of the ocean bottom 250 miles off the New Jersey coast and 7200 feet below the surface showed the area was once a section of the eastern coast line beach. This beach is now covered to a depth of several feet by typical ocean sediment, a

probable accumulation of millions of years.

The pioneer spirit is not yet dead in New England. Sixty-five co-eds are out for the rifle team at the University of Vermont.



JINGLE BELLS, JINGLE BELLS

May we wish you a real old-fashioned Merry Christmas with all the trimmin's and may it be just one of many more to come.

New River Light & Power Co.



It's a cheery thought and a sincere wish, and at the same time let us thank you for your patronage during the past year

MULLINS & CLAY
Your Independent Grocers

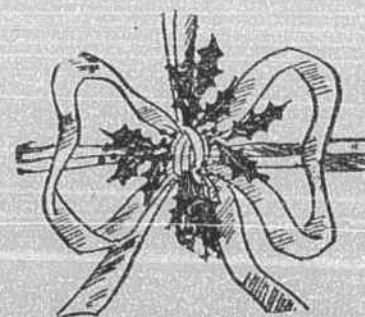


It's The Same The World Around

But nowhere in the world is it meant more sincerely than it is here.

Please accept our wishes for The Merriest Christmas that you have ever spent.

CITY MEAT MARKET



WHILE WE'RE ON THE SUBJECT

We just wanted to express to you our most sincere appreciation for your good will and patronage, and to wish for you an old-time MERRY CHRISTMAS

Boone Drug Company
The REXALL STORE

The Season's
BEST
to You

In this season of seasons, when joy prevails throughout, may we add our best wishes to the many others for a Merry Christmas

REINS-STURDIVANT
The Funeral Home

Announcement

We are mighty glad to announce to the members of our association that, with the amount of money in your treasury, the amount due from a small number of delinquent members and the membership fees coming in, that we do not find it necessary to make another call on you until the beginning of the April quarter, due and payable April 1st, 1936. If you have a friend you think should have this protection for their family we might say that their membership fee will pay them up to April 1st, 1936, or almost four months' protection for the membership fee alone.

Your Association has grown to more than 14,000 strong, and our goal is 15,000 members in good standing by January 1st, 1936. Can we count on each and every member to make this our dream come true, and to help give protection to the families of those of your friends that you know need it?

Yours for a bigger and better Association,

MADGE L. STURDIVANT, Secretary

Reins-Sturdivant Burial Association