

The Unposted Christmas Letter

THE gray day was settling in to a frigid night. A white mist obscured the pine covered hills and spread itself over the valley like a vast curtain shutting out familiar objects.

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.

A Campfire Brought into Sharp Relief the Figures of a Man and a Boy, not ones for stealing rides, we pay like gentlemen or walk, eh, lad?

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 woodsman 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.

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 thinking 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 wherd' ye say ye come from?" "Iowa, Tim."

"Now, do tell, I been in Iowa myself, 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."

"Here I do," Tim supplemented. "There wasn't much work."

"That's right, Tim, and I wasn't keen on school. I wrote a note tellin' 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."

It was about everything a fellow could think of, and the boy gazed down at the letter. Gee, Tim, you ought to see them bushes go after that ball and smash the line—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 while 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 Moberly, Iowa. Here it is—a ticket to yer 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—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 fer 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 fer me—an' yer welcome to it. Ye see, Jimmy, I sort of tuk to ye the day ye walked inter the loggin' camp jest as they were closin' down fer the winter an' we tuk the trail together. An' when ye talked of Christmas, an' sich, ye set me thinkin'.

He laid a gnarled hand on the boy's shoulder. "There's only one thing I'm askin', lad, an' that is: ye'll stay of 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 bin 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."

The eastbound train came to a stop. As the slender youth was climbing aboard, with a last hand clasp, old Tim pressed a crumpled bill into his hand. "Ye must eat, lad, an' don't lose yer ticket. Don't ferget yer 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."

Tim fumbled in his pocket and produced a bit of paper. and I owe it to you. I'll pay it back some 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."

Confidential



The Christmas Dinner

By Alice B. Palmer

IT WAS Christmas day! Ice coated—snow coated—crisp and delightful! Great preparations for the holiday feast were in progress in the old homestead at the far end of Jay street.

There were just seven of them in the little family—father, mother and children. They were all busy in the happy holiday task of helping mother. The turkey was spitting.

Granny Hitchcock, over on the corner, was the first always on her Christmas list. "My Christmas gift to you this year is my promise to come to read to you once every week in the new year and I'll write our letters, too, on that same day each week."

"Dear Mrs. Simmons: My Christmas gift to you this year is my promise to stay with and keep Buddy after school, one day each month—the day the Mothers' club meets—from 4:30 to 6:00. You won't."

Lucia Bell, a new resident several doors down the same street, was sitting alone dreamily gazing out upon the Christmas ice castles.

"Won't you be one of us," said mother sweetly, "and cut the Christmas pie?"

Lucia Bell was thrilled and before anyone knew it she had them trimly cut and ready to serve.

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

"Promise" Presents

"NOT a cent to spare for gifts this year, Clare dear, I'm sorry," Mrs. Jordan told her daughter shortly before Christmas.

"No gifts, and yet there was money for greeting cards. Well, why not spring a surprise on all of them? Yes, that would work and it would be a grand surprise and yet heaps of fun, too."

"No, I don't want any greeting cards, mother, but if you'll just get me a dozen stamped envelopes instead, I'll be all set for Christmas."

"Well, I must say you take this like a good sport and you are easy to please, but you might let me in on this secret, child!"

"Nope, it wouldn't be a secret then," she sent back, smiling with her knowledge.

"Dear Mrs. Simmons: My Christmas gift to you this year is my promise to stay with and keep Buddy after school, one day each month—the day the Mothers' club meets—from 4:30 to 6:00. You won't."

"Nops, it wouldn't be secret then," she sent back. have to hire any one on those occasions."

There was a promise to Miss Hillman that Clare and some of her classmates would come down and recite their pieces and sing some of their songs.

"Other folks will be thanked just once during the year, but I'll be seeing folks smile and hear them saying 'thanks,' and know they really mean it, the whole year long. Money presents cheat the rivers out of a lot of fun, that's sure," she reminded.



AS ROSS HUTTON finished telling his little daughter the story of Christmas, of the shepherds and the Christ child, and had as tactfully as possible explained about Santa Claus, Polly heaved a sigh.

The day before Christmas, Ross saw a white woolly lamb in the window of a toy shop. He was glad he had walked to his office. Otherwise he might not have seen the lamb. He would stop on his way home and get it.

When he parked his car before the shop, he thought that the lamb might not be there struck him for the first time. He felt much relieved, therefore, when he saw the lamb in the window.

As he tucked the package under his arm and turned to leave the shop, a little boy came in. Ross heard him ask the proprietor if he still had the lamb that was in the window that morning.



Santa Claus Had Brought Her a Sheep and a Baby Doll.

tened on the place where the lamb had been. He seemed so disappointed, it was too bad there wasn't another lamb for him. Ross thought as he drove away.

But try as he would he couldn't get the picture of the little fellow out of his mind. Halfway home he turned his car around and went back to the shop.

The next morning he was awakened by Polly's happy cry that she knew there was a "Santa Claus" because he had brought her a "sheep" and a baby doll just as she asked him to.

"Where?" Ross asked, pointing to the lamb. Anne whispered that she had bought it.

"There is a Santa Claus, isn't there, Daddy?" Polly's voice implied she was giving information rather than asking it.

"Where?" Ross asked, pointing to the lamb. Anne whispered that she had bought it.

At Christmas in St. Croix, Virgin Islands, the youngsters hang up pillowcases instead of stockings.

A Dressy Frock Fitting Budget



"As easy as pie" to fit between two graceful raglan sleeves, a wedge-shaped yoke is a distinguishing feature of this rather dressy, yet inexpensive afternoon frock.

Pattern 9545 may be ordered only in sizes 14, 16, 18, 20, 22, 24, 26, 28, 30, 32, 34, 36, 38, 40 and 42. Size 16 requires 3 1/2 yards 39 inch fabric and 3/4 yard contrasting. Complete diagrammed sew chart included.

Send your order to The Sewing Circle Pattern Dept., 232 West Eighteenth St., New York, N. Y.

"Ain't" Is Vulgar, Yet We Shy at "Am I Not?"

A teacher of English has pointed out a curious effect of the constant stressing of the vulgarity of the use of the word "ain't" in conversation.

It is strange that people should shy at the little expression, "Am I not," Americans just do not care for those three little words.

Or Counterfeiting Some people make money even when times are hard. That's talent.

PANAMA CANAL NOT JUST MERE DITCH: A SECOND-STORY LAKE

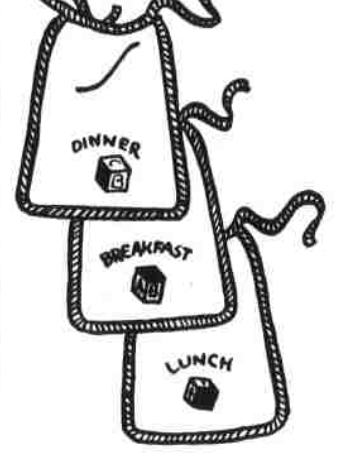
The Panama canal is of tremendous importance, for it makes it possible for us to have one navy instead of two. The excellent way in which the locks are handled lets us move the whole of our fleet from the Atlantic into the Pacific, or vice versa, in a day and a half.

It is not (as so many people still seem to believe) a big ditch dug across the narrow strip of mountainous land that connects North and South America. It is really a second-story lake that carries the ships from one ocean to the next by way of the attic.

A canal like that depends for its efficiency upon its locks. Once one of the locks has been destroyed or even seriously damaged, the canal is as helpless as an automobile without gasoline.

Simple Set of Bibs For the Little One

Plenty of bibs must always be handy for the little one and a mother is always ready to make up a few more if they cost as little as these do and also require a little handwork.



Send FIFTEEN CENTS in coins or stamps (coins preferred) for this pattern. Be sure to write plainly your NAME, ADDRESS, STYLE NUMBER and SIZE.

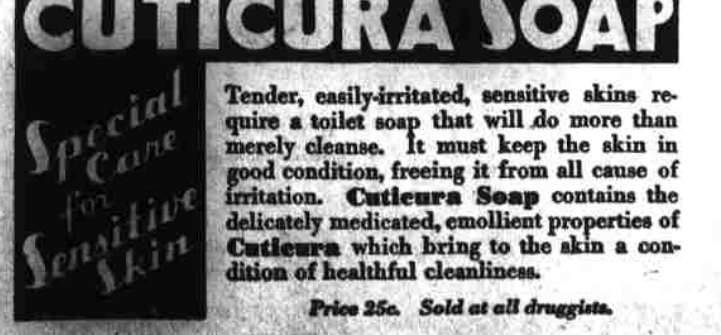
Address Home Craft Co., Dept. A, Nineteenth and St. Louis Ave., St. Louis, Mo. Inclose a stamped addressed envelope for reply when writing for any information.

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