



By Edward L. Van Dyke

"I'LL NEVER FORGET, I guess, the December night when our American Legion post meeting was interrupted by a knock on the door."

Carl Engler, our third vice commander, was nearest the door. He glanced at the commander, then left the room. Out in the hall we could hear a high pitched voice saying something about "mama and daddy." Soon Engler returned, looking puzzled.

"Mister Commander," he said, "there's a boy outside who says he'd like to speak to the post. Says his name is David Cary and that what he has to say is mighty important."

Harry Brooks, our commander, a balding veteran of both world wars, arose.

"Comrades," says he, "I've an idea this lad is the son of Wilson Cary, up on Hollister Hill. Wilson's a veteran who's always knocking the Legion—never would join the post. Let's listen to what his boy has to say."

Young David that night really stirred us. It was just four days before Christmas; not too many members were present and all were anxious to get home. They really perked up, though.



With a gasp he raised himself on one elbow and shook his fist.

When that boy stood gravely before us men and spoke his piece.

When the lad had left, gravely snuffing the flag, just as he had seen Engler do, the commander turned to me.

"Comrade Butler," he said, "I appoint you chairman of a committee of six to look into this. Will someone make a motion that the committee be allowed to use up to fifty dollars, if it finds it proper in this case?"

The motion was duly made and passed without a dissenting voice.

As I sat up there, of the going that Saturday night—Christmas Eve, Harry wasn't much more, but the leader was lively, right and I made rather good time on this my second try up the hill.

The Cary house was a neatly kept place, just off the hillside road. When I looked at the door, Harry Cary lay on the floor dead and the woman.

"Oh, Mr. Butler," she said, her face brightening, "I'm glad you came. She looked at her watch. "Bill is pretty unhappy and I hope you know why. Walk right in."

WILSON CARY'S expression was that of a mixture of pain and bitterness. He didn't even look at his hand.

"Now don't wish me a Merry Christmas," he said, sadly. "We men can't be happy who have a broken boy if he's broken on Christmas Eve—and had a nice wife and kid on his mind."

I had thinking that, too. "What's David?" I asked.

"He's asleep," said Cary. "The Legionnaire who gave constitutional provisions of sleeping pills and pills with an extra, by mistake. Please, please, but please don't help me lift and lift. I'm sorry—glad you came, but I think you'd better go."

That same the knock on the door—the sound I had been waiting for. You should have seen me. I was when the gang clumped in. There was Engler, carrying a white package, and almost staggered over the blue box came McCarty, Leggett, Bill, Tom and the others. All these boys had, no, the boys had, had slipped in here of their own volition.

When Cary started in amazement when we moved in. The packages, save those containing food, we piled near the foot of the bed.

"Bill," I said, "Carl Field just learned the other day about your being laid up. The boys just want you to know you're not forgotten."

Cary's lips were trembling. "How did you know about it?" he demanded. When I didn't answer, he spoke again.

"Why are you doing this—I'm not a post member, you know."

"Bill," I said, "you mentioned the Legion previously a month ago. Maybe you don't know, but it winds up with these words—'and finally our membership by our devotion to mutual helpfulness.'"

My committee members were grinning broadly. But Cary wasn't. He was staring like a kid.

"Come," I said to my gang. "Let's get the knock out of here."



YES, VIRGINIA

"Yes, indeed!

"Virginia, your little friends are wrong. They have been affected by the skepticism of a skeptical age—they do not believe except what they see—they think that nothing can be which is not comprehensible by their little minds.



"All minds, Virginia, whether they be men's or children's, are little.

"In this great universe of ours, man is a mere insect, an ant, in his intellect as compared with the boundless world about him, as measured by the intelligence capable of grasping the whole of truth and knowledge.

"Yes, Virginia, there is a Santa Claus.

"He exists as certainly as love and generosity and devotion exist, and you know that they abound and give to your life its highest beauty and joy. Alas! how dreary would be the world if there were no Santa Claus! It would be as dreary as if there were no Virginias. There would be no childlike faith then, no poetry, no romance to make tolerable this existence. We should have no enjoyment, except in sense and sight. The eternal light with which childhood fills the world would be extinguished.

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It was only September, and 1897's Christmas was three months in the future. But Virginia O'Hanlon's concern was with an important problem that, to her, knew no season. That was why she wrote her letter to the New York Sun. The answer to Virginia's question, written in a moment of deep spiritual insight by Francis B. Church, stands even today as a testament expressing two thousand years of faith. It has been reprinted here because it always will deserve to be read again.

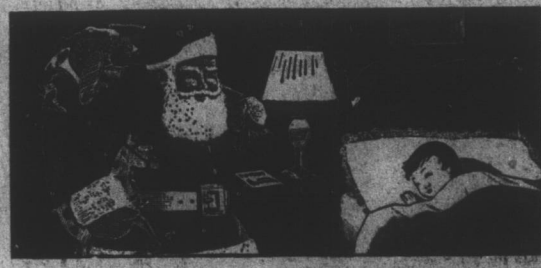
"Not believe in Santa Claus! You might as well not believe in fairies!"
"You might get your papa to hire men to watch in all the chimneys on Christmas Eve to



catch Santa Claus, but even if they did not see Santa Claus coming down, what would that prove? Nobody sees Santa Claus, but that is no sign that there is no Santa Claus—the most real things in the world are those neither children nor men can see.

"Did you ever see fairies dancing on the lawn? Of course not, but that's no proof that they are not there—nobody can conceive or imagine all the wonders that are unseen and unseeable in the world.

"You tear apart the baby's rattle and see what makes the noise inside, but there is a veil covering the unseen world which not the strongest man, or even the united strength of all the strongest men, that ever lived, could tear apart. Only faith, fancy, poetry, love, romance, can push aside the curtain and view and picture the supernal beauty and glory beyond.



"Is it all real?—ah, Virginia, in all this world there is nothing else real and abiding.

"No Santa Claus! Thank God!—he lives, and he lives forever—a thousand years from now, Virginia, nay, ten thousand years from now, he will continue to make glad the heart of childhood."

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