

Children and Old-Fashioned Toys



"CHILDREN are conservative beings, even old-fashioned, when it comes to choosing toys. They aren't up to date and as full of the modern spirit of progress and invention as the toymakers believe them to be."

Thus spoke one who is a sort of professional Santa Claus—that is, he has played the part at so many Sunday school Christmas parties that he sometimes imagines he is growing cotton whiskers.

"They display the same quaint, simple, old-fashioned taste as their grandfathers and grandmothers when they were children," he continued. "Most of them, do, anyhow. Every year the toy manufacturers break loose with a new crop of automatic racing cars, aeroplanes, submarines, fire engines and kicking donkeys. If the children were constructed on the same nervous clock-work plan, they would give old Santa Claus no rest unless he kept up with all the modern inventions. Instead of toy soldiers they would demand mortar batteries, and they would not be satisfied with mooley cows, but would demand that they have pedigree and give only certified milk and cream."

"They would not accept a Noah's ark unless it was a combination of the steamship Lusitania and a modern cement bungalow, with sleeping porches, twin-screw propellers, electric searchlights, wireless apparatus, second chattel mortgage—in fact, all the comforts of ship and home complete. They would require Mr. Noah to carry a pilot's license as well as a college degree in natural history. All the animals would have to be trained to do tricks, and poor Noah's family would have a fine time herding them while wearing wooden raincoats and stove-pipe hats."

"Fortunately children, real children, are not constructed that way. They want their arks on the old-fashioned plan, whereby you lift off the roof and find Noah minus his head, and most of the animals trying to hobble on three legs."

"Automobiles in miniature, with real

upholstered seats and rubber tires may fascinate a small boy for a few hours, but you'd better place your faith in a good, old-fashioned rocking horse, with saddle and stirrups, and a mane and tail of real hair. The rocking horse is not going out of fashion by a long way, and I predict that in the horseless age, if that time ever comes, our children's children will be jerking the mane of a wooden 'horsey' and whipping him on his painted flanks, and trying to feed him crackers. Also, they'll be falling off his back and bumping their little foreheads in the old-fashioned way, and 'horsey' will have to be thrashed and locked up in the clothes closet for his bad behavior.

"And as for dolls, you've got to give them real 'baby dolls' and not grand lasses in the latest tango gowns and hats. For the last 50 years or so dotting parents who are well to do have been trying the experiment of presenting their little girls with waxen fashion models—only to find the precious one crying for the rag baby of the laundress' daughter. Children show the real mother instinct when they spurn the 'play-child' which is too dressy and up to date."

"I have one friend, the father of a large and lively family. I make him happy every Christmas time by presenting his kids with a bunch of cheap, mechanical toys. After about half an hour of winding them up, the little ones tire of the clicking wonders and return to their woolly dogs, rubber dolls and other simple favorites. That is when father's fun begins. He insists on winding up the toys and running them all Christmas day, ostensibly for the pleasure of his youngsters. He does not cease winding until the toys begin to get out of order, and then he has the additional pleasure of trying to repair them."

Sometimes I think that a manufacturer could make a fortune selling toys just for grown-ups. Seeing a bunch of adults busy working mechanical toys reminds me of the time when the whole family insists on taking little Johnny to the circus.

A Christmas Carol

by HENRY WADSWORTH LONGFELLOW

I HEAR along our street
Pass the minstrel throng;
Hark! They play so sweet,
On their hautboys, Christmas songs!
Let us by the fire
Ever higher
Sing them till the night expires!

IN December ring
Every day the chimes;
Loud the gleemen sing
In the streets their merry rhymes.
Let us by the fire
Ever higher
Sing them till the night expires!

SHEPHERDS at the grange,
Where the Babe was born,
Sing with many a change
Christmas carols until morn.
Let us by the fire
Ever higher
Sing them till the night expires!

THESE good people sang
Songs devout and sweet;
While the rosters rang,
There they stood with freezing feet.
Let us by the fire
Ever higher
Sing them till the night expires!

NUNS in frigid cells
At this holy tide,
For want of something else,
Christmas songs at times have tried.
Let us by the fire
Ever higher
Sing them till the night expires!

WHO by the fireside stands,
Stamps his feet and sings;
But his hands who blows his hands
Not to get a carol brings.
Let us by the fire
Ever higher
Sing them till the night expires!

HANGING MISTLETOE

Origin of Custom Associated With Christmas Festivities.

Plant is Surrounded With Many Superstitions in European Countries—Sign of Ill Omen in Some Parts of Ireland.

THE good old custom of hanging mistletoe from the ceiling at the Christmas festivities is said to have its origin in the idea that since the plant did not have its roots in the ground no part of it should ever be permitted to touch the earth.

Among the Saxons the fact that mistletoe was suspended from the roof of a dwelling intimated to the wayfarer that the hospitality of the house was at his disposal, and beneath its branches friend and stranger, vassal and lord, gathered in comradeship and good cheer.

The religious aspect of the mistletoe tradition, which had its origin in the Druidical rites and the gathering of it by the archdruid with his golden sickle, merged later into a purely social symbol, and the idea of simple hospitality developed into one of merrymaking and a somewhat riotous entertainment.

The kiss of the Scandinavian goddess expanded into the custom of a kiss given for every berry that grew on the bough. Small wonder that, in spite of the mistletoe having originally existed in the odor of the sanctuary, the church came to regard it as an entirely pagan symbol and refused to allow it to participate with the lily and the evergreen in the Yuletide decorations.

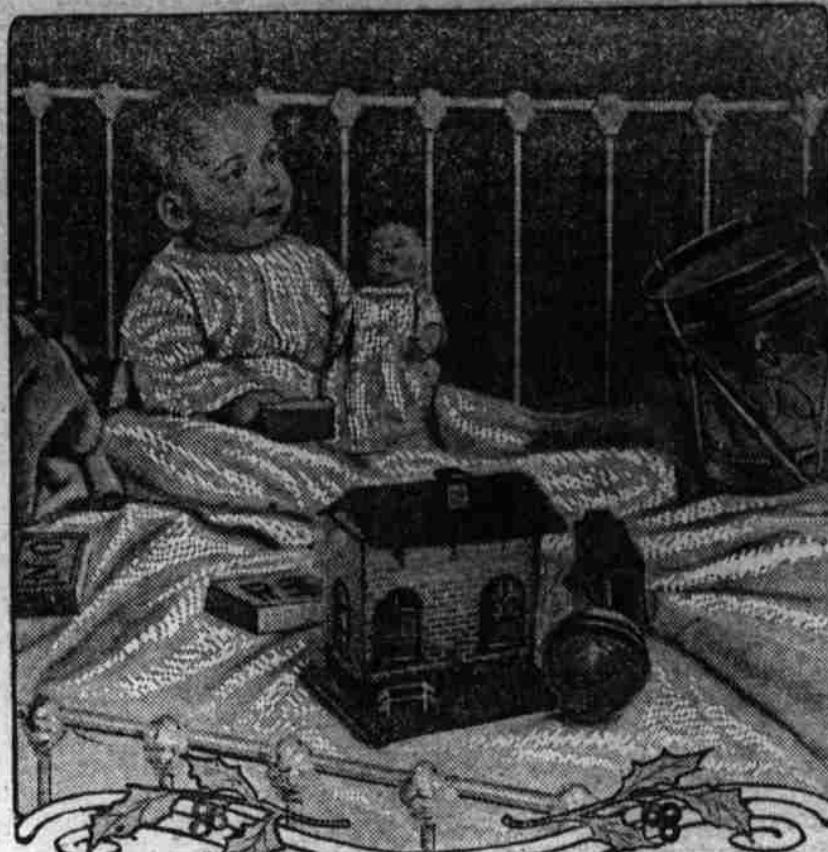
There is an ancient belief that the mistletoe was the tree from which the holy cross was hewn and that after this was made the plant withered and ever afterward became a mere parasitic growth, clinging for support to other and sturdier trees.

Other stories, however, credit it with divine gifts in the healing of diseases and the expulsion of evil spirits. Ram, the high priest of the Celts, received in a dream the intimation that by means of the plant he would be enabled to save his people from the plague which was decimating them. To celebrate their deliverance he instituted the feast of Noel (new health), a midwinter holiday, which has come to be considered coincident with the new year.

In many parts of the United Kingdom the silver berries and the gray-green leaves of the mistletoe are looked upon as anything but an emblem of good cheer; on the contrary, the plant is regarded with dread as being the bringer of ill luck and the sign of ill omen. This superstition exists both in Devonshire and in Ireland, and, strange to say, in neither of these places does the plant flourish, owing, report has it, to the fact that both incurred the displeasure of the Druids and were in consequence cursed in such a way that their soil became incapable of nourishing the sacred growth.

In the sixth book of Aeneid a lengthy description of the mistletoe is given by Virgil, who makes the Sybil describe to his hero the exact spot in hades where he will find it growing. There is little doubt that the strange ethereal appearance of the little opaque berry is largely responsible for the mystic character it has enjoyed among the people of other nations from the earliest historical times.

A Nautical Christmas Tale



A ship came in from the Land of Nod,
Its deck was white as snow,
It bore no tow'ring masts above,
No anchor chains below,
Its small, spring-bottomed mattress-hull
Was laden high with wealth,
Which strangely had been placed aboard
En voyage—hisi!—by stealth.

The skipper of this freighted craft
Was quite a careless sort,
The cargo he did not espy,
Till he hoove into port,
And then upon the portside bow,
In raptures he did kneel,
For Santa Claus is no mere dream,
And Christmas toys are REAL!

—GENE MORGAN.

A CHRISTMAS DREAM

By J. A. WALDRON.

I DREAMED a dream on Christmas eve that no one, surely, will believe. All will discredit it because in it I was with Santa Claus and witnessed many things so queer I hesitate to tell them here.

Old Santa had just filled his pack and made it ready for his back. It holds a million things or more from Santa's rare and endless store, and like some basket magical, though taken from 'tis always full.

Though I saw Santa plainly, he seemed not at all to notice me. He sat in silence with a map spread out upon his ample lap to mark his course o'er land and sea while waiting for his evening tea.

His cook—he has no wife, you know—came in and said she meant to go. She said her job did not quite suit and he must find a substitute. Cooks everywhere just grump and gad, and with most folks they get in bad.

Well, Santa's smile quick left his face and he ripped up a dress of lace perhaps intended for this cook, who gave him then a wrathful look; and



when she put the teapot down I saw her slip from out her gown and drop into the teapot quick some sort of dope with movement slick.

"I would take much more than this, I think, to drive old Santa Claus to drink; that is to say, to rum, perhaps, though sometimes he may like his schnappa. Full many a cup of tea he quaffed. The more he drank the more he laughed. Uncanny was his jollity, and I at first thought I should see."

He seized his pack, and full of joy piled me upon it like a toy, and rushing forth into the night began his world-embracing flight. He used a sleigh, as we all know, but needed neither ice or snow. We sailed away o'er mount and plain, through many weathers, snow and rain—through wind and sleet and zero air—though all the time it seemed quite fair.

A dozen rainbows ran ahead. Their bells were soundless as they fled, and all the ghostly journey seemed quite fitting in the dream I dreamed. A

continent would loom and melt into an ocean ere I felt a moment pass, and yet between a million Christmas homes were seen and gifts uncounted were bestowed from Santa's rich and boundless load.

Though I upon the top reposed I was in no way discomfited, for magic wonders multiplied that night upon our snowy ride. The greater wonders, though, to me might have been traced to Santa's tea, sophisticated by his cook, and of which he so much partook; for at the homes of wealth, where boys and girls had much, he left few toys, while poorer children's wishes found complete fulfillment on his round; and to strange humors he gave vent as here and there we quickly went.

Some men by others well esteemed got prison wear the while they dreamed; and others, poor and furnished ill, of good things must have found their fill; and many men of lean estate awoke to find their riches great, each one admonished that his door should always open to the poor.

Fantastic tricks, too, Santa played on men and women, boy and maid. In one old spinster's stocking thin I saw him slip a manikin; in one old bach's dingy place a woman's form of wondrous grace. 'Twas wax, of course; but 'twas a hint that ought to stir a heart of flint. A man with millions strangely made Old Santa left a hoe and spade; to one I knew ill-hap had struck he left a parcel labeled "Luck;" to pals of mine that Fortune bars he gave next season's motor car. This got my goat, and I to see just what he purposed giving me quite foolishly the silence broke, and empty-handed I awoke!—Judge.

CHRISTMAS SUPERSTITIONS

If you will go to the crossroads between eleven and twelve on Christmas night you will hear what most concerns you in the coming year.

If on Christmas eve you make a little heap of salt on the table, and it melts over night, you will die the next year; if, in the morning, it remains undiminished, you will live.

If a shirt be spun, woven and sewed by a pure, chaste maiden on Christmas day it will be proof against lead or steel.

If you are born at sermon time on Christmas morning you can see spirits.

If you burn elder on Christmas eve you will have revealed to you all the witches and the sorcerers of the neighborhood.

If you eat a raw egg on Christmas morning, fasting, you can carry heavy weights.

It is unfortunate to carry anything forth from the house on Christmas morning until something has been brought into it.

If the fire burns brightly on Christmas morning it betokens prosperity; if it smolders, adversity.

A Husky Fowl

Willie came in from the shed where Uncle Rufus was picking a Christmas chicken for his small city nephew's dinner.

"Aunt Sus!" he cried as he entered, "what do you think? Uncle Rufus is out to the shed hushing a hen!"

Bessie's Plea

"Say, mamma, please don't make any fire in my bedroom grate," begged little Bessie.

"Why, you'll freeze."
"I don't mind being cold, just so long as Santa will be able to get down the chimney all right."

TRUE SPIRIT OF DAY

Christmas Giving Should Be Prompted by the Heart.

Religion in the Orthodox Sense Not Necessary to Appreciate Finer Qualities of Great Christian Holiday.

By PRUDENCE STANDISH.

ONCE more the Christmastide and its beautiful meaning is with the world. Again the shepherds, watching their flocks by night, are sore afraid at the glory which shines about them. Clothed in blinding light, the angel speaks; the heavenly host that crowds suddenly about him sing of glory in the highest and peace and good will. The wise men who have seen his star in the East, kneel and spread their gifts of gold and myrrh and frankincense without question.

The miracle of 2,000 years ago is still new and glad and lovely, for, lo! in all Christendom bells peal and sweet choirs sing the message given by the blinding angel and the crowding host:

"For behold I bring you tidings of great joy which shall be to all people. Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good will toward men."

This is the message of the Christmastide, yet the bigger half of Christendom makes the period the pagan festival it once was at the time of the winter solstice. We give gifts, for sake of the gods of custom and merriment, forgetting entirely that they are for sakes of the great spiritual joy "which shall be to all people."

The gold and myrrh and frankincense of the heart are withheld—we give gifts because we've got to, and keep our hearts as much closed to the Christmas child as was the inn. We have our own selfish ends to gain, the rich patron to cater to, the friend to appease. We heap little children with dazzling toys, and light the starry lamps of their fir trees because it is the fashion, and we do our small Christmas charities because it would seem mean not to do them.

We have forgotten the joyous and sublime meaning of Christmas. One does not need to be religious in the orthodox sense to appreciate the finer quality of this great festival, for what is known as Christian feeling has come to be a moral obligation at this time—a point of etiquette, in truth, for the heart and mind.

In point of mere etiquette—what the social world thinks on the subject of Christmas gift giving—it is thought bad taste for a person of modest means to give presents of value to others of wealth and influence, for this savors too much like currying to continued favor if the giver is already under obligations. But some knowledge of the helpful friend's existence is necessary, and this may take the form of a pretty Christmas card with an appropriate greeting; or a knot of flowers or winter berries may be sent with a note expressing warm Christmas wishes.

That the servant who has given her bodily strength and heart's best interest to the home must not be forgotten, goes without saying; but it is certainly bad form to make the poor servant's gift an inexpensive trifle when something better can be afforded.

Then what a woeful want of taste it shows for us to defer buying a friend's or sister's present until we have found out what she means to give us, and so make the exchange a quid pro quo. The gift that goes to friend or relative is above all one for love, and it is undoubtedly better taste for the recipient of the simpler gift in the exchange to appear as pleased as if she had received something ten times its value.

But, then, what matters the nature of the gift after all? The spirit is the thing—and does not this silly picture or cushion, so unbecoming to the parlor, mean that the friend or sister has thought of us?

As for the little children, so much are their feelings painfully strained at this time that I would like to write a book on the subject. I beg every mother not to threaten the poor little heart that misbehaves sometimes with the eternal word that "Santa Claus won't come if you do that any more." The dear kiddie who forgets to be good knows better after a year or two of this harrowing threat, which makes you out a story teller. Meanwhile, there is the little heart staying awake at night with its dreadful anxieties; there are the sudden storms of bitter tears, with all the glory of Christmas sunk in the bottomless pit of absolute sadness that Santa—dear, absent, good old fat gentleman—won't come.

We remember the poor and drop a few pennies gladly for the blind children.

But, why do we do it—why? It is because a wide, sweet star has stopped over a stable in the far East, because the church choirs are singing of peace on earth and good will toward men.

So let us never lose sight of that fact with our gifts, whether our hands tender or receive them; for the heart closed to the deeper significance of Christmas may truly be likened to the hut that held no room. Let us send with each gift some of the heart's true gold and frankincense—bind it with the cord of some merriment or helpfulness. Let us receive each and every one of our gifts as tidings of great joy.

TO KNOW FUTURE HUSBAND

Many Old English Customs and Superstitions Center Around Christmas.

All down the ages girls have been eager to find out their future destiny—whether they will be "old maids," or, as they are now called, "bachelor girls," or wives and mothers. Christmas, as well as all the other festivals, has been allotted its customs and superstitions through which the secret of the future may be learned.

To find the answer to the important question, wife or old maid, a girl had to go alone on Christmas eve and knock on the henhouse door. If a cock answered her knock by crowing, she would be married, but if no cock crowed in answer, then she would be an old maid. This undertaking would require a good deal of courage in the old days of superstition, as on Christmas eve evil spirits were supposed to have increased power and ghosts were supposed to prow around.

If a girl wished to know the name of her future husband she took four onions and named each one after a boy friend. She then placed one in each corner of a room and the one that sprouted before January 6 bore the name of the man she would marry.

In some districts this was carried out rather differently. Several onions were selected and named and placed close together, and the one that sprouted first gave the name that was to be hers. We can imagine how carefully the warmest place would be chosen for some special onion.

HE WAS THANKFUL.



"John," said the Loving Wife, "I intended to get you a nice new necktie for Christmas, but I am ashamed to acknowledge that in the rush of the shopping I completely forgot it."

"Thank you, nevertheless," said the Happy Husband.

ANNUAL "HOLLER" DAY.

When children have their Christmas toys the house will ring with laughter gay; and thus, in truth, by girls and boys, is Christmas made a "holler" day.