

BEFORE AND AFTER



Engaged Girl—I'm going to give John a cigar case and a diamond stickpin. What are you going to give Frank?  
 Married Friend—Oh, I'm giving him a fireless cooker and a dime savings bank.

CHRISTMAS CREED UNIVERSAL

Adjusts itself to All Conditions and All Places—It's Magic Influences the World.

The festival called Christmas has come to have a creed wider than any ritual. Its magic has influenced the world in a degree more profound and far-reaching than that of any other recurring incident marked by the history of mankind. Its sentiment has, indeed, overflowed all boundaries, both of sect and of social condition. Its high, clear note of cheer and charity has appealed to an unbounded degree wherever human ideals have had sway. Pessimism halts at its portal.

The creed of kindness adjusts itself to all conditions and all places. It seems to be a good working creed, despite the unattractive phases of perfunctory giving and taking. It is a cheerful creed. It strews life with gaiety and color. It is a culmination to sentiments of fair play, to active sympathy, to the do-it-now impulse.

Christmas has no climate. It glows where life is green and where it is white. In city and in country, in the hills and on the desert, among the pines and among the palms it finds a voice. It is holy day and holiday. It drapes the altar and the hearth. It has many American versions, and many races add their varying symbols to its tenderness and to its animation. Above all, the call of Christmas is "Peace on Earth." In the present grievous crisis of the world there is significance in this call beyond that of any crisis mankind ever before was called to read. That war has darkened Christmas for so much of the world may well seem, at the moment, the crushing condemnation of all such conflicts.

Yet it will remain true that the full beauty of the day and the time is due those who may find that beauty. Children of every land seize it for their own. And, "except ye become as one of these," life loses its saving luster.

My Christmas Tree

On Christmas morning when I awake, and sleep-dust from my eyes I shake, I see a sight that makes me start and causes thumpings in my heart! A Christmas tree—oh, pretty sight—with candles, bells and balls afloat. With horns and dolls and sugar plums, and skates and trains and beating drums. And oh, it is a wonder-tree, with heaps of things for me to see! Rare gifts hang upon the side, which tinselled fairies cannot hide. A soldier-doll, a doll house, too, and strings of gold come to my view, and as I look I seem to hear sweet Christmas music soft and clear.

A Merry Christmas it seems to say, A merry, happy, holy day!

Wise Willie. After five-year-old Willie had gone to bed on Christmas eve his mother went into the room to see if he had hung up his stocking properly for Santa Claus. Much to her surprise she found that the little fellow had appropriated one of hers for the occasion and had attached a slip of paper on which he had printed in a bold hand one of his Sunday-school texts: "The Lord loveth a cheerful giver."

His Portion. Bill—Do you expect your landlady to give you anything for Christmas?  
 Jill—Sure.  
 "What do you expect it to be?"  
 "Oh, the neck, I reckon."



The Great Iron Cross

A Christmas Story

by Harry Irving Greene



OST things Deacon took as they came, and with great calmness of spirit, for he was an even-tempered old horse, whose disposition a dozen years, filled with the usual allotment of equine adversity, had thoroughly seasoned. Yet now he was pawing and stamping as impatiently as any four-year-old. At intervals he would stretch his neck, thrust forward his old white nose, and indulge in a complaining whinny. There was reason for Deacon's restlessness. More than an hour ago he should have been on the move, but here he was still waiting in the post office shed, and never a sign or word from his driver. Deacon, you understand, pulled Uncle Sam's mail over Rural-Free Delivery Route No. 2, Havertown P. O. He had pulled it for three years, and he was fairly well versed in the business. At any rate, he knew that it was past his starting time. Long before had the sway-back sorrel on Route No. 1 taken the road. The pert little bay mare on No. 3 had followed a few minutes later. Yet here was Deacon, with the heaviest and longest route of them all, still standing idly in the shed.

Inside, in the Havertown post office, were a number of men whose frame of mind was worse than Deacon's. One

No sooner had they reached Joel's road, where the route began, than Deacon realized the inexperience of the new man. Why, he was actually going to drive right past the Powers' place, and the Powers almost always had mail of some kind, even if it wasn't more than a poultry magazine or a seed catalogue. After one or two such mistakes Deacon took charge of things himself. From house to house he went, stopping wherever he had been in the habit of calling, waiting until the new carrier found who lived there and had looked through letters and parcels to see if he had anything for them.

All the forenoon and all the afternoon this went on, but when the red sun went down in the frosty west there still remained half a hundred letters and more than a peck of packages to be delivered. The new man was hungry and tired, but he was no quitter. So he begged some hay and oats for Deacon, borrowed a lantern, and together they started to finish the route. As for Deacon, his old knees were stiffer than ever, his shoulder muscles ached, his flanks heaved like a pair of blacksmith's bellows, but he plunged on, never skipping a single house, never hesitating at a roundabout half-mile, doing his whole duty quite as thoroughly as if there had been someone behind to urge him on instead of a cold-numbered clerk, who had no longer even touched the reins. At last only one letter was left, a thick, bulky one in a blue waterproof envelope, bearing a foreign postmark. "Josiah Braisted, Esq.," was the address.

"Braisted, eh?" muttered the clerk. "Wonder if the old horse knows where he lives?"

Evidently Deacon did, for he was plowing through a big drift, heading straight out on the Boston road into the darkness. Far ahead, on the top of a long hill, the clerk could see the lights of a big house. There were no other lights between. Miles behind he could make out the glow of the city. The clerk wished he could be back there, where one could be warm again and get something hot to eat. With numb fingers he pulled out his watch. Half-past nine! Why, it would take them a good two hours to drive back now! Braisted he hanged! He could get his letter after Christmas.

So he grabbed the reins and indicated to Deacon a desire to turn around. But Deacon would not turn. Pull on the rein as he might, Deacon would only swing his head about, keeping his legs moving straight ahead. By much shouting and sawing on the reins Deacon was stopped. Then the new driver waded out to his head, took him by the bits and tried to point the horse the other way. Deacon refused to budge. Those lights on the top of the long hill marked the end of the route, and Deacon knew it. And to those lights they went. "Josiah Braisted?" asked the driver curtly of the young woman who answered his ring.

"Oh, it's come, it's come!" she shouted to someone within, as she held out her hand eagerly for the letter.

Never before had he seen so much excitement caused by the delivery of a letter. In a moment there were three or four persons in the front hall, all talking at once.

"Do you think it will save him, doctor?" asked the anxious-faced old lady who had followed the girl to the door.

"It will if anything will, I guess," answered a stout, bearded man. And he mounted the stairs to see the patient in the upper room.

Then they insisted that the half-frozen clerk come inside and have something to eat. Deacon? Oh, they would take care of Deacon. They did all this and more. It seemed that this letter had been long expected, and was sadly needed, for it came from a prodigal son to a very sick father. It had its effect, too.

Of course the clerk told them of Deacon's heroic stubbornness, of how the old horse had insisted on going to the very end of the route when he had tried to turn him back. Josiah Braisted, Esq., heard the story during his convalescence.

"I must tell my son about that when he comes home," he would repeat as they told him of the part Deacon played in the story. "We ought to do something for that old horse," he said.

They did, too. The office clerk, who will first show you a handsome gold watch, tells the story best, always ending with, "And old Deacon, why, he lives out there on the Braisted place like a thoroughbred. He's in clover, he is."

"Well," Dan Sweeney will add, "it's no more'n he deserves. Old Deacon was a mighty good horse in his day, and mighty knowin'."—St. Louis Globe-Democrat.

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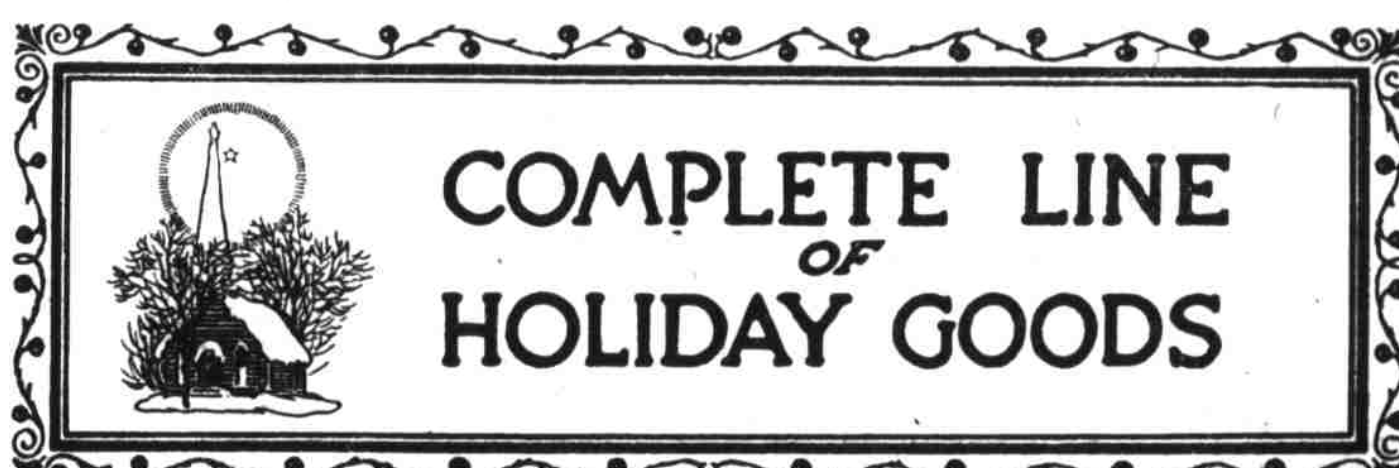
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