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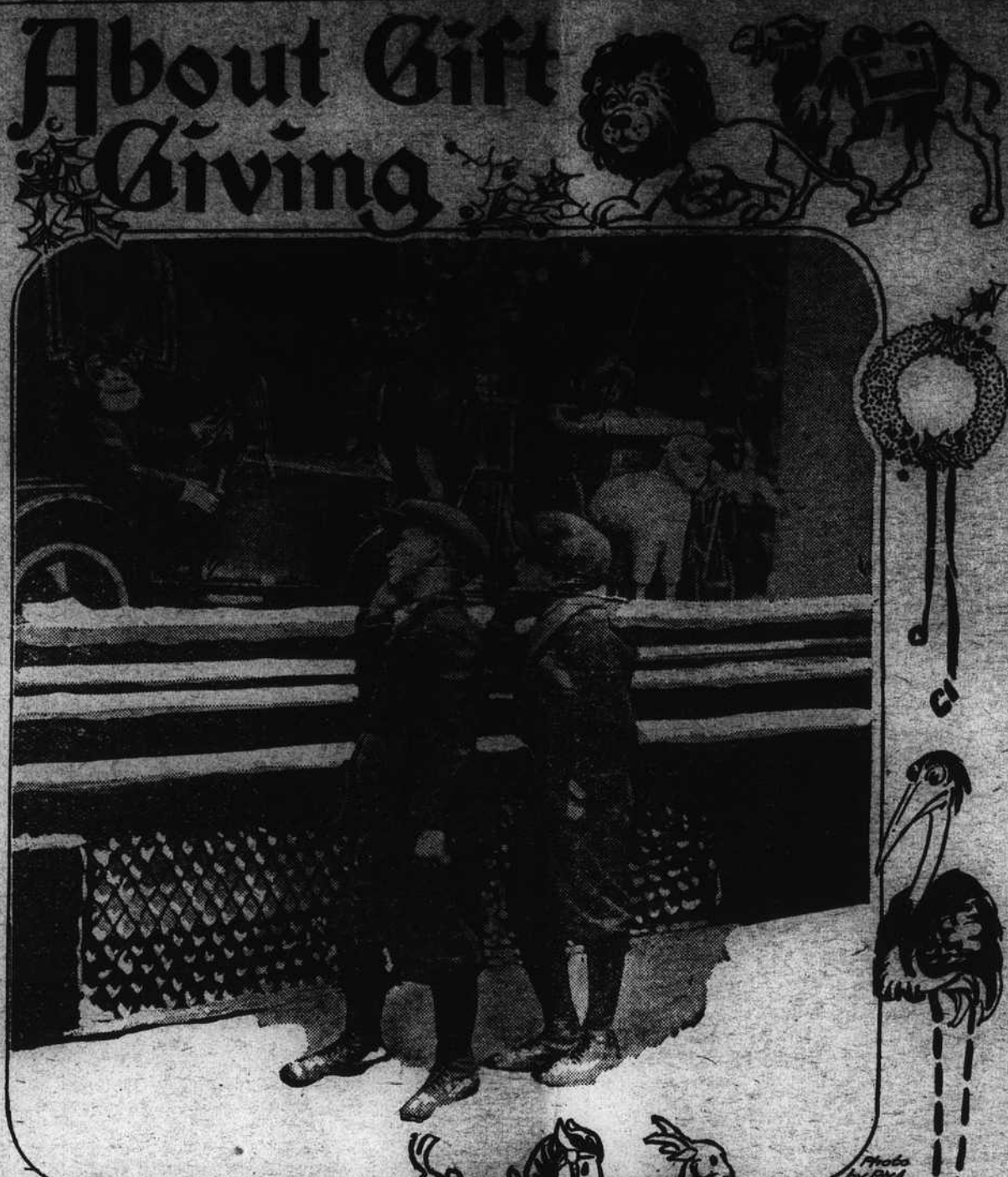
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WITH the world absorbed just now in the process of making and buying gifts for Christmas, how many of us stop to think what it is all about? So simply and naturally has gift-making slipped into our scheme of things that we scarcely recognize it as a thing in itself.

Gift-making has a history as old as time, and there are many occasions on which we deem it fit and proper, nay, even obligatory, to give and exchange gifts. Nearly every one exchanges gifts at Christmas time, and this year we expect to see the custom observed to its fullest possibilities.

Glancing over the ages, we find that gift-making has always existed in some form or other. Our savage ancestors were great hands at the game. But gift-giving in primitive man did not spring from any thought or idea connected with generosity. His was not the simple desire to please. Being selfish and unutterably superstitious, he feared and distrusted strangers, just as some of us do today. He scorned the weak and cringed before the strong. The conditions of life forced him to these reactions.

Whatever impulses primitive man may have had to share his possessions or to make a gift of something which he really preferred to keep for himself, grew out of fear. From what we know about the nature of our earliest ancestors we cannot believe that he would have parted with anything he wanted unless he was afraid. When the lightning flashed and the thunder roared, an overwhelming fear possessed him. Unable to reason that these were natural elements over which he could not possibly exercise control, he shot at the storm with arrows and shouted at the thunder. When these efforts failed, his fear increased. What had he done to anger the gods? Perhaps a gift would appease this anger. To him the giving of a treasured possession meant real sacrifice. For instance, if he made a bonfire and burned some of his hard-earned food, he expected the gods to appreciate his sacrifice and turn off the thunder.

The Egyptians made great gifts to their kings. The Israelites gave a tenth of all their grain, their wine, their cattle to the king. This custom spread everywhere, and even Christianity failed to wipe it out. Ambassadors, visiting foreign countries, brought gifts. We are told that Queen Elizabeth received thousands of gifts from her subjects at New Year's.

There remains little doubt that, what other purposes may have induced the making of a gift, there lurked behind it an unconscious desire to win the friendship of the person of power to gain one's own ends—even as the weak man of the primitive tribe made a gift to the tribal

strong man in the desire to gain his friendship and protection.

The Bible gives expression to this thought. Says Deuteronomy 16:19: "A gift doth blind the eyes of the wise." Meaning, of course, that it is easy to obtain what one wants if one distributes gifts judiciously.

Among many peoples, the making of a gift became a sort of ceremony. A gift meant much more to primitive man than it does to us. When he brought himself to part with a choice bearskin or a sharp flint spear, he felt that he was parting with something akin to himself. Thus the exchange of gifts came to be a common way of formally binding two persons together. When the Dama of North Borneo exchanged weapons they were sworn friends. In central Celebes, even today, the exchange of gifts is recognized as a ceremony for establishing friendship. In Patagonia, no chief is allowed to enter into the territory of another until gifts have been exchanged.

The exchange of gifts at Christmas time possibly grew out of the desire to emulate the amazing unselfishness of Christ. The custom was nurtured in Germany. Here it became the habit to make periodic exchange of gifts among friends, relatives, acquaintances. It became an obligation, and to escape it the man with many friends sometimes took an extended trip at this period.

From Germany, the custom of Christmas gift giving spread over Europe. It crossed the sea and was brought to the struggling colonists who had cut loose from all Old World influences. It has become more and more an institution, as the generations have slipped by, and today we exchange gifts as a matter of course.

It was a custom among the Romans for the priest to put a box on all outgoing ships. The people were required to put something into it. When the ship was ready to sail, the box was sealed and went to sea with it. On the return the box was turned over to the priest who placed it aside until Christmas, at which time mass was said and the box opened. Sometimes the contents were kept by the church; sometimes distributed to the poor. It is related that frequently at the opening of this box those who had not placed anything in it came forward and offered gifts in the form of money or jewelry.

During the early period of Christianity it was customary for poor men and women to sing carols to the streets at Christmas time. They would be given food, clothing and money, not because of the songs they sang, but because it was the custom to do

so. And custom, among superstitious peoples, is sacred. They were afraid that evil would befall them if they did not make gifts to the singers who caroled Christ's praise.

From actual records we know that gift making to children goes far back into prehistory. At various museums here and abroad there are on view dolls, animals, and other toys which have been taken out of the long buried tombs of children.

We can easily picture a savage father of long ago bringing a curious shell for his child to play with. We can see a savage mother carefully fashioning a flint or bone toy that her child might have something with which to busy himself. Among these primitive peoples, marriage was not considered binding until a child was born. The birth of the child therefore must have been an occasion of great celebration, and perhaps all the clansmen presented gifts to the newcomer. It would have been a ceremony—to show the child he was welcome and among friends.

Painted clay dolls, some in the form of humans and some in the form of animals, were given to early Egyptian children as playthings. Among the early Romans, the man who adopted a child gave it rich gifts to prove that he was able to take care of it.

Gifts have always accompanied christenings. In the Middle Ages the godparents usually presented the child with gold or silver spoons. It is barely possible that the phrase, "born with a silver spoon in his mouth," may have come from this custom.

The custom of presenting children with gifts at Christmas time was most pronounced among the Germans in early life. Kris Kringle is their name for Santa Claus. It is derived from Krist Kindl, which means Christ child. We can understand why the holiday would have been recognized as being particularly a child's festival.

Saint Nicholas, or Santa Claus, is regarded as the patron saint of Christmas. The old nursery myth is that he comes down the chimney with a pack on his back to leave gifts for good children.

It is possible that this myth originated with the custom of cleaning the chimney at the beginning of the new year to enable good luck to enter the household. A housewife busy cleaning the chimney at or about Christmas time, might have whispered to her children, to keep them out of mischief, that if they were good Santa Claus would come down the chimney and bring gifts to them. In any event, the children hurried to wash the news among their playmates. Today we have the story of the

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