

AN ABSENT SANTA CLAUS

Lucy Morton had shrunk from asking little Ruth what she wanted Santa Claus to bring her, ever since that time, three years ago, when, in answer to the same question, she had replied: "I want him to bring me my papa." And now the woman, as she huddled closer to the tiny old stove in her shabby apartment, resolved to say nothing whatever about the festival. Ruth had nearly forgotten her father, to be sure, not having seen him for four years, but there was small chance of hearing the bells of the reindeer now, and it seemed better to forget that, too.

But it was not the approach of physical want, nor yet the wreck of her earlier illusions that made the most of Lucy's anguish of spirit. Rather was it the arrival, at last, of a doubt as to the righteousness of her position and the growing feeling that she was going to lower her pride, to call for succor to that world from which she had so proudly turned aside and tacitly to admit that she had been in the wrong.

And what a bitter admission it would be! Four years ago Lucy had come east with Ruth, then three years old, and without her husband, to spend the holidays with her widowed father, and when, as her visit lengthened, it slowly became known that she was not going to return to the home of Albert Morton, she was surprised and outraged to find that not all of the friends who had known them both were as sympathetic or as completely her partisans as she had taken for granted they would be. This she had met with fine scorn, and any suggestions that matrimony meant minor concessions or that it took two to make a quarrel, she repudiated along with the persons who made them. Neither to quarrel nor to concede had been part of her fine breeding. It was not until her father's death and her own sudden and wholly unexpected impoverishment that she began to think of herself as a deserted wife, but even then her pride was unshaken, and though Albert had written almost at once, she remembered now that she had let his letter go unanswered. She recalled, too, that all overtures for reconciliation had come from him and had been ignored by her. There had been no scandal nor talk of a divorce, and though he had written often until within the last year, he had never sought her out nor claimed any right to see the child.

For a brief moment she had believed that with her education and accomplishments she could easily support herself and Ruth without appealing to her lukewarm and disapproving friends. When her dignified search for a genteel means of livelihood had become a wild scramble for a job she still clung to the comforting thought that she was the aggrieved party. But now at last she was facing a crisis. For less than a week ahead there was food and the shelter of a dingy, third-rate boarding house, where the ghosts of bogus voters were said to walk and where less unobtrusive shapes were encountered in the flesh, and after that—

A lively whistling in the alley of "Not Because You're So Curly" roused Lucy from her thoughts. She went to the window and peered down, holding the curtain to keep the draft from the bed where Ruth was sleeping. "Is that you, Reuben?" she called, softly. "Come up here for a moment, will you?"

Reuben, uniformed messenger boy No. 11, aged 14 years by the grace of his school certificate, knew a lady when he saw one, and when he appeared at the door of the top floor back, he held his cap in his hand. "Evening," he said, as he tipped over to the little stove. "Gee! The stinky little stork ain't no one, two 'ee on a night like this, is it?" and he waited for the lady to speak.

"Reuben," said Lucy, with a slight hesitation that the boy did not miss, as she pulled a ring with a diamond in it from her finger, "do you think I could get any money for this from the pawnbroker?"

"Sure, Mizzy Morton," he said, eyeing the ring without taking it. "But what for? Christmas for de kid?"

"That—and other things," replied the woman.

Reuben seemed a little slow to-night. He had pawned other articles for Mrs. Morton, getting more for them than she would have known how; he had talked and played with the beautiful Ruth in the alley and he had heard a fraction and guessed all the rest of her story. The stalwart friendship he had offered them had been accepted with thankfulness.

"Say, listen," he said at last. "Youse two have got de book shop skinned a mile if you could only see it from where I sit. You know dat skirt dance dey was doin' in de alley last Monday? Well, I learnt to play a tune for on de 'noug' organ. To-morrow night is Amator night at de Gem Theatre, and if Ruth'll do dat dance dere, say, Mizzy Morton, she'll win first prize in a walk, and it ain't stange money, nor Christmas ornaments, any more, neither."

"What, Ruth, my little Ruth, dance at de Gem Theatre before all those howling men, and be pulled off de stage by that horrible hook you told us about? Why, Reuben, it would frighten de child to de death. It cannot be thought of."

Reuben looked shame-faced at the woman's reproachful glance, but not dismayed. He kept his eyes on his cap as he hurried on. "Say, listen!" he said. "I got de Amator stunt shaken down into good shape at de Gem, since I was tellin' you. Dey do holler worse 'n a political mass-meeting, when de turn's rotten, and de hook ain't wrapped in velvet, neither, but dey know de real thing when dey see it, and Ruth'll get past in a walk."

Mrs. Morton shook her head.

"Fer Ruth's so little, do you see, and so soft. If it ain't pretty girls dat catches de public, it's kids; least dat's de answer if you look at de Sunday papers. And of—"

Just think of how she would feel, Reuben!

"Oh, she'd be tickled for fair if you'd let her know for why, and, of course, Mizzy Morton, de prize 'd be all hers; I wouldn't want a cent fer playin'!"

Mrs. Morton patted the boy on the

shoulder with a grateful smile, but still she shook her head and still he persisted. "And besides der prize, dere might be somepin' else doin'," he said. "Friday night two or t'ree 'centrical guys is goin' to de Gem, lookin' fer professional vor-dervill talent; dey's top notchers, too, and when dey 'd see Ruth dance dey could read it on de wrapper. All de orders would have to take off here roller skates. Dey'd give her a try, sure, and say, 'listos, Mizzy Morton, you'd never have to hook no skinnin' den.'"

But at these new vistas Lucy shook her head again. "My innocent Ruth on de stage!" she exclaimed. "Never!" and she burst into tears.

It was from this phenomenon that Reuben, young in nothing save years and enthusiasm, inferred that the poison was working. Yet he knew too much to defend the stage just here. He had already met curious people who shrunk from it and its hard beginnings and had sounded the depths of their prejudices without understanding them. So now he appeared to renounce the idea. Instead, he said, with an apologetic manner, that he thought Ruth was too little to be hurt by such an experience. Then he took the ring and praised its beauty, refraining from any comment as he ostentatiously picked out the initials on the inside of the band, and finally heaved a sentimental sigh, with the remark that he hoped it wasn't "in memoriam" of some absent friend. Then he returned it with a promise to dispose of it to-morrow.

Reuben renewed the attack the next morning and about noon sallied forth to find as many tried and true friends as he could buy tickets for, to act as claqueurs and to submit them to some hours of strenuous training in that difficult art. By this time all the eyes of the promoter, the impresario, the press agent and the manager, thrown into one, were his. He allayed Mrs. Morton's trepidations while his own began to rise. He told Ruth nothing of the hooting, or the look, but let her understand that besides the personal triumph dear to the feminine heart, even of that tender age, her success—of which he raised no question—would mean happiness for her mother, the coming of Santa Claus, and other things delightful. He made arrangements with the manager for Lucy to go behind with Ruth when the time arrived, and even to keep them, until Ruth's turn came, in a little unused cubby-hole of a room, where the child would not hear the awful hooting and yelling over the earlier victims or see the operation of the dreaded hook.

Despite all that Reuben could do Lucy clung to Ruth's hand in an agony of fright until she was in the wings and the manager was announcing: "A dance by Miss Sarah Brown," the name being invented by Reuben, who had said: "De stinky little stork ain't no one, two 'ee ain't struck no swell out dere in front." The child was dressed in a red skirt and cap, trimmed with tufts of fur cotton, which carried a clever suggestion of a diminutive feminine Santa Claus. "You mustn't begin to dance straight off," was Reuben's last whispered injunction. "Dey'll let out a yell when dey see dem pretty clothes; den, when dey's winded, 'turn 'em round and smile at me like you do in de back yard, and den I'll spiel and you can start in."

Ruth got neatly to the centre of the stage, but she forgot to turn her feet to the audience as she walked out, and a wild yell burst upon her ears. She turned an astonished gaze upon her stern critic, but there was no fear in it, and for an instant silence fell, just as her eyes wandered in an upward glance, which carried not only the usual infantile appeal, but a measure of self-confidence. Then, by their timeliness, Reuben's claqueurs earned their applause—clapping without shouting—came down from them. Before the lower part of the house could, in accordance with time-honored custom, signify its refusal to acquiesce in this cheap and premature approval from above, little Ruth smiled, smiled as she might have smiled into her mother's eyes. Then came at once a mighty roar of applause from everywhere, and she smiled again, and then at Reuben, who was already blowing himself red in the face, and it wasn't until she put up one tiny, rose tinted hand for silence that she could hear his strenuous pipe. It would not have mattered then if she had not detected at all, for as Reuben said afterward, she "had 'em got" when she first smiled, and when she missed her head dey was down and out." But she did dance, and so well that an encore—a most unusual thing for an amateur—was insisted on. "And I think de money I lashed off to get dem clackers in," said Reuben.

As they make their triumphant way back to the cubby hole, Lucy almost in a state of collapse overstrained emotions, the alert Reuben looked back to see two men in evening dress, whom he had noticed in the front of the house, coming with the fat little manager of the theatre. "Dey's dem 'centrical guys of who I have spoke," he whispered excitedly, as they entered the room. "Comin' to see you, too, fer sure. Didn't I tell you you wouldn't never have to do your own automobile repairs after to-night?"

It was true. The manager appeared at the door, bowing and scraping and asking to be permitted to present two friends, who had greatly admired Ruth's dance. Lucy was asked to be excused on the score of fatigue, when one of the men, at sound of her voice, pushed forward and then halted, dumbfounded, on the threshold.

"Albert!" exclaimed Lucy, starting up from her rickety chair, and then as the man stood with an expression of horror on his face as he took in the dirty room, the child's fantastic costume and the petched and shabby garments of his beautiful young wife, she lowered her eyes and covered her face with her hands. "Forgive me," she murmured. "We were starving!"

"Forgive you?" cried the man. "My God, at you ask to be forgiven that I have let you come to such—"

"Excuse me," said Reuben, putting his tow head on the rowl of stomach of the gaping manager and backing him

out of the room. "Dis don't appear to be no talkfest, after all. I guess you've got a sapper date wid de queen of burlesque, and fer me, it's back to de mine," and he came out, too, and closed the door.

But when Reuben left he had three times the value of the first prize in his pocket, and Ruth, as she and the other two were being whirled away through the brilliantly lighted and crowded streets, raised her head from the tumbled shirt front of her father as it drooped drowsily. "Am I you really a theatre man?"

"No, Ruth, I just happened to drop in with a theatrical friend. And to think that I did not recognize you when I saw you on the stage!"

"But you are my very own papa?"

"Yes, dear," said Lucy. "Your very own papa, and—Santa Claus."

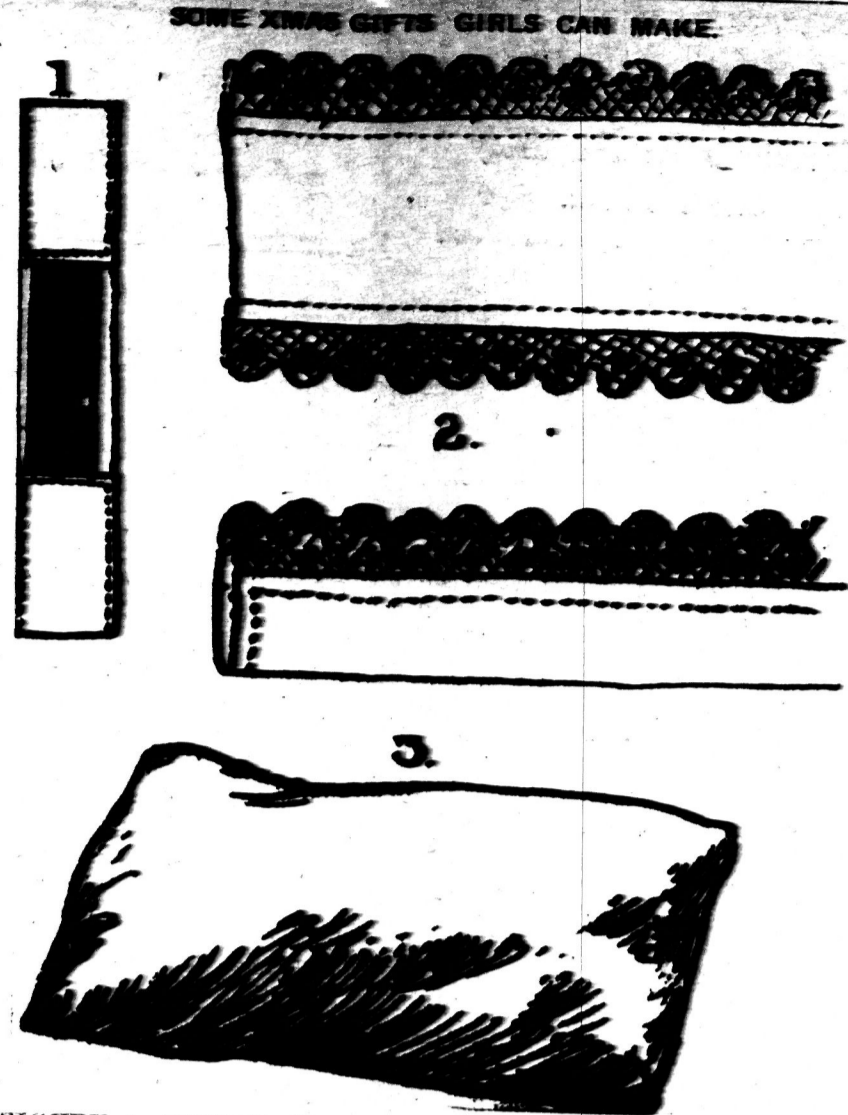


FIGURE 1—COLLAR SUPPORT.

FIG. 2—WASHABLE RUCHING.

By Eva Dean.

It is very well for the little folk if Christmas can be made to mean giving to them as well as receiving. But asking father for money to buy something is not really giving. If a child can offer a gift that he has made with his own hands, and on which he has spent the thought necessary to fit to the recipient, it will increase to it as well as the pleasure he takes in it, as well as that of the one who receives it. Some suggestions are given here that may help our little readers, especially, we hope, the very tiny ones.

These would be appreciated by any woman because they can be washed without being spoiled, and it is not necessary to rip them in order to iron the waist well. A strip of tape is folded over at the ends and fastened down at both sides of the fold, making two pockets. The raw edge of the tape would better be

hemmed back also. A little strip of whalebone of the right length is slipped into the two pockets (the dark line in the picture). This is easily removed when the collar is laundered, leaving the tape to be washed in the collar.

Any little girl who knows how to hem can make this ruching, and any woman will be glad to receive it. A strip of fine muslin the length of the collar band is hemmed on both sides, and a border of narrow lace sewed on either edge. The band is then folded so that one lace edge stands up a little higher than the other, and the gift is complete.

This would be an acceptable gift for either a man or a woman. It is a small cushion made of velveteen, stuffed with cotton. It should be just large enough to fit nicely into the hand. It is useful for polishing shoes, or for simply rubbing up an old polish that has become dulled or dusty.

It's so easy to get the wrong thing, in necklaces, enamel is greatly in vogue. Not by itself, but as a means of enhancing jewels. It is made to harmonize exactly and exquisitely. In popular stones like amethyst, jade, malachite, and lazuli, whatever metal they are set in, there is the addition of enamel in echoing tones. Supplementary beauty is thus gained and the stones suggest beautiful actresses posed in harmonious stage pictures. Naturally the effect is only bettered when the work is done by a master hand. The design as well as the color must be in harmony. I saw some black opals thus beautified. Of course, these stones are handsome enough of themselves. But I think they are even more beautiful with the little surrounding scrolls of enamel. Small diamonds are also added with fine effect.

Some Prospects.

Now for mother! My sure she'll be delighted with the French work basket you mention. The gold gimp on those quaint brocade affairs is delightfully and beautifully old-time. I heard her saying the other day that she was in of about everything, and had lost her ribbon runner and her emery. Besides, her last work basket is looking seedy.

Scarcely purposes sending me the Spanish lace mantilla that grandma bought in Cuba. You needn't have troubled to "sound" it. Any one would be enchanted to have that rich creamy affair in silk lace. You're an angel to be willing to have it go out of your immediate family.

If you didn't have so much silver I'd advise you and yours to give Aunt yet more. There are the loveliest things. Placed and engraved pieces were never handsomer. And the smallest affairs, rather in the trinket class, are altogether engaging. You continue to go in for spoons? If so, I'll send a list of the most desirable ones.

On Monday last we went to hear Grace George. She wore some white dresses as dainty as herself, and the women of her company were also dressed with great splendor. Two frocks in the new Paquin mode were worn. One was of soft black Amazon satin with cream lace upper rigging. I've forgotten the color of the other, but it is also eked out with filmy lace from an inch or so above the waist line.

Ever your loving,

Mary.

New Toys.

When Christmas Day is over
What does the pale moon see
A-peeping through the window
Across the Christmas tree?
It sees the little Playthings,
Half forgotten now,
Faded and neglected,
Together on the floor.

Upon the flowered carpet
The woolly hams dote gaze,
The Clara doll regarding
With sad unobtrusive gaze;
And Jack the merry Jumper,
Grimes lonely and in vain,
To see the children
Come play with us again!

Four timid tops are painted,
"Toucher" but a day,
You've scarcely grown acquainted
In these brief hours of play;
Their playmates meet to-morrow
Beneath the twinkling pine
To lay the Love of Childhood
Upon the Christmas shrine.

Ah, Baby, in your dressing,
Tender but a day,
Their toyish beams are tender
To all your whims of play;
And at tomorrow's bedtime,
To see they should not be slighted,
Blow out the candle gently,
And kiss your friends good-night.

The New York Sun has unearthed in instance of an amusing combination of names. An English clergyman on a certain Sunday last September married William Button and Elizabeth Thimble, and one of the witnesses who signed the register of the marriage was Mary Needle.

In Jewelry.

If anybody purposes giving you jewelry, be certain they buy it through me.

THE YELLOW CREPE DE CHINE

(From the Springfield Republican.)

Upon a day which fell just a week before Christmas, Katharine Hiatt sat in her room drawing on her gloves for a shopping excursion with an air of deep satisfaction. Now and then she glanced out of the window at the thickly falling snowflakes with a look of keen appreciation. She loved a snow storm, and she had the leisure to appreciate its beauty, since all her Christmas gifts were made, tied up, labeled and ready to be sent off when the proper time should come. Moreover, she had just found upon looking into her bank book that sufficient sum of spending money remained to enable her to make herself a much-desired present.

"Come in, mother," she called, in answer to a soft tap at the door.

A slender little woman in black entered, a troubled look on her gentle countenance.

"Now, dearest, don't tell me," begged Katharine, putting up a warning hand. "I know the postman's son has broken his leg, or you've heard of some people swag over on the west side without a single flannel petticoat in the family, or something. But just this week I don't wish to hear about it. I really don't. I have decided that I am going to be perfectly, absolutely happy just for the next ten days. And then when Herbert has gone back to Nebraska, I'll begin to think of the sad things in the world again, and help you feel sorry for the dreadfully unlucky people."

"I hardly think Herbert would enjoy hearing you make that speech, daughter."

"I would make him understand it," said Katharine, wiffully. "I would make it clear to him that since he lives in Nebraska and I live in Massachusetts and we see each other only once a year, we have a right to be perfectly, flawlessly happy for that week. And I would tell him how hard I worked over all the Christmas presents—even Aunt Lavina's mother, now, honestly, didn't I?—and that I wasn't lazy and I wasn't stingy, and that I really had earned my right to forget everybody but him for a week. And then I should ask him, mother, how he liked my new dress?"

"What dress, daughter?"

"The new yellow crepe de chine I am going to buy this morning, may I please your ladyship," said Katharine, flourishing her bank book. "Just the soft, beautiful, shimmering yellow that I love—the color, mother, of the evening sunshine on the hillside the day that Herbert asked me to marry him."

"Dear me!" said her mother. "Do you know that, only seven days until Christmas? And who is to make this poetical gown?"

"I said the beetle, with my thread and needle, I'll make the gown," chanted Katharine. "You forget what a genius I am, mother. And, of course, I shall get Alice Dean to come over and help me for a couple of days, she sews so nicely, after the designing is done. And I shall use that beautiful old lace I have had for so long. Won't it be lovely, mother?"

And do you think that I am very very wicked and selfish to want to stand free from all the trouble that is in the world, and be just rapturously happy for a little more than a week?"

Her mother wriggled away gently from Katharine's hug, and stood for a moment smiling at her thoughtfully.

"Dear child, do you really think you can?" she murmured. "Run along now, and buy your dress."

But the dress proved an entrancing task. Any one would be enchanted to have that rich creamy affair in silk lace. You're an angel to be willing to have it go out of your immediate family.

If you didn't have so much silver I'd advise you and yours to give Aunt yet more. There are the loveliest things. Placed and engraved pieces were never handsomer. And the smallest affairs, rather in the trinket class, are altogether engaging. You continue to go in for spoons? If so, I'll send a list of the most desirable ones.

On Monday last we went to hear Grace George. She wore some white dresses as dainty as herself, and the women of her company were also dressed with great splendor. Two frocks in the new Paquin mode were worn. One was of soft black Amazon satin with cream lace upper rigging. I've forgotten the color of the other, but it is also eked out with filmy lace from an inch or so above the waist line.

Ever your loving,

Mary.

New Toys.

When Christmas Day is over
What does the pale moon see
A-peeping through the window
Across the Christmas tree?
It sees the little Playthings,
Half forgotten now,
Faded and neglected,
Together on the floor.

Upon the flowered carpet
The woolly hams dote gaze,
The Clara doll regarding
With sad unobtrusive gaze;
And Jack the merry Jumper,
Grimes lonely and in vain,
To see the children
Come play with us again!

Four timid tops are painted,
"Toucher" but a day,
You've scarcely grown acquainted
In these brief hours of play;
Their playmates meet to-morrow
Beneath the twinkling pine
To lay the Love of Childhood
Upon the Christmas shrine.

Ah, Baby, in your dressing,
Tender but a day,
Their toyish beams are tender
To all your whims of play;
And at tomorrow's bedtime,
To see they should not be slighted,
Blow out the candle gently,
And kiss your friends good-night.

The New York Sun has unearthed in instance of an amusing combination of names. An English clergyman on a certain Sunday last September married William Button and Elizabeth Thimble, and one of the witnesses who signed the register of the marriage was Mary Needle.

In Jewelry.

If anybody purposes giving you jewelry, be certain they buy it through me.

and stood beside him, and clasped her little hands in joy.

"Oh, Santa Claus!" she said, softly. "I'm so glad you've come! They said there wasn't any! Are you cold?"

He did not speak, only nodded or shook his head in answer to her questions. Grace and Florence stood by like dream-children, too bewildered to speak, but Nannie showed him all her toys, and thanked him for the ones he brought last Christmas.

"How wonderful it all was—how wonderful to have him really here! When at last he drove away," cried Nannie. "And they all swept to the window, but he was not there. They waited, but he did not come."

"He's gone, of course," said Grace. "I didn't hear him," said Nannie.

"Don't you remember how it goes?" Florence whispered. "And away they all flew like the down of a thistle. You wouldn't hear him, of course."

"Nannie says she hears sleigh-bells now," Grace whispered, and a little louder than she dared before.

The door opened softly, and mother came in.

"I heard his sleigh-bells, I know I did," was what mother heard Nannie say, in an excited whisper.

"Oh, chickabiddies, didn't you dream it, dears?" mother said with a merry smile.

"Not no! Not! It was really true, mother! Really it was!" Nannie jumped up and down with joy.

Mother stooped down among them, and put her arms about them. "Oh, darling chickabiddies!" she said, with a great air of delight and mystery, "there is something I have to tell you that is better than Santa Claus, even so much. Who would you rather see right this minute, Santa Claus or father?"

"Oh, father! father! father!" they screamed.

And there in the doorway stood father, home again after three years.

When they had hugged and hugged and kissed him over and over again, when Bobby had been waked, too, and Mamma stood by rocking herself with happiness, it was Nannie, who nestled closest in father's arms, and drew her little slim hand down his cheek.

"But, father, dear, what a long beard you've got! Santa Claus had a long beard, too, just like that!"

SANTA CLAUS' YEAR OFF.

I know all the children will be distressed to hear that old St. Nick is sick, and will not be here this year. They will wonder how I found it out. Well, while I was busily engaged in my office late at night, seeing what I could do for the many children, good and bad, making out my lists, suddenly the lights grew dim and looking up I saw a very tiny, dwarfish-looking old man. He was all drawn and wrinkled, and red-worked and had, and as work large green spectacles. Talking long, slithering steps, he was soon at my side. "Said I 'Well?'" said he. "I am Santa Claus, young son Jim. I have come to represent you, and all that you can give me the names of all the children, good and bad, and all that they should have. So astonished was I that I could do nothing but stare, although, having seen St. Nick very often, no family likeness could I trace; but I asked if he would not hurry, so I could have a few words with him and find out if he were really a son or only an impostor."

Soon he brought out a tray and from a very greasy bag produced all things that could be of any use.

To both old and young, of any tongue—Japanese, Chinese, Russian, all Indian, American and Spanish dolls, Woolly dogs, "Tost" bears, balls and mask.

Everything longed for by lad and lass. "Now," says he, "what do you think? Am I his son, or a mere hoodwink?"

I turned, and, asking him his age, he peckered up his wrinkled face and replied:

"Years twelve hundred and nine."

Then he asked if I did not think it was getting time for him to help St. Nicholas out, for the good old man "was getting stout and near twenty centuries had rounded out."

Thinking all he said was true, from my desk a list I drew of children small, large, good and bad, and a mighty list, too, I had.

Bowing, he bade me adieu, from my office he quickly flew.

And the lights burned brightly. Keeper of the list for Santa Claus.

THE CHRISTMAS SPREAD.

Christmas Squares.

Two heaping tablespoons of chopped candied peel, two tablespoons of chopped preserved cherries, two tablespoons of cleaned sultana raisins, two tablespoons of chopped dates, one white teaspoon of rose extract and some confectioner's sugar. Chop all the fruit very fine. Put the white of egg into a basin, add the water, rose extract and stir till smooth. Add the chopped fruit and then stir in enough confectioner's sugar to form a stiff paste. Allow the mixture to dry for three hours.

Brush over with melted chocolate. When dry, turn the confection on to waxed paper and brush over the other side with the melted chocolate. When set, cut in to small squares.