

THE STORY OF A CHRISTMAS EVE

What Christmas Means

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Right now, in the midst of the busy Christmas season, is as good a time as any to sit down, and give over a few thoughts as to just what would be the condition of affairs in this country and in this age, if the Universal God had left Christmas, its festival and celebration, and all its pleasant associations out of the general Scheme of Things, and given us a Christmas-less Creation. What would the Twentieth Century and the American people do without a Christmas?

By Christmas-less is not meant Christ-less. This is not intended to be a treatise in the higher criticism or the deeper theology. By Christmas-less, is meant, an absence in this world of the spirit of Christmas. Leaving its deeper significance and its real importance out of the question, where would this old world be without the spirit of the Twenty-fifth of December.

It can easily be reckoned the greatest and most important celebration of the year, and is unrivalled by any festival, anywhere. The spirit of Christmas is unique. It imparts a general feeling of good will and happiness that if not absolutely lacking in, can never be approached in intensity and ardor, by any other holiday. The spirit of giving and doing good permeates the very air, the moment November gives place to December on the calendar, and sadness is as foreign to the general order of things as beef at Musselman's dinner. The love-labor of buying gifts and preparing them for the recipient is one of the pleasant associations of the season, and cannot be duplicated in satisfaction by any other action or undertaking. The spirit of Christmas is an extremely infectious thing and effects everybody more or less—the rich and the poor, alike. The rich are happy because they are able to celebrate it in style. The poor rejoice, mainly just because it's Christmas, and it's the time for rejoicing.

There are many creeds who do not believe in Christ and the celebration of December 25th as a religious festival, but they take unto themselves the spirit of the day, and make as merry as the most devout believer. It's the spirit of the season that grips them and grips them hard. They may question its significance, but they simply must yield to its charm and influence, and give themselves over to its celebration. It may not be the sublimest of motives, this were materialism—but the fact remains.

Christmas always seems to be the big milepost on the course of the year. Looking forward to the beautiful season and the celebration of it; seems to form a most agreeable break in the cycle of the 265 days, and take the monotony out of the years. For at least a month before, it exerts its influence, and perhaps half of that time afterwards. Sweet anticipation; delightful period of enjoyment; pleasant recollections—that's the sum total of Christmas and Christmastide.

Take the festive spirit of Christmas out of the world and this old terrestrial ball will worry along somehow, but figure on a great, big, aching void.



TWO LITTLE STOCKINGS.

Close to the fireplace, broad and wide. Two little stockings hung side by side. "Two!" said St. Nick, as down he came. Loaded with toys and many a game. "Ho-ho," with a laugh of fun. "I'll have no cheating, my pretty one, I know you dwell in this house my dear. There's only one little girl lives here."

So he crept up close to the chimney place and measured a sock with sober face. Just then a wee little note fell out. And fluttered low, like a bird, about "Aha, what's this?" said he in surprise as he pushed his specks up close to his eyes. And read the address in a child's rough pen.

"Dear Santa Claus," so it began. "I have hung for a child named Clara Hill. She's a poor little girl, but very good. So I thought, perhaps, you kindly would put a new pair of stockings for her. And help to make her Christmas bright. It's very nice of you for both stockings. Please put all in Clara's. I shan't care." Santa Nicholas brushed a tear from his eye.

And "God bless you, darling," he said with a sigh. Then softly he blew through the chimney high. A note like a bird's as it soars on high. When down came two of the funniest mortals. That ever were seen on this side earth's rare. "Hurry up!" said Saint Nick, "and nicely prepare."

All a little girl wants where money is rare. Then, oh, what a scene there was in that room! Away went the elves, but down from Of the sooty old chimney came tumbling low. A child's whole wardrobe, from head to foot. How Santa Claus laughed as he gathered them in. And fastened each one to the sock with Right at the toe he hung a blue dress. "She'll think it came from the sky," I said, "gives."

Said Saint Nicholas, smoothing the folds of blue. And tying the hood to the stocking, too. When all the warm clothes were fastened there. Then Santa Claus tucked a toy here and there. And hurried away on the frosty air. Saying, "God pity the poor and bless the dear child. Who prides them too, on this night so wild. The wind caught the words, and bore them on high. Till they died away on the midnight sky. While Saint Nicholas flew through the leav'ry air. Bringing "peace and goodwill" with him everywhere. —Sarah Keesbles Hunt.

Jack told the story while the girl distributed the parcels she had brought among the limp stockings. There was even a gift for the capacious sock that represented Dick Mason's Christmas.

"I have nothing for yours, Mr. Penfield," she said, respectfully surveying the remaining empty sock.

"A little note saying that you had changed your mind," he began. "But I haven't changed my mind," she murmured faintly.

"Are you sure?" he insisted. "Your eyes, Kitty, betrayed you when you came into this room. You were glad to see me. Say that you will go back to the Bar T with me in the spring."

"Oh, there is something in the sock," she said evasively, and she stepped forward, and thrust a small card, which she extended toward Penfield.

He took it and glanced at the opposite side. He uttered an exclamation of surprise. Then he held it out to her. She took it reluctantly. As she looked a warm flush spread over her face, and she cried impulsively, "Why, that's mine!"

It was a snapshot of the master of the Bar T ranch standing in the corral, surrounded by hundreds of horned cattle.

"Did you take that picture, Kitty?" asked Jack eagerly. She nodded shamefacedly. "How did it get in there?" he asked, with a puzzled look.

A merry voice called from the doorway: "I found it on the floor of your room. Christopher Kit, carefully wrapped in tissue paper, after you went home at Thanksgiving. Of course I recognized Mr. Penfield when he arrived yesterday, and—and I wanted something wonderful to happen on Christmas eve, and for the first time in my life it has happened. And that's all, except merry Christmas both!"

"Bless the child!" murmured Jack happily, gathering the abashed Christopher into his arms. "That's what I say, too," she whispered softly.

What's the use of Christmas if you forget it by New Year's?—Manchester Union.

(Christina Mackie.)
"I'm so anxious that you should at Christopher, Dick."
"Pray, who is Christopher? Tell me, and I, too, may be distracted at his arrival," drawled Penfield, surveying the love-stricken Dick and his bed with some disgust and turning to Amy, who was viewing him with unmistakable relish.
"Christopher Browning is our cousin," replied, with a wicked look at her brother. "The dearest fellow! Writes, 'I don't know,'" murmured Penfield, logically.
"Well, Chris does write for the magazines, or anything that will do."
"I'm not," Amy looked at him from mirth brimming eyes. She was dressing a doll for her little niece, and she tied a bow on the flaxen curls and then the effect with audible satisfaction.
"Isn't she too sweet? Now I'm going down to the village to leave this at Mrs. Lee's, and you may come, too, Mr. Penfield, for the way is long and the night is stormy."
Penfield arose with alacrity. Anything was better than sitting before the cheery fire and staring at the photograph of the girl he loved unwisely and trying to summon courage to ask unceremoniously whom the picture represented. Didn't he know?
When they reached the front door Amy ran back to the library, and he heard the rise and fall of her shrill girlish voice as she expostulated with her sister. It was evident that she spined her point, for when she returned she was smiling and her eyes were as bright as the snow crystals sparkling under the radiance from the wide open door.
"They plunged into the softly falling whiteness, and Penfield bared his head to the cold fresh air, and endeavored to thrust aside the burden that lay heavily upon his heart.
"Wasn't an ideal Christmas eve!" said Amy. "When I was a little girl—"
"Oh, when?" interrupted Jack, merrily.
"When I was a little girl," insisted Amy, solemnly. "I used to believe that something wonderful must happen on Christmas eve. I would watch at the window and look for a messenger to arrive with marvelous news or expect that a long lost uncle would appear and shower gifts upon us. But it never happened. Nothing wonderful ever happened to me," she added, with a mist of fly-
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of Christmas wishes, Mrs. Latimer and her daughters withdrew, leaving the two men alone before the fire.
When Dick Mason had finished his cigar he, too, sought his room, and then Penfield kept his lonely vigil. It was 11 o'clock, and the storm was abating. The soft spat of snow against the window panes had ceased, and there was an occasional tinkle of sleigh bells from the highway which proclaimed that belated Christmas sleepers were venturing out.
Penfield stared moodily at the picture of the girl he loved. It stood on the mantelshelf, framed in silver. It portrayed a girl in riding dress with one arm thrown over the neck of a horse, whose nose muzzled her other hand. She was a wide eyed, soft featured girl, with dark hair parted in the middle and topped by a broad felt hat. Her round chin was lifted above the low collar of her white blouse, and from the crown of her hat to the tips of her riding boots she appeared the embodiment of life, health and love. Yet love she had withheld from Jack Penfield. He was thinking of that now as he sat there—thinking how strange it was that she should have found her picture in the home of his cousin's fiancée, among people whom he had never before met, but who had greeted him warmly as Dick Mason's cousin and had taken him into their midst as one of themselves. He had come out of the west a fortnight before—out of the west where he had made his home for years—away from the open life of the plains, the free air of Montana, where he was king on his own ranch, to the overcivilized east, where to simple hearted Jack Penfield God seemed shut up in the stuffy brick and stone churches. In the wild free west God was everywhere. That was his fancy.
He had come east because a girl had implanted the germ of restlessness within him—a restlessness that forbade him peace of mind until he could persuade her to reconsider her decision. The picture before him was an enlargement of one he had taken himself with a pocket camera. Its duplicate in miniature was folded in his letter case next to his heart. In the spring Kitty Brown had come to the west to visit his neighbors, the Clarks. She was a writer, one who was tired and whose body and soul needed relaxation. She found it under the free blue sky as she skimmed over the ranges side by side with Jack Penfield when the day came for her to return to her enslaving pen.
"You do not understand," she had told him. "I could not give up my work, and I do not love you as much as I love that. You can see," she had added with that frank smile of hers, "that my love is a divided one, and you cannot accept that?"
"No," he had replied gravely. "I cannot accept a divided love." And so they had turned their horses' heads homeward, and their parting had been a warm hand clasp and—that was all.
That was all Jack Penfield had to think and dream about. The great eastern city swallowed her up. He had not asked for her address, but as the months went by and brilliant autumn claimed the land, and the broad plains and distant ranges changed color under her hard, cold touch, he grew restless, and finally in December he arranged his affairs, and leaving his foreman in charge of the Bar T outfit he had come to New York to find Kitty Brown. He had been too proud and reserved to ask for information from her friends, the Clarks, and his quest for the girl he loved had been quite hopeless. Then he had dropped in upon his cousin, Dick Mason, who had picked him up and carried him off for the holidays to the country home of the Latimers, and here he was, with the first clew to Kitty Brown staring him in the face. He felt no elation now, for with the nearness of her discovery came the thought that she would send him away again. Nevertheless he determined that he would unobtrusively to sweet, motherly Mrs. Latimer in the morning.
There was a tinkle of sleighbells drawing nearer, the faint sound of an arrival at the door, and he hastened to his feet to greet the coming stranger, whom he had almost forgotten. The hall door closed softly, and then the door of the library was pushed gently open, and a slim, dark clad figure, with arms brimming over with packages, slipped into the room and then paused abruptly as Penfield advanced.
"Mr. Browning"—Jack stopped short and stared with unbelieving eyes. The girl laughed softly, and there was joy in her eyes as she raised them to his.
"Where did you come from?" she asked, dropping her parcels to the table and extending both gloved little hands.
"From the Bar T," he replied laconically, holding her hands firmly on his great brown palms.
"Explain why you are here for all places. I left you riding the ranges in Montana, and I see you again in the country home of my cousins, and you call me Mr. Browning!" she said, withdrawing her hand and removing the heavy cloak that enveloped her.
"I was expecting Christopher Browning. I was sitting up for him. I was surprised when you entered."
"I am Christopher Browning," she said saucily. "Don't dare to tell me that you did not know that!"
"I didn't know it," he admitted humbly. "I knew you as Kitty Brown—"
"Oh, the Clarks always abbreviated it. And so you did not know you were waiting for me?" she said musingly, drawing nearer the fire and holding her hands to the comforting warmth.
"I've been waiting for you ever since you left the ranges, Kitty," he said gravely.
She turned away suddenly, and her voice shook slightly, as she replied, "I told you that you must not."
"I cannot help it, Kitty. You must know"—he began, drawing nearer to her.
"You may help me distribute my gifts," she said quickly, recovering her

Two children were sitting in front of the bright fire one evening the week before Christmas not long ago. They were tired of play, and mother and father and the big sisters and brothers had gone to town. Jennie and Bob were left with Grandma, whose knitting had dropped on her lap as if she, too, were tired.
Golden haired Jennie looked around the pretty room, but not even Alice in Wonderland or Grimm's Fairy Tales, which lay on a table near could tempt her to read to-night.
All at once Bob's dark eyes sparkled and nestling close to Grandma's side he said:
"Tell us a story, Granny, 'bout the time when you were a little girl."
The light shone on Grandma's sweet face and silver hair and the dim eyes grew soft and bright as she patted the curly head and putting her arms round Jennie's slender form, drew her close to her.
"Would you like a story about Christmas?" she said.
"Yes! yes, indeed," said both in the same breath.
"Well, a great many years ago, near the Gulf of St. Lawrence five children lived in a little house on a hill not far from the sea. On fine summer days they could go down to the beach and watch the boats come in with their loads of fish and gather pretty shells and stones. In the early spring they hunted for the sweet pink mayflowers hidden under the moss and knew when the time came to find the blue violets in the fence corners.
They picked berries, too, among the long grass of the meadows or in the woods. The older ones, Martha, Hugh and Janet, with little Esie, went to school, but delicate little Ernest stayed home with his mother.
But there was no sign of green grass or blue waves, much less of flowers or berries this Christmas morning. The whole world was covered with snow. For two days the feathery flakes had fallen from the grey sky, silent and thick and fast. Then the wind had risen and for a day and a night it had howled and whistled till the roads were blocked and the little house was covered on one side of the eaves with a great hard white bank that blocked the door and windows. It had grown very cold and although the fire in the big stove had burned nearly all night the windows were covered so thick with frost that the pretty patterns of ferns and trees and all sorts of graceful figures had disappeared and hardy Hugh could scarcely, with his hot tongue and warm breath, make a hole large enough to see through.
And now, perhaps, you had better hear something of the people who lived in this home, which humble though it was, was a very happy one.
Mr. Morton was the district teacher. He had come to the settlement seven years before and was honored both by the parents and children. He was not, however, paid, and even sober Martha little hard struggle it was to buy clothing for the family. But her son was a rare manager, and the family was poor the children never felt it.
They loved their tall, fair very dearly and thought there was one so beautiful as she in her dress of soft grey alpaca with its white collar.
But father and mother were the little folks. All sorts of nursery rhymes and stories seemed to be hid in his head and many a noisy romp and merry game the little folks had with him in the winter evenings. And this was Christmas morning, the happiest day in the year. Din as the fire was, it was bright enough to show the stockings hung close to the stove. With laugh and shout the children drew out their treasures. A scalloped cake, a bunch of raisins, a handful of nuts, sticks of home-made candy (cocking they called it), a big apple and some doughnuts do not perhaps seem great riches to you who have books and dolls and toys. But not one of you will be happier on Christmas day than were these girls and boys that morning.
The little ones hurried to show and share with father their treasures, and mother and Martha began to get the breakfast. But when did children ever want breakfast on Christmas morning?
And now the little ones must be dressed. The girls put on the pretty pink pin-flores that covered their warm feet. Hugh wore the same mother made last year from an old one of father's, and little Ernest, the pretty plaid frock with his bright yellow buttons that grandmother had sent from town.
And now, from outside, voices could be heard. Mr. Jackson, the farmer, whose big house was only a stone's throw distant, and his two big boys were busy shovelling a tunnel to the door, and before the children had grown tired of their play it opened, letting in a flood of Christmas light and showing the jolly face of the farmer, as he shouted, "A merry Christmas!"
Very soon Mrs. Jackson followed him, bringing in her snowy face, a host of good wishes and under her clean print apron, a bowl of steaming broth which Mrs. Morton must, perforce, sit down and take. The day had worn on and it was now within an hour of noon. That the quiet mother had been less busy and active than usual, the children had not noticed, but they had felt, somehow that as father moved about, his voice was very soft and tender and as leaving the little ones he put his arm round his oldest daughter and gave her his Christmas kiss; she remembered afterwards that his voice trembled.
And then the most wonderful thing happened. Bustling Mrs. Jackson carried off every one of the little troop to her own house for their Christmas dinner. As mother hastily kissed them good-bye she told them all to be good. Father had gone out and the bewildered children were beside the big house before they had time to question even it

children in those days, because they were not used to it.
There they were with packages of their own age. There were some presents and nuts to eat. The older children helped to set the long table. The young cloth, the pretty dishes, the bright and polished steel knives and forks were set in their proper places on the table. The big dining-room with its warm fire in the great Franklin stove, its warm carpet and gay rug, was so comfortable. The children were so glad to be home, and so glad to have a distance settlement had been so long Christmas with their friends and Mrs. Jackson had not yet come home. But by the time the big dinner was cooked she was ready to sit at the table and help her double family to all the good things she and her daughters had provided. It would take too long to tell of the big dinner, but the pumpkin pie and the mince which disappeared so merrily were the too many a story they told their schooner to the were to be bought of apples were handed old friends set apart arose an odor, strange and charming, filled the of the cask of rum that the schooner's cabin stories grew jollier a song from the where they had spent was sung.
But now the over. The snow lighted with gle by their kind very quiet upon them, sh their father c bearing in his de. To the show his white bundle, hair, that had home on that Then he led where tended l mother lay w smiling happy in her bosom

THE CHRISTMAS BELLS' MISONS.

(Will Carleton in Every Where.)
Sadness and Gladness were walking together. As oft they had done before, Sadness was sighing, and Gladness replying. With jewels of laughter galore. "How on this earth can you find any mirth?" "When sorrow is sown in your sight?" "Who wean you sigh?" was the merry reply. "When an' of the world is so bright?" Jauntily swaying, the Christmas bells' singing. Came joyfully sweet to the ear: Sadness, unheeding Despondency's pleading. Sent upward a sweet smile of cheer. But Gladness a tear dropped, warm and sincere. For the pain that the Christ-Martyr bore. And each saw the other; and Gladness and Sadness. Twined arms, and were friends evermore.