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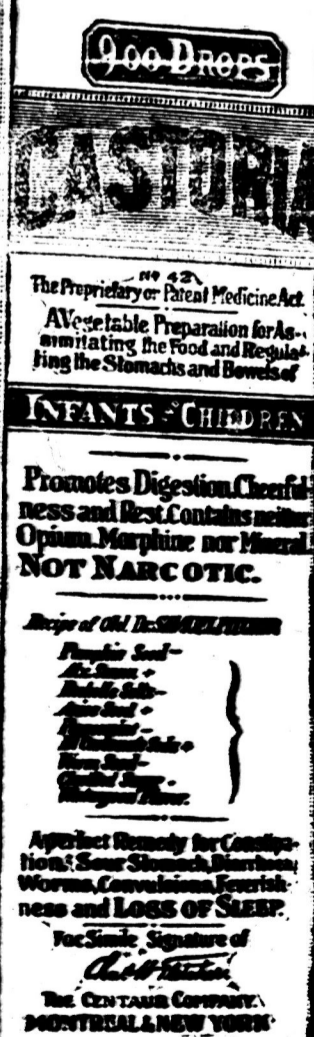
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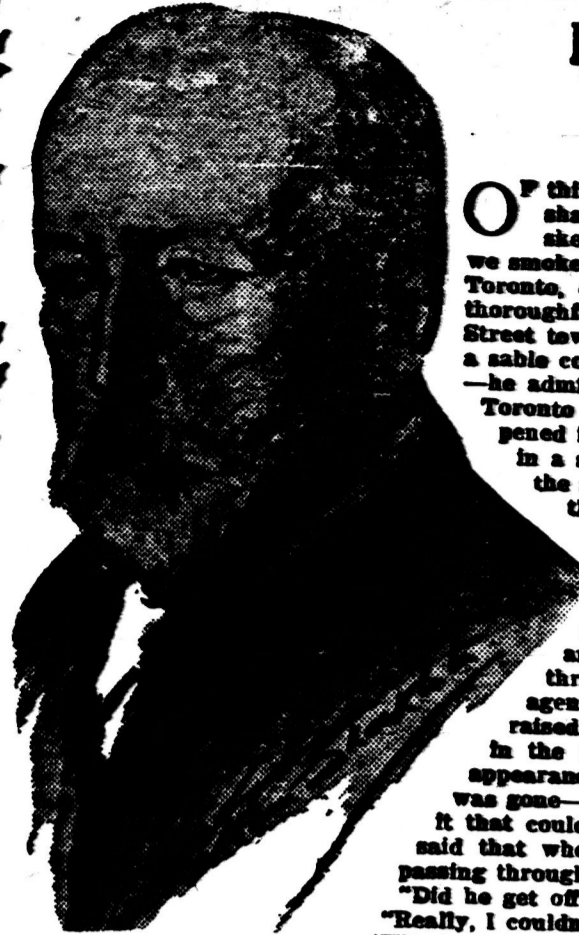
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A Christmas Story

By Order of the President



Of this story the late Sir William Van Horne is the hero, and I shall endeavor to reproduce the scenes as he so clearly sketched them to me in his home one winter night, the while we smoked the after-dinner cigar. Picture then a Christmas eve in Toronto, crowds of shoppers abroad in the brilliantly illuminated thoroughfares, and Sir William Van Horne walking down Yonge Street towards the station in a magnificent fur-lined overcoat with a sable collar. Yes, he was proud of the passengers instead of in a special car. When he got on the train, prior to going to the smoking-room, he threw off his new coat and threw it over the back of his seat. There he left it.

"I haven't the least idea. I was reading at the time and didn't take much notice of him."

By the president's orders, the train was pulled up at a wayside station, and a wire was sent back to Burketon Falls to put the police on the track of any man seen wearing a black, fur-lined overcoat with a sable collar.

Then Sir William, in his democratic way, strolled forward to the baggage car to hunt out another coat from his baggage. As he passed through the third-class coach, he saw a man sitting there wearing an overcoat remarkably like the one he had lost. But the collar was turned up and he could not be sure. He scrutinized the man carefully and passed on to the end of the car. Then he turned back through the car and gazed steadily into the man's face.

The man turned and quickly averted his gaze from the piercing scrutiny. In that glance the president knew him to be guilty. He leaned over the man and said in a low voice: "Come forward with me to the baggage car."

"What for?" asked the man obstinately.

"Because I say you've got to," replied the president, "unless you want a fuss made before the other passengers?" The man got up and followed the president without another word. The conductor, at a sign from the president, also followed.

"Now," said the president sternly, when the baggage car was reached, "where did you get that overcoat?"

The man looked at his questioner sheepishly.

"I don't see that I'm bound to tell you," he answered.

He was evidently a laboring man and was overshadowed and subdued by the president's manner. His face was bronzed and his weather-beaten; it was by no means the face of a criminal. He looked like one of the great army of workers who, by labor with pick and shovel and axe, spend their lives in conquering the wilderness for the fellow-men.

With a quick movement the president slipped his fingers into the breast pocket of the coat and pulled out a silk handkerchief. On one corner of this was his own initials.

"Do you know to whom that belongs?" asked the president, shaking the handkerchief threateningly in the man's face.

"No."

"That handkerchief belongs to me, and that overcoat you've got on belongs to me. Now do you know what I'm going to do with you? I'm going to hand you over to the police at the next station."

"Oh, sir!" exclaimed the man, almost in tears.

He stripped off the overcoat and held it out.

"Here's your overcoat. I didn't mean to steal it. I saw it lying on the seat, and I thought some passenger had got out and forgotten it. Really, sir, I never meant to steal it!"

"If you didn't mean to steal it, why didn't you hand it to the conductor?"

"I thought if I didn't take it somebody else would. I looked on it as a stroke of luck, that's all."

"Well, you'll find it a stroke of bad luck for you, my man!" "Get a policeman as soon as we get into Bethany Junction," he said to the conductor. "I'll look after this man meanwhile."

"My God, sir! don't do it!" pleaded the man. "I'll drive my poor wife crazy. I haven't been

"What sort of a man was he?"

"I suppose you've got four or five little ones looking forward to your coming home Christmas?"

"Yes, sir." Tears came in the man's eyes; a choking sob burst from him.

"Shut up, you snivelling coward!" roared the president. To see the man actually in tears angered him beyond measure.

The brakes were already grinding on the wheels. The man put his hand on the president's arm. "Don't do it, sir," he said. "I don't ask it for myself, but for my wife and youngsters. There's no harm done. You've got your coat."

The president shook him off roughly. "You common thieves," he said—and the words cut the laborer like a knife—"common thieves are always afraid to face the music. You always snivel about your wife and family at home when you're found out. But I've made up my mind to stop your little games on this railroad and I'm going to do it!"

"Jump out and get a policeman," he said to the conductor, as the train came to a standstill.

A few minutes afterwards the conductor returned with a policeman, and the man, silent and dejected, was marched off into the dark night in custody.

When the train started off again for Montreal the president roared in the baggage car. He sat on the top of a pile of boxes, quietly smoking a cigar and dangling his feet. His gaze was fixed on a new perambulator, but it was a long time before he really saw it.

When the conductor came in he nodded toward the perambulator, and remarked: "Seasonable present, eh?"

"Yes, sir, a very useful sort of article," replied the conductor.

"But what I want to know," replied the president, "is why anybody should buy a wheeled baby carriage at this time of the year?"

A man thought that for sure. A woman would have bought one with runners at this time of the year.

"Of course she would," replied the conductor. "But the man must have had a busy time shopping, mustn't he? There's a rocking horse in the baby carriage; there's a toboggan; there's a turkey, and, oh—dozen of things."

"It'll be a pretty happy Christmas wherever that baby carriage and its load is going."

"Yes, a carriage for the new baby, and lots of presents for a pretty healthy little family, by the look of it."

The label on the baby-carriage caught the eye of the conductor. He lifted it with his thumb and forefinger, and bent over to look at it. Then he dropped it as though it burned his fingers, and turned to the president with something like consternation in his face.

"What does it say?" asked the president. "Why man, anybody would think 'twas dynamite with a live fuse attached to look at you. What's on the label, anyway?"

"It says 'John Kennedy, Peterborough.'"

"Holy Caesar!" exclaimed the president, springing to his feet. "Why that's the man who took my overcoat—the man I had arrested!"

"Yes, sir."

The president stood for a long time looking at his cigar. He recalled the pitiful pleadings of the man, his pale, agonized face, the unmanly tears.

"I'll drive my poor wife crazy," the man had said, "I haven't been home for six months—been rail-roading back in the bush. She and the little 'uns have been expecting me for Christmas."

Sir William thought of his own wife and family in his luxurious home in Montreal. They were waiting for him this Christmas eve, he knew, waiting and counting up the hours before he would return. Yet he had only been away two weeks. As a contrast he pictured some humble little home in Peterborough where a poor woman, who had not seen her husband for six months, was waiting this Christmas eve for his arrival. She would have scrubbed up the house till it looked as clean as a new pin. She would have a dainty meal ready for her husband and the president's imagination added the domestic touch of a woman hanging out clean clothes on the little children, and probably at this moment, was telling them for the hundredth time, "Your father's coming home!" And the little children! Surely they were dancing about the house and saying, "Daddy's coming! Daddy's coming!" He knew what little children were!

Lastly came a stinging thought. The baby carriage was probably meant for a new baby that the father had never seen.

The president began to repent. After all, what had the man done? Probably he really thought the overcoat was lost, and had picked it up just the same as a man might pick up a ten-dollar bill on the floor of a hotel, feeling he might as well have it as anybody else.

When the train got to the next station, Sir William jumped out and walked into the little station house.

"Give me that key," he said to the astonished operator. The president had been an operator in his early days, he at once sat down at the telegraph instrument and gave the call for Bethany Junction. When he got through to that place he sent a message that considerably surprised the operator at the other end.

"Get Kennedy, the man arrested this evening, released immediately. His arrest a regrettable mistake. Get out an engine and one car and immediately run a special through to Peterborough. Kennedy must get there to-night."

"By whose orders?" asked the operator at the other end.

"By order of the president, William Van Horne," was the reply.

At Peterborough station that night a woman named Kennedy, with a baby in her arms, and three or four little ones flocking around her, was considerably astonished to hear an important looking gentleman, who stopped from the train on which she had expected her husband, inquiring for her by name.

"Is Mrs. Kennedy here?" roared Sir William.

"Yes, sir," said the woman timidly. "I'm Mrs. Kennedy."

"Your husband is coming along on the next train," said Sir William.

"He'll be here in a couple of hours. Here, let me shake your hand and wish you a Merry Christmas. God bless you, ma'am! God bless you!"

He jumped on the train and was gone.

And in the hand that the president had shaken Mrs. Kennedy found a Christmas present. It was a twenty-dollar bill!

Christmas Appeal

The Hospital for Sick Children

COLLEGE ST., TORONTO.

Dear Mr. Editor:—

Thanks for your kindness in allowing the privilege of appealing at this Christmas time on behalf of the Hospital for Sick Children, Toronto.

In the 46 years of the Hospital's existence there have been treated within its walls 24,106 children as in-patients; 221,705 as out-patients; a grand total of 245,811 in and out-patients.

The Hospital for Sick Children gives a province-wide service, for little patients from every section of Ontario have sought its aid. Last year 499 patients were admitted from 232 places outside the city of Toronto. In 1914 there were 334 from 210 places.

Of the 2,533 in-patients last year 1,771 were medical cases and 1,064 surgical. In the orthopedic department, of the 2,533 in-patients, 264 were treated for deformities, 21 Pett's disease of the spine, 10 lateral curvature of the spine, 18 bow-legs, 57 club-foot, 17 scoliosis of the spine, 42 club-foot, disease of knee, hip, ankle, wrist and elbow; 76 infantile paralysis, 8 wry neck, and 21 miscellaneous.

Our battle is never-ending—in one that will continue while the world lasts, for it is the fight between the armies of life and death, to save the child who, the sick little ones, sons and daughters, not only of our soldier men, but of the fathers and mothers still in this home-land province.

The Hospital is beating back disease and death, the enemies that assail the lives of little children as the British Empire is beating back Germany, Austria and Turkey, the enemies that assail the life of liberty.

So we appeal to the generous people of Ontario not to forget those so near and dear to us, who lie in the beds and cots of this great charity.

Will the people at large, as of old, respond to our call? Will they remember that every day is a war year for the Hospital, every day a day of battle, and that the Hospital needs money, not for its own sake, but for the children's sake?

The Hospital has waged its war for forty years. The people of Toronto and Ontario have been its friends, and this year of all years it requires help. Surely you will give to a charity that cares for every sick child in Ontario, for only as your money reaches the Hospital can the Hospital's mercy reach the children.

Every dollar is a link of kindness in the chain of mercy that joins the money in your pocket to the miseries of some child's life, some mother's heart.

Remember that Christmas calls you to open the purse of your kindness to the Hospital that the Hospital may open the heart of its help to the children.

Will you send a dollar, or more if you can, to Douglas Davidson, Secretary-Treasurer, or

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"A Merry Christmas" to all. James Speakman, President of the United Farmers' of Alberta, died at Calgary.

A deputation from the Ontario Education Association asked the Acting Minister of Education for important amendments in the proposed teachers' pension scheme.

The National Liberal Advisory Council to consist of fifty members, has been constituted as an outcome of the Conference called by Sir Wilfrid Laurier at Ottawa.

WALLPAPERS—New Stock of the Scotch Outings just arrived. The Jarvis Drug Store.

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