

Merry Christmas To All.



SANTA CLAUS AT GRIMM'S RANCH.

A Story for Christmas.



THOUSAND pardons, but could the senior the change give for two gold pieces of \$20? John Wells jerked his newly-urged horses to a standstill and glared his annoyance at the heavily-bearded Mexican who, with doffed sombrero, had suddenly confronted him at a point where the Menardville road, extricated itself from the scattered jacals of Fort McKavett, and headed out for the open prairie. It was early morning of the 24th of December, 1895. Wells had freshly risen from an unappetizing and indigestible breakfast of grease-sodden tortillas and rancid bacon; had quarreled with the hotel keeper over his extortionate charges for the last night's lodging; was hungry; angry with the sharp sleet that came drifting against his face from the northeast; angry with the "infernal luck" that doomed him to wander over the wild prairies of southwestern Texas while the rest of mankind were happily preparing for the holiday festivities; angry at the abominable cabbage-leaf cigar which refused to yield him solace from his woes; angry with the world at large and—just at that moment—with the disreputable looking "Greaser" before him in particular.

"Two gold pieces of \$20," he growled. "Where are they? Are they counterfeited? How did you come by them?" The Mexican gravely held them forth in his dirty palm for inspection. "They are gold, senior. They were given me by the American, Senior Black—who sends the meat of goats across the seas in cans. The money is the price of 40 goats that I drove from the Rio Concho." Wells regarded the Mexican with a searching gaze of suspicion. "I know Col. Bill Black, and his gold is good. But I think I know you, too. You were in the hotel just now when I paid my bill, and I think I saw you last night at the store where I bought those cursed cigars. I believe you want to learn if I have money, so you can relieve me of it farther out on the plains." The object of Wells' distrust threw his arms aloft in humble deprecation. "The Sacred Mother knows!" "Never mind that nonsense," exclaimed Wells, roughly. "I'm no baby, and I'll take



"THEY ARE GOLD, SENOR."

chances on you and all the Greasers in McKavett. I'll give you silver for your gold; and here in this sack is more money—white and yellow—that you may have for the taking. Don't be afraid of the guns—they are never loaded—but sail in as soon as you can raise your crowd and overtake me." The Mexican made no reply to this bland bit of encouragement, but his snaky eyes gleamed evilly from their covert of steely brows, as they rested upon the plump sackskin pouch nestled between the butts of a heavy shotgun and a winchester rifle. He was profuse in his thanks for the American's kindness, but Wells' only response was a short grunt as he once more drew the blankets closely around him and chirruped to his not-over-willing team. It was a long drive to Menardville, and a longer one to the nearest railway station, the point for which Wells was now heading. Ever since the middle of November he had been driving here and there among the scattered ranches, on a collecting trip for his employers, a prominent firm of San Antonio merchants; and he was more than anxious to get back to civilization once more. He had been successful in his mission and had remitted several large sums by express; but

his collections had been heavy during the last few days, and at least \$3,000, in bills and coin, were stowed away in his pockets and in the buckskin bag at his feet. It was a large sum of money and he naturally felt the responsibility its possession involved. John Wells was by no means a coward, but he was perfectly acquainted with the country and its people, and knew that the chance of acquiring one-tenth the amount he carried would be sufficient to prompt many of the latter to murder. He had been particularly struck with the villainous face and suspicious demeanor of the goat-herder, and the uneasiness aroused by the little incident of the morning hung over him during the entire day.

Without making his usual noonday halt, he drove steadily on, occasionally glancing back over the dim trail, in momentary expectation of finding himself pursued. However, evening came without anything having transpired to increase his alarm, and an hour before darkness closed down upon the bleak plains he drew rein before the door of a lone ranch and, without the usual preliminary of applying for accommodations, began divesting his tired horses of the harness.

As he unhooked the tugs of the off horse, a tow-headed urchin of eight or nine years came strolling up from the near-by corral, crept into the buggy seat and drew the blankets over his head until only his boyish face and sparkling eyes were visible. "What's your name, mister?" he asked, with childlike directness. "Jack Wells. What's yours?" "Hank Grimm. I'm only Little Hank. Old Hank is my gran'paw, and he owns this ranch. The Mexicans call this 'Dos Botas Ranch,' 'cause gran'paw gives the 'two boot' brand. Say, mister, do you know who I thought you might be when you drive up?"

"Couldn't guess." "I thought maybe it was Santa Claus, but then I allow he's got more whiskers'n you have. Still, he might have shaved." Wells admitted that Santa Claus might, by way of a change, conclude to make his annual trip with a beard of three weeks' growth, or even a smoothly-shaven face. Further than that he couldn't, under the circumstances, blame Little Hank for looking upon all strangers with an eye of suspicion; but he thought the chances of popping his gaze on Santa Claus by daylight were extremely small. Several millions of boys, in different parts of the world, had been keeping their eyes open for years without avail, and there had come to be a popular belief that the jolly fellow with the reindeer traveled principally in the dark.

"That's the way he hit this ranch last Christmas, and I reckon he left it till about the last ranch on his rounds," remarked the boy. "He didn't leave me a thing that I wanted—nuthin' but a little tin wagon and a pound of candy. Say, mister, d'ye reckon Santa Claus ever handles winchesters?" The appearance of the elder Hank Grimm spared Wells the necessity of answering this difficult query. The owner of the "Two Boot ranch" was a man well advanced in years, and possessed of a sturdy, erect figure, square-cut features and sky-blue eyes, that told at once of German ancestry and of past service in the armies of the old world or the new. He welcomed the traveler heartily, directed him how to dispose of his horses for the night, and then abruptly turned away and entered the house. Little Hank remained behind and, in his quaint, boyish way, superintended Wells' every movement.

A covey of quail that had been foraging in the vicinity of the crib flushed at their approach and settled in the prairie grass a short distance away. Little Hank clamored to have one of them killed for his Christmas breakfast, and to please him, on their return to the buggy, Wells slipped a couple of bird loads in his Parker, and, when the covey rose again, grassed three plump beauties with a hasty double shot. The boy was in perfect ecstasies over his success.

"That's better'n you could do with a winchester," he remarked, in a tone denoting that he considered this the height of possible praise. "Gran'paw says a shotgun is no good; but I reckon it depends a heap on who shoots it. I never seed but one before, and it wasn't with shucks. It belonged to a man from Arkansas, and he couldn't hit the broadside of a mule."

The traveler's effects were soon transferred to the living room of the ranch, where he was introduced to the ranchman's aged wife, and found that the only occupants of the place were themselves and their precocious grandson. Grimm was a German of the old school, with true Teutonic ideas of comfort, and it seemed that unusual preparations for the evening meal had been made in honor of his visitors. All in the way of food that the ranch could offer was on the table, and, surmounting the array of snowy biscuits, ham and eggs, juicy steak and canned fruit, stood a group of ancient glass decanters, their contents shining in a gradation of colors from deep red to straw yellow.

Little Hank seemed to look upon his share of the feast as an especial treat, and after it was disposed of his tongue ran more glibly

than ever. At length his grandire suspended for a moment a morsel of beef half raised to his mouth, and uttered a word of reproof. "Henry, my boy, it is not right that the children should talk and the grown ones listen. Remember, you should be very good to-night. They say that Santa Claus to bad boys is not kind."

"But see," retorted the lad, quickly. "I was good before and what did he bring me? Nothing. I wanted a winchester and he brought me a tin wagon."

"The child would be a man before his time," put in his grandmother. "He talks of nothing but guns; and if he had them he would kill us all, and himself in the bargain."

"I would be a brave soldier—like my father," said the boy, his eyes filling with tears.

"And be killed by the Indians, as was he," responded the old ranchman. "My child, the Grimms have been soldiers since the earliest days. I have fought, in my time, with brave men to lead me on to battle, and I tell you there is nothing in soldiering—noting but hard work and slavery and bloodshed and death. It is a dog's life; nothing more."

Later in the night, when Wells and Little Hank were snugly stowed away in the latter's bed, the question of Santa Claus and the "winchester" came up again, but no lengthy discussion followed. It must have been sometime after midnight when Wells was partially aroused by the knowledge that some one was moving in the room, and called out to know who it might be.

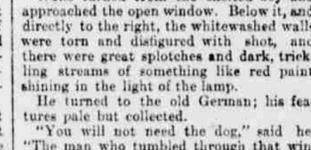
"Nobody but me—Hank Grimm. Not gran'paw, but the little one. You know—"

But that was quite enough for the somnolent gentleman from San Antonio. If the sentence was finished he failed to hear its conclusion. Sometime afterwards, however, he was aroused again; and this time so thoroughly that he heard and understood the words that awoke him. They evidently came from the "living room" into which his apartment opened, and were uttered at the top of Little Hank's childish treble.

"That now, Santa Claus, I've got you this time, and either that winchester comes or I down your meat-house. No tin wagons for me this Christmas."

There was a fierce covey grittingly muttered; the sharp crack of a pistol; and then—boom! boom!—two thunderous reports almost as one, shaking the adobe walls of the ranch to their foundations. A dense volume of smoke rolled into the sleeping room, but Wells charged through it with ready rifle, reaching the outer apartment just as old Grimm entered from another door light in hand.

Little Hank lay beneath the huge table, groaning dimly and rubbing his shoulder. Otherwise the room was unoccupied; but a window near the door was open, and on the



"I'VE GOT YOU THIS TIME, SANTA CLAUS."

hard dirt floor lay a freshly discharged pistol and a Mexican sombrero. "It is robbers that have been here," exclaimed the ranchman. "It is Mexican robbers, and they have shot my boy!"

Wells dived beneath the table, brought forth the injured lad and placed him tenderly in a chair; but he at once struggled to his feet. "Turn loose the dog, gran'paw, or he will get away. It's Santa Claus, and I'm blamed if he didn't miss me with his pistol right slap in my face. I never knowed afore that Santa Claus was an Arkansas man."

Wells turned from the excited boy and approached the open window. Below it, and directly to the right, the whitewashed walls were torn and disfigured with shot, and there were great splashes and dark, trickling streams of something like red paint shining in the light of the lamp.

He turned to the old German; his features pale and collected. "You will not need the dog," said he. "The man who tumbled through that window is lying where he fell—and I think I will recognize him when I see him."

Wells was right in both his surmises. In "layin' for Santa Claus" Little Hank had taken a step that no midnight marauder could have foreseen. In forcing an entry to Grimm's ranch, the Mexican goat-herder, who had trailed Wells all the way from McKavett, had gone directly to his death. His lay outside the window, as he had fallen when the bulk of two loads of buckshot had struck him, and when Little Hank gazed into his dead face, its pallor more ghastly still in the lamplight, he screamed and staggered back, covering his eyes with trembling hands.

"I don't want to be a soldier," he sobbed. "I never want to kill another man as long as I live." But his sturdy old granddam—descended, no doubt, from a long line of warlike Teutons—took him in her strong arms consolingly. "But this man was a robber, my dear. Killing was his deserts, for he came to murder us all in our sleep. You saved our lives, and now would you turn toward and make us ashamed?"

NOBODY CLAIMED THE WATCH.

That Is Why the Reintor of This Story Kept a Remarkable Time-piece.

"Great Scott! but that's a fine watch," came from a chorus. "Where'd you ever get it?" "Stole it," answered its possessor, calmly, relates the Philadelphia Inquirer. "You don't believe me, do you?" he went on. "Well, I'll tell you how it happened. I was on a western district which enjoyed the reputation of being the toughest one covered by the house. I had some time to kill and so went into one of the gambling joints. It isn't necessary to go into details as to what happened. As luck would have it there were a half dozen others in the place besides myself who might be considered as possible victims. When the time came the lights were put out suddenly and then we had 'rough house' for about ten minutes. In the middle of it I felt somebody grab my watch and reached out after him. I caught some one and felt that he was just putting a watch in his trousers pocket. I gave his wrist a hard wrench and got the timepiece. Then I broke away. When I got to the light I found the watch was this one. And as I never heard from the owner I have it to compensate for the loss of mine."

After which the waiter hurried over in response to six different signals.

INFLUENZA FROM OZONE.

Pure Air from Lake Michigan Gave an Investigator an Extremely Hard Cold.

On one occasion the present writer walked to the edge of Lake Michigan when a strong wind was blowing right from the lake. The bodily condition was as near perfect as could be, says Popular Science, and yet in less than five minutes there was every evidence of having caught an extremely hard cold. The severe influenza continued until, on walking away, in less than 500 feet, it disappeared as if by magic. It is very certain that the temperature had nothing to do with this, nor the wind, but the influenza was directly due to the abundant ozone in the air. By inquiry it was learned that hundreds of residents who had lived upon the immediate edge of the lake had been obliged to move back three or four miles in order to relieve themselves from such experiences. Physicians readily admit that it is not always possible to say why one "catches" cold; it certainly cannot always be because of undue exposure or change in temperature, but probably also to changes in the electric condition of the air. Facts of this kind should lead to the extreme caution in studying any supposed relation between the weather and health.

BURIED TREASURE.

Hidden Gold Over Which a Blind Negro Raved for Thirty-Five Years.

There is an old negro, Uncle Tom Weston, down on the Florida side of the Okefinokee swamp, who has raved for 35 years about a buried treasure which he is unable to recover. He says, reports the Cincinnati Enquirer, his old master buried \$25,000 in gold during the civil war when Sherman's army was marching through Georgia. He carried the treasure box for his master and dug a hole in the swamp in which the gold was buried. An accident made him blind before the war and he was not able to see where the treasure was concealed. His master died during the war without recovering the gold and left no instructions concerning it. Uncle Tom has suffered from rheumatism for many years and is a cripple. Though he is blind and crippled, Uncle Tom has made many trips to the swamp in quest of the hidden treasure, only to be disappointed. The old man is afraid somebody has already recovered it, as he understands several parties instituted a search. He is the oldest negro in the Okefinokee region, and he sits on his door sill all day long wondering about the buried treasure and sorrowing because he must die without succeeding in recovering it.

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Health is lost by neglecting to keep the blood pure, but it is regained by purifying, enriching and vitalizing the blood with the great health restorer, Hood's Sarsaparilla. Thousands who thought health had been permanently lost have been made perfectly well by taking this great medicine. Your experience may be the same.

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When the coal man joins church he evidently believes it's time for him to mend his ways.

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Birds of a feather are in demand for hats.

TO STARVE IS A FALLACY.—The dictum to stop eating because you have indigestion has long since been exploded. Dr. Von Star's Pineapple Tablets introduced a new era in the treatment of stomach troubles. It has proved that one may eat his fill of anything and everything that he relishes, and one tablet taken after the meal will aid the stomach in doing its work, and preclude the possibility of any distress. 18 in a box, 10 cents.

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Turkeys are beginning to wonder what they will have for Christmas dinner.

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FIND OUT YOURSELF.

Why ask a physician to find out whether your kidneys are diseased. Take a glass tumbler and fill it with urine. If there is a sediment after standing twenty-four hours, your kidneys are sick. If you have a desire to urinate often, a pain in the back, or if your urine stains linen, you should at once take Dr. David Kennedy's Favorite Remedy, as delay is dangerous. There is no question about its being the best and surest medicine in the world for any and all diseases of the kidneys, liver, bladder and of the urinary passages, rheumatism, dyspepsia or constipation of the bowels. It quickly relieves inability to hold urine, and the necessity of getting up often during the night. It stops that scalding pain when passing urine and corrects the bad effects of whiskey and beer.

It is sold by all druggists at one dollar a bottle. You can have a trial bottle and pamphlet of valuable medical advice sent free by mail postpaid, by mentioning the COLUMBIAN and sending your address to the DR. DAVID KENNEDY CORPORATION, Rondout, N. Y. The publisher of this paper guarantees the genuineness of this liberal offer.

The '99 calendar's days are numbered.

The pickpocket isn't so anxious to keep a watch on his victim as to take it away from him.

In another column will be found the advertisement of Wilmer Atkinson Co., publishers of the Biggle Books. In conciseness of statement, in the thoroughness with which the ground has been covered, the Biggle Books have won praises on every hand. The best-of-down, common-sense, cream not skim-milk method, which characterizes the pages of the "Farm Journal" has been carried out in their preparation. For mechanical effect no expense or pains have been spared, and the highly finished paper, the beautiful illustrations, the excellent type and press work, and the handsome cloth binding, makes these books models of the printer's art. The color work in the Berry, Poultry and Cow Books has never been attempted before in any book selling for a reasonable price. No farm or rural home is complete without Judge Biggle's Books, and no one interested in these subjects can afford to let another day go by without sharing in the helpful things with which their pages are filled. Pay \$4 for a farm library other than this and you will not have more value. The price is 50 cents, free by mail; address the publishers, Wilmer Atkinson Co., Philadelphia.

If riches take unto themselves wings, it stands to reason that a rich young man should be a trifle flighty.

Now is the time to practice writing 1900.

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CASTORIA. The Kind You Have Always Bought. Bears the Signature of Chas. H. Fletcher

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Illustrated, largely in color, from pictures made in Palestine by CORWIN KNAPP LINSON.

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SCIENCE AND EXPLORATION.

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Filter Plants of Europe

Bacteriology in Commerce

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INTERESTING ARTICLES by Lieut. Richmond P. Hobson, Capt. Joshua Slocum, Hamlin Garland, R. S. Baker, Rev. Cyrus T. Brady, Prof. E. S. Holden, Ex-Gov. G. S. Boutwell, and others.

Lieut. Peary's Latest Campaign for the Pole

Cy Warman's Account of the Klondike Railroad

On the Greatest Ship Afloat.

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