

BAD CHILDREN'S CHRISTMAS



THIS is a story of last Christmas day; and I will tell you right away that it ended happily. But it begins sadly. It was Christmas day up at the North pole, and as usual on the day before Christmas, St. Nicholas had been hurried and rather grumpy. Only this time, Mother Nicholas thought to herself that he was just a bit grumpier than she had ever known him. And at suppertime she found that she was right.

He came into the kitchen, closing his workshop door with a bang, and sat down with all the little Nicholases to his porridge.

"Well, I've said it before," he growled, "but this time I mean it. The children down there in the world will get nothing from my pack this night. It's time they were taught a lesson."

All the little Nicholases gasped, but Mother Nicholas only asked calmly: "Why, what is the matter now, father? After you've been working for them the whole year, you wouldn't go and disappoint the poor dears would you?"

"Yes, I would," declared St. Nicholas, swallowing his porridge in great gulps, and pretending that he was not a saint at all. "Half of them go around saying that there isn't any St. Nicholas, poking fun at me, and laughing in their sleeves. And the other half think it makes no difference whether they are good children or not, I'll fill their stockings just the same. It's a thankless job, I tell you. And I'm too old a man for it. So!"

"Come," said Mother Nicholas, soothingly, "here is a plate of griddle cakes. When you have eaten you will see things differently."

"No, when I have eaten I shall go to bed. That's where an old fellow like me belongs, an old fellow who children don't believe in."

Mother saw that he was determined, and that there was nothing to do for it, since griddle cakes wouldn't help. So she put her finger to her lips to motion the children silent, and went on quietly about her work. And when St. Nicholas had finished his supper, he did roll away to bed, only telling the little Nicholases to be sure to hang their stockings, for they had been good children all the year and still believed in him.

The minute the door closed behind him the little Nicholases burst into excited chatter. "Oh, what a pity! Those poor children! Surely there must be some good ones! Oh dear, what fun will Christmas be to us if all the children in the world down there are unhappy!"

"What indeed!" Mother Nicholas shook her head and looked often at



"Yes, I would," declared St. Nicholas.

the closed door, behind which St. Nicholas could already be heard snoring.

"And the reindeer!" cried the oldest boy, "what will they do without their yearly exercise? It seems as though father might have gone, if only for their sakes."

Mother Nicholas thought so, too. And at that minute they heard the reindeer's little hoofs beating on the hard snow crust at the door. Wise little beasts! St. Nicholas had never delayed the Christmas-Eve journey so long before, and so here they were to save him the trouble of going for them. The Nicholas children felt that they never could face the poor little reindeer's disappointment.

But what was Mother Nicholas doing so busily over there by the cupboard? The children looked in amazement. It was seldom that mother left the snowhouse at any time of day. And here she was, after dark, and Christmas Eve, too, putting on her hood and cape, and pulling on her gaiters!

"Are you going to drive the reindeer back to the stables?" asked the oldest boy. "Oh, please, let me. Father always lets me, you know."

Mother shook her head. "I'll not be

driving them back to the stables until this night's work is done," she said. "If you're awake when we get back you may do it as always."

How the children stared! "Was little old mother going all alone on that long, wild drive over towns and forests and oceans and up and down chimneys, and goodness knows where, without asking St. Nicholas if she might?"

Yes, that was just what she was going to do! "For, when a good thing needs doing," she said brightly, "no permission is needed."

"Keep the fire going, be sure that the baby has the fur rug well up around his chin, and give your father a good breakfast when he wakes," she called over her shoulder and was away out of the door almost before they had realized that she was going. They heard the scampering of the reindeer hoofs, faster the dimmer they got, and then just the stillness of the North pole.

That was last Christmas Eve. And if you ask any child who lay awake to see St. Nicholas, and peeped out with one eye, all the time pretending to be fast asleep, he will tell you that it wasn't St. Nicholas he saw at all. It was just a tiny, sprightly old lady with frosty white curls and a red hood, who filled naughty Willie's stocking just as full as good Marguerite's, and



St. Nicholas Welcomed Her Back Affectionately.

left many more bon-bons in both than was usual. That peeping child will also tell you that before she went back up the chimney, she gave baby a kiss on his pink cheek, a thing St. Nicholas (who is as afraid of babies as a burglar is, and for the same reason) has never been known to do.

And mother, will you believe me, in spite of having stopped to kiss all the babies, was back at the North pole a whole hour earlier than St. Nicholas had ever been able to make it, even in his younger days. Her work was well done, too! But in spite of the early hour, she found the children and her husband waiting for her. St. Nicholas welcomed her back more affectionately than the children.

"I woke in the middle of the night," he said, "out of such a horrid dream—all about crying children and sad mothers. Bless you, good wife, for not letting that dream come true!"

"Oh, don't mention it," said Mother Nicholas. "It was no trouble at all. Indeed, it did me good. I think, father, since you are getting so old, I will take over this job myself from now on."

St. Nicholas looked thoughtful at that. He paced up and down the floor. Then he came and stood in front of Mother Nicholas, straightening up and looking almost as young as in his early days.

"No, mother," he said firmly. "A woman's place is in the home. I'll attend to the business hereafter, thank you."

And mother, who, after all, only wanted everybody to be happy, made him some griddle cakes for his breakfast.

But that was last year, the year you got a stocking full, even though you hadn't been so very good. This year you had better watch out, for it is old St. Nicholas himself you have to deal with.

Party Supper Boxes.

Where there is seating room at the Christmas-time party refreshments are appropriately served in small boxes covered with red paper or holly patterned paper, and tied with gay ribbons in holiday color. Each box contains a sandwich, slices of cake, nuts and candies daintily wrapped in wax paper. A tissue paper napkin, in Christmas design, is folded in each box. When each person has received his or her supper box the coffee and ice cream are served and the contents of the box are eaten with it. The pretty boxes can be retained by the guests as a souvenir, or "favor," if they like such things.

Choosing the Holly.

Superstitious people assert that one should be careful about the choice of the holly for the decorations. Part should be smooth and part prickly. Then providing both kinds are carried into the house at the same time, all will be well. But should the prickly variety be taken in first, then the husband will rule the household during the coming year; if the smooth is brought in first the wife will be "top dog."

Christmas Spirit Needed.
None of us can have too much of the Christmas spirit.

SUMMARY OF PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

Washington, Dec. 8.—President Harding, in his annual message delivered today to Congress in person, deals with nearly a score of subjects, chief among them prohibition, farm credits, the transportation problem, child labor and immigration.

The Executive announces his purpose to invite the Governors of the States and territories to an early conference with the Federal executive authority with a view to adopting definite policies of national and State co-operation in administering the prohibition laws. He says the day is unlikely to come when the prohibition amendment will be repealed, and that the nation should adapt its course accordingly.

President Harding tells Congress that if the statutory provisions for prohibition enforcement are contrary to deliberate public opinion, which he does not believe, the rigorous and literal enforcement will concentrate public attention on any requisite modification.

"Such a course," he adds "conforms with the law and saves the humiliation of the Government and the humiliation of our people before the world and challenges the destructive forces engaged in widespread violation, official corruption, and individual demoralization."

Transportation Problems

With regard to the transportation problem, Mr. Harding proposes that the Railroad Labor Board be abolished with the substitution of a labor division in the Interstate Commerce Commission with ample power to require its rulings to be accepted by both parties to a disputed question. The Executive also proposes that the law require the carriers and their employees to institute means and methods to negotiate between themselves their constantly arising differences, limiting appeals to the Government body to disputes of such character as are likely to affect the public welfare.

Co-ordination of all transportation facilities is urged by the President. These would include not only in and waterways, but motor truck transportation as well. He inveighs against the system of paralleling the railroads with truck roads, thus drawing freight from the steam lines instead of making the motor truck a feeder for them.

As to the carriers themselves, Mr. Harding suggests as ways of increased economy and efficiency there be a merger of lines into systems, interchange of freight cars, the consolidation of facilities and the economic use of terminals. He declares that the managers of the lines are without that intercarrier co-operative relationship "so highly essential to the best and most economical operation," adding that they could not function in harmony when the recent strike threatened the paralysis of all railway transportation.

Credit for Farmers Urged

More extended credit for the farmers is strongly urged by the executive, who declares that the very proof of helpfulness already given is the strongest argument for the permanent establishment of widened credits. He says the farm loan bureau may well have its powers enlarged to provide ample farm production credits as well as enlarged land credits.

Two constitutional amendments are proposed. One would give Congress authority over child labor and the other would restrict the issues of tax exempt securities, which are declared to be "drying up the sources of Federal taxation and encouraging unproductive and extravagant expenditures by States and municipalities."

Would Register Aliens

Enactment of legislation providing for registration of aliens and for more thorough examination of emigrants at the ports of embarkation is urged. The President says there is a "recrudescence of hyphenated Americanism, which we thought to have been stamped out when we committed the nation, life and soul to the World War," and adds that advocates of revolution are abusing the hospitality of American shores, "finding their deluded followers among those who take on the habiliments of an American without knowing an American soul."

Registration of aliens, the President adds, will enable the nation to guard against abuses in immigration, checking the undesirable whose irregular coming is his first violation of the law, and at the same time, will facilitate the needed Americanizing of those who mean to enroll as citizens.

Defends Foreign Policy

Dealing with foreign affairs, Mr. Harding tells Congress that American relations are not only free from every threatening cloud, but the

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country has contributed its "larger influence" toward making armed conflict less likely.

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