

# Prize Christmas Essay

Written by

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Winner of the Prize in the Review Contest.

"December is here and it will soon be Christmas," is the cry of every school boy and girl.

Oh, that happy time, Christmas, when every one is happy, or at least ought to be for we are celebrating the birthday of Christ. As we gather around the evening fireside and look at gifts we have received during the day, I wonder how many think of how this same day eighteen hundred and ninety-eight years ago was spent in the little village of Bethlehem. Very different, indeed, from what it is now. Of course there were gifts, but those gifts were to express the joy of the birth of the Savior; and instead of a warm fire-side they were gathered around a lowly manger, for there was no other place for the birth-place of the Son of Man.

But let us talk a little of the time before Christmas.

When grim, blustering December and his brother the North wind make their appearance, we realize for a certainty that Winter has arrived and Christmas is not far behind.

But woe unto him who is unprepared for their appearance. They are prevailed upon and use the liberty given them regardless of every one's feelings.

And now is the time of mystery. What whispering and plotting! Every one is afraid that it will be known what they will give and what a serious thing that would be.

Then those mysterious packages that are brought home. The paper manufacturers must make the paper stronger during this time, for if they did not there would surely be holes burned in the paper by the burning eyes fastened upon it.

The shop windows, too, are in festive array, being decorated with things that would be nice to give your friends if you have plenty of money.

If only shop windows could talk they would have great tales to tell of the different faces that look through them during the day.

Some people are making presents and any one that receives a home-made present should think themselves doubly favored; for a person would not put any time on a present for anyone whom they didn't think a great deal of.

But if it doesn't snow on Christmas, Christmas will not be complete to the young people who want to go coasting, skating, or sleighriding on the moonlight night in a cutter just made for two.

As it gets nearer Christmas and the days get colder and shorter the boys and girls watch the clouds for signs of snow.

The clouds grow grayer and heavier and on Christmas Eve as we journey toward the brilliantly lighted church to listen to Christmas Anthems and recitations of "Peace on earth, good will toward men," which is the same old story, yet always so interesting, we hear said by all, "It will surely snow before morning."

When we reach home it is quite late and we are all glad to seek our warm beds. I say all, but I forget the little ones who rebel against going to bed for

they want to stay up and try and solve the mystery of how Kris Kringle with his big pack crawls down the chimney. But soon scamper off with a regretful look, when they are told that Santa Claus only visits children who are fast asleep.

Innocent little children, keep your faith in Santa as long as you can for when you fail to trust him half the joys of Christmas are over.

The next morning we find that the prophecy has come true and that the bare world of the night before is transformed into a fairy land. It still snows and we see the tiny snow-flakes flying hither and thither as though a thing so pure lured to light upon so wicked an Earth. Every building has a new roof and is remodeled into different shapes.

The trees and bushes bend to the ground with the task that Heaven has put upon them.

The little birds look around in a bewildered way as if trying to discover what had changed the aspect of things. Poor little birds, you will surely have to work for a living now!

Although we love to watch the snow we do not tarry long, for we see that the clouds are breaking and the snow will soon cease and we are eager to be away; either to go coasting or have a fine game of snow-ball, and perhaps to get our faces washed clean once more.

But before we go we must examine our stockings to see what Santa has left us.

Perhaps some may have trees so of course they travel into the parlor. The younger ones with mouths and eyes wide open to see what they think might be for them. Then when they have looked until their eyes are sore and their mouths tired of asking questions about Father Christmas, they turn away with a sigh, wishing it was evening so that the gifts might be distributed.

But in our good fortune we must not forget the less fortunate and try and remember to do as He whose birthday we are celebrating would have us do. To send a gift to these people whom ever they be, even if it be but the smallest and poorest gift, if it be given with a kind word and a cheerful spirit we will be given as much credit by Him as if it had been a costly one.

Perhaps we may share with them our dinner. And that dinner of ours! Why the table fairly groans with the good things upon it.

We all eat rather a light breakfast—the boys especially—so that we may be able to eat a little more dinner than usual. If only things were stretched out a little more through the year. But no, every thing comes on Christmas and when a person tries to eat a little of everything he feels rather uncomfortable and perhaps, may have to call the Doctor. Well, "it's an ill wind that never blows any one any good," and the Doctor reaps the benefit here.

But Christmas like all other days must close. We watch with sorrow the sun sink in the West and the moon usurp its power, for we know that the happiest day of the year will soon be gone.

## SAXONY SANTA CLAUS

HANS RUPPERT WALKS ALL THE WAY FROM RUSSIA.

A Great, Gallant Figure, With Top Boots and Mighty Pack—Christmas Customs of the Fatherland—Procession on Christmas Eve.

Hans Ruppert is the name of the Santa Claus of Saxony given by the simple, pious peasantry. "Hans Ruppert will arrive tonight!" the children of Saxony cry all along the dear, darkening twilight of Christmas eve, as they flatten their little Saxon noses against the cottage window panes, peering out along the winter roads for "our Hans Ruppert." "Hans Ruppert is coming tonight!" say the simple hearted grown up folk to one another, a people who have one evening in the winter twilight of their hard, stern lives when it will be all glow and glamour and froth of fun.

Hans Ruppert comes from Russia, from its silent mysteries of steppe and of snows. But he is not a Slav. Hans Ruppert is not the traditional Santa Claus of the Teuton land—a jolly old man with curly beard and winking smile. "Hans Ruppert is a tall, brawny, peasant looking fellow," say the good Saxony folk with a sublime earnestness as if they had seen him. Hans Ruppert has muscles minted from their own brave life of gray toil. Hans Ruppert walks all the way from afar, from the Asiatic Russia and, at every step he takes toward the Caucasus chain, at every stride up and up, still up the ledges of its rock and bluff and brae, across its brawling streams, now down on the other side of its stern shoulder shadowed in the star calm, at every pace past the Russian villages twinkling through the night mists like sparklets struck off from the czar crown way off there above the Neva, as he foots it grandly—this great, gallant Hans Ruppert—his top boots that at the beginning of the long Christmas march reached only below the knee, grow taller and taller, still higher—until when he hears the Rhein-strom murmur and the golden voice above the Lorelei rock, and at last at the gates of Berlin sees the mighty gleam of the army of the vaterland, the Hans Ruppertish boots are up to the loins, cuirassier fashion, accordion wrinkled and mirror in their mighty polish the very "Sword of My Illustrious Grandfather!" And Hans Ruppert stands a grenadier, one of the sacred bodyguard around an emperor, stands with star on breast and double headed eagle on helmet, stands a mighty ghost to deal death to the foes of vaterland—until next Christmas.

On his back, through all his long trudge tonight, Hans Ruppert carries his pack. It is a pack of good things. Thou hast no Christmas tree within that mighty bundle, Hans! The peasant children have made the tree all ready for Hans in the diligent purchase from their little Saxon pennings on the market day. Hans Ruppert brings the garments for the Christmas tree. Here in his pack is the Christ child's hair, the gold and silver filigree which Hans will twist across the branches with his own brawny hands. Here are the candles, the Christ child's eyes, and the toys and the gifts, "the blessings that drop from the hands of Baby Jesus."

And now the procession forms at 8 o'clock on Christmas eve to go to see what Hans Ruppert has brought to the little family. The procession begins with grandfather and grandmother, on whose seamed and yellowed cheeks glistens the gentle tear of age. Then follow the father and the mother and the unwedded uncles and aunts, and now the children, according to age and size, who are awed in anticipation of "our Hans Ruppert" on the other side of that door toward which the procession is now moving. They stand up on tiptoe and peer behind father's stalwart frame, rebuked by das mutterchen, with a solid Saxon cuff on the unwilling ear. "Ach, mutterchen, it's heilige Nacht!" pleads the father, and mother moderates. Here are the servants of the household, wearing their good Christmas starch of check apron stiffness. How it stands out in its buckram beauty! If it were possible—which the dear Herr Gardener of us all forbids—the apple cheeks of the good house girl glow with a more frisky glisten as she gazes down upon the spheric circumference of starch. The housemaid's smile is hunched, too, and it never leaves her lips until that mysterious door off there is opened by grandfather's trembling old hand, and now some one in the Christmas procession has struck the sweet, resonant, prolonging chords of the sticher, and the hymn rises as one "pure concert" along the whole of the household's heart:

O heilige Nacht!  
Stille Nacht!

The door is thrown open, and only the stalwart spirits—the Erdgeiste who guard the scallops and volutes of the Teutonic verb—can comprehend the meander and the meaning of the family's exclamations now. Hans Ruppert has done it all! Hans Ruppert has done it all! The tree glistens into gracious charm. It is the aurora of the Divine Child.

And then the good Saxon muscles fall to, and fall, too, on supper. Now, the supper is a sweet feature of this great evening 1897. For only once a year does the marzipan come round—marzipan, that dear cake, crusted with powdered almonds. Only once a year does "stoken" come round, that dearest cake with raisins—raisins plucked by Hans Ruppert in that faroff mystery—raisins that grew and hadn't anything to do with sour grapes.

But the supper passes, and the night is deepening. The eyes of childhood are drooping. The family rises and again circles the Christmas tree, hand in hand now, perhaps for the last time on earth. Who can foresee the years? May the dear Christ child guard us all!—New York Commercial Advertiser.

ALEX. AEBISCHER.

FRED. AEBISCHER.

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## When You are Well Dressed,

You are well satisfied with yourself, and when you are satisfied with yourself you are satisfied with everybody around you; consequently you are happier, and everyone around you is happier by coming in contact with you. It costs very little to be well dressed, but don't make the mistake of buying ready-made, or tailor-to-the-trade clothing, if you wish to be well dressed, for an ill-fitting, poorly made suit or coat can be told as far as you can see it.

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## FATHER CHRISTMAS.

A Suggestion to the Boys For Christmas Celebrations.

Why couldn't our boys get up some holiday plays similar to the immemorial "Father Christmas" play, in which the lads of Merrie England have so much fun? The origin of this play is lost in antiquity, but it deals with knights and their adventures, certain of which challenge and fight the followers of Father Christmas, and are in turn routed, till Father Christmas and the Black Knight cope in mortal combat, the latter, of course, being worsted.

The boys are dressed in fantastic style, with tall paper caps on and paper fringe around their jackets, wearing masks to conceal their identity. They are called the "mummers," and go from house to house of their friends, invariably receiving a kind welcome and a little treat at the end of the performance. They also take up a penny collection, and everybody has a penny for the mummers who afford so much amusement.

In our early history there is abundant scope for the youthful playwrights, and the object of their performances in holiday week might be some charity in which boys are the beneficiaries, such as a treat of "goodies" to a dozen newsboys or bootblacks, to get supplies for a sick boy or the like.

The Indian in our early history is as good as the knight element for a stirring play for mummers—Massasoit and his tribe, in war paint, feathers and blankets, on the one side, and on the other the prim Puritans, in broad brimmed hats and short breeches.

Or the Pocahontas and Powhatan drama, with John Smith, the hero, and a band of cavaliers to make it lively. The boys of Boston Common and the red coated Britishers was an episode to inspire their fraternity of today, and it would be great fun for our laddies in Christmas week to dress up and illustrate the valor of their ancestors, as their English cousins annually commemorate some otherwise forgotten achievement of feudal days.—Philadelphia Record.



Amy—What did Charley bring you for a Christmas present?  
Mabel—The mean thing didn't bring me anything but a sprig of mistletoe.—Day City Chat.

### Good Deeds for Christmas.

Don't shut your door to pity the poor. Give the children a bushel of happiness, and they'll share it with you.

Raise the preacher's salary—but not so high that he can't reach it.

Make the Christmas tree a green spot in memory.

Don't lose sight of the fact that you were a boy yourself in the early years of the century.

Don't let the tin horn blast your happiness. Christmas will soon blow over. Make somebody happy, even if you have to settle an old bill to do it.—Atlanta Constitution.

"My wife has to take two weeks to do her Christmas shopping."

"Does she buy so many presents?"

"No; but she has to go downtown every day and exchange all the things she got the day before."—Chicago Record.

### By Mail or Express.

Oh, sing me not of Christmas past, For though that may be pleasant, And Christmas future just as bright, I want the Christmas present.—M. Landburgh Wilson, in Brooklyn Life.