

Santa Claus' Aeroplane



By ARTHUR L. PRICE.

"I SHALL always regret the discovery of the north pole," said Mrs. Santa Claus, "for it seems to mean that you are to have no more reindeer to draw your sleigh, my dear."

"Sleighs, my good wife," said Santa Claus, knocking the ashes from his great German pipe, "sleighs are out of fashion now."

"But really, Santy," demanded the great benefactor's wife, looking suddenly up from the heap of little doll dresses she was smoothing out, preparatory to putting them in her husband's ample pack, "really, my dear, you are not going to try to go over the snow and ice in an automobile this year?" You know that last year a policeman in Vancouver wanted to stop you for exceeding the speed limit, and when you got to Mount Shasta the snow was so deep that you were nearly blocked."

Santa Claus arose from his great armchair by the fire and bent down to reach for his great boots. He did not speak for several minutes, as Santy is a stout man, as every one knows who has interested himself in the life of the finest man in the world, and it is not so easy for a stout man to draw on his heavy red top boots as it is for a small boy to slip into his shoes on a cold morning. He drew on one boot and then stood up and stamped his foot well into it. Then he drew on the other and turned around several times to see that they were comfortable.

"I shan't use my automobile this year," he said with his jolly twinkle.

"And there is not a reindeer in the corral?"

"No, my dear; but what of that? It is true that when the deer saw Doctor Cook and Lieutenant Peary coming up toward the pole arm in arm they all ran away from us, heart-broken because they thought that their master's domain was being captured by other men, but I think, thanks to the Wright brothers, that I can do nicely this year without the reindeer on an automobile."

"The Wright brothers?" she asked as if she had never heard of them.

"Yes; Mr. Wilbur and Mr. Orville Wright have come to my aid this year in the most splendid way. They have sent me an aeroplane in which I can deliver my presents to all the children in the land in the fastest time I have ever made."

"What is an aeroplane?" asked the hard working wife.

"An aeroplane," replied Santa Claus, "is a machine invented for the special benefit of me—Santa Claus. It is the only machine with which I can go from housetop to housetop, from chimneytop to chimneytop, without getting down on the ground. The reindeer were kind and gentle and fleet and ever so willing to draw me all around the world from Bethlehem to Berkeley, but they could not always jump from

housetop to housetop. My bicycle carried me swiftly, but I had to work it hard."

"But there is the motorcycle," interrupted his wife.

"Yes, but I have only the one motorcycle this year, and I have promised that to Willie who lives in the Richmond district, San Francisco, and I could not fail him this year because he wrote me that he needed it for Christmas morning, as he was going to have his Christmas dinner out of the city and he depended upon the wheel to take him to the place."

"Of course you could not disappoint Willie, my dear," said Mrs. Santa Claus, "but tell me more about the aeroplane."

"How did you hear about it?"

"The north pole explorers told me," replied Santy with a laugh. "When at sight of Doctor Cook and Lieutenant Peary all my reindeer fled I asked them what I could do to get around to the houses of all my little friends and Mr. Peary told me I had better write to the Wright brothers and they would fit me out with just what I needed. So I wrote. The machine arrived last night. Come, wife, we will look at it together."

Santa Claus gave his arm to his wife and together the dear old couple went to see the new machine. At that time, it was on the morning of Christmas eve, Santa Claus' house was packed full of toys and dolls and other presents for boys and girls. There were sleds and snowshoes and skates for the children who live up in the High Sierra; there were sunshades and bathing suits and canoes for those who live in San Diego or Los Angeles, and thousands of roller coasters, tennis rackets, baseball mits, footballs and roller skates for the boys and girls of San Francisco, who live out of doors all the year around and who receive the presents which make them the hardiest and healthiest children in the whole world. Between the great piles of goods in the warehouse Santy and Mrs. Claus picked their way cautiously, for many of the presents were fragile and would break if rudely touched.

"I would feel like a brute," said Santa Claus, "if I delivered a single present that was not perfect. If the children want to play with smashed toys on New Year's day they can do the smashing themselves."

"Nothing shall leave our hands but will be whole," replied his good wife.

They passed the candy kitchen and Santa Claus could not resist taking a great handful of molasses kisses, for all fat men like candy—that is the reason they are fat.

Beyond the candy kitchen was a large gymnasium, where all the boxing gloves, Indian clubs, dumbbells and horizontal bars were tested by Santa Claus' gnomes before they were sent out to the playrooms of the world. In the center of this big "gym" Mrs. Santa Claus saw a wonderful machine. There

was a frame of light woodwork, tightly bound and braced by taut piano wires which would sing at the touch. The frame was in the shape of a long oblong box without any sides nor ends. It was about 35 feet long and at the end was six feet square. Over the top of the upper frame and the upper side of the lower frame were stretched plane or nearly flat surfaces of white cloth. Sticking out in front and behind were box-like frames covered with cloth. Directly in the center of the framework was a bright engine, and behind it, and connected with it by a shaft, was a long blade of wood, the propeller blade.

"There is my aeroplane," said Santa Claus proudly.

He gave a whistle and immediately 340 little men ran to him from all sides of the room.

Santa Claus raised his hand and commanded silence.

"Now, my good little men," he said to the gnomes and dwarfs, "now it is Christmas eve again. You have labored well for me all year and your task is about to end. All that now remains to be done is to load up my aeroplane. Do that and then you can have your holiday. Tomorrow you can all celebrate. I have ordered for each of you a yellow bowl full of cranberry sauce, four mince pies, two pumpkin pies, red and green ice cream, mashed potatoes—"

"And nothing else, sir?" asked the smallest gnome, tears coming into his eyes.

Santa Claus laughed and laughed for five minutes. His big sides rolled with mirth.

When he could catch his breath again he said: "Yes, something else for you. To each one I will give a turkey with four drumsticks."

The little men set to work with a will and within a very few minutes they had piled all the toys in the world on the planes of Santa Claus' flying machine.

"They say that flying machines can not carry freight," murmured Santa Claus as he bent over his engines and tinkered them up to their fullest power. "I'll show them."

"We are all loaded now, sir," said the littlest gnome, saluting Santa Claus.

"All right then, my boys, I'll be home early in the morning to sit at table with you—and to have some of the turkey with the four drum sticks."

He wheeled the flying machine out into the snow that surrounded his north pole home. He turned the crank of the engine and the propeller started to spin.

"Now I am ready," said Santa Claus, "but where is my wife?"

"Wait, husband, wait," called the good lady from the door of the workshop. "you have forgotten the best present you have," and Mrs. Santa Claus came running out, trundling the motor cycle, the present for Willie of the Richmond district.

"Goodness!" cried Santa, "I nearly

forgot that, and Willie is the best boy I know." He kissed his wife as the gnomes lifted the motorcycle to the top of the load.

The propeller blades spun again and Santa Claus soared off.

It was a splendid sight to see Santa Claus flying down from the north like a great white bird high up in the sky. He passed over Dawson City in the Klondike, where the miners work in the ice and snow getting out gold; he passed over the black coal mines of British Columbia and the immense forests of Christmas trees of Washington and Oregon. At every house he stopped and left his gifts, jamming every stocking with candy, nuts, oranges, trumpets and dates.

It was just midnight by the ferry building clock when he crossed the bay and entered over San Francisco. Few knew that he was here, because grown up people can not see Santa Claus, no matter how hard they look. Only good hearted children can know this generous man. Far up over the tops of the great office buildings Santa Claus guided his aeroplane.

"I will go out to Willie's house in the Richmond district first," said Santa to himself, and he pulled a lever which made his machine tilt toward the right and turned up over California street. "I shall leave the motorcycle with the boy and then I'll distribute my presents out in Western addition, then in the Mission, and then around the hotel district. But Willie must have his motorcycle—whoa, Donder und Blitzen, what is this?" Something seemed to be happening to his machine and Santa Claus in his excitement involuntarily called out the names of his two most famous reindeer.

The engine of the aeroplane began to whimper and to cough as if it needed to have its chest rubbed well with goose grease. Slowly it sank to the roof of a house. "I'll be eaten by a Teddy bear!" exclaimed Santa Claus.

The aeroplane had alighted on the flat roof of a large apartment house. "I presume I am stuck," exclaimed the old gentleman, "but since I am here I might as well attend to the children in this house. My stars, Willie lives here! It is lucky for me that he does, for I must get his motorcycle to him."

The wheel was unstrapped from the pack on the aeroplane and Santa Claus, for all his fatness, slipped down the gas stove flue with the present for Willie. Gently he deposited the machine and slipped back on to the roof. "Now I'll have to tinker up this bird of mine," he murmured, "or not a child can get another present. The old saint set to work, but he could not find what was wrong."

"I am afraid," he said, "it is all over with Christmas." Real tears fell from his eyes. "How can I ever hold up my head again," he sobbed. "Nearly all the children of San Francisco are to be disappointed. For the first time in my life I have failed in my trust. It is all because I relied on a modern invention. If only there was some one around who understood engines—but grownups can not see me, and children are too young. Hello, who's there?"

"It is I, Willie," said a boy's voice. "I heard you on the roof and came up to see what was the matter."

"My aeroplane has broken down and I can't fix it, Willie. Did you ever hear of such a plight?"

"I'll look at it," volunteered the boy. "Why," he exclaimed, "all you need is a plug—now, if I only knew where a motorcycle engine was—"

"Have you looked under your Christmas tree yet?" asked Santa Claus with a sly wink through his teary eyes.

"Oh, joy," cried the boy, and he ran from the roof down the stairway into the house. A moment later he returned, bent over the machine and then said to Santy, "There you are; crank her up and off you go."

"But you have crippled your own engine, my good boy. You will be disappointed in your trip today."

"It is better that I be disappointed than that all the other children in the world should be," declared the boy handsomely. "But I can get my motor fixed easily."

"Next year I'll bring you an aeroplane of your own," Santa Claus promised as he flew away again, high up on the roof.

"Gee, it's lucky I got up early," said Willie.