

Santa Mike— A Christmas Convict Story

By T. C. BRIDGES



THE December night closed across the desolate moor, the snow ceased falling, the clouds broke, and a brilliant moon shed its silver light across the wide stretches of rolling white-ness. With the change, it began to freeze fiercely, coating the sodden drifts with a crisp film of ice.

At every step Mike Dempsey's tired feet broke through this coating, and sank deep into soft stuff beneath, making the traveling so terribly hard that, in spite of the bitter cold, perspiration stood in beads on his thin, brown face.

He was breathing hard, and evidently desperately weary, yet he never stopped for a moment, though now and then, as he plowed his way onward, he would turn his head and cast an apprehensive glance back over his shoulder.

Had anyone been near enough to watch him, they would easily have understood his haste. The drah livery plentifully besprinkled with broad arrows marked him as one of the state's unwilling guests. As a matter of fact, Mike Dempsey had been for the last three years a prison inmate, and it was with the intention of escaping another seven years of unappreciated hospitality that he had, a few hours previously, "done a bunk" under cover of the sudden snowstorm.

"I've puzzled this screws, that's wan thing sure," he muttered to himself, and in spite of his fatigue a slight chuckle escaped his thin lips. "But faith, I've puzzled meself, too, and I don't know where I am no more than Adam.

"If I cud only git a landmark of some sort!" he went on. "Eanst I cud find my road to the railway, I'd win clear. Mike Dempsey wasn't a navy siven years for nothing."

He crunched his slow way across a flat valley, jumped a little brook and pushed up the steep slope beyond.

A gleam of light in the next valley attracted his attention. It came from a lighted window, and there was something comforting to the lonely fugitive in the red glow cast upon the glittering snow. Without hesitation, he started downhill toward it.

Presently he was cautiously approaching a small house, which stood in a tiny garden surrounded by a low dry-stone wall. There was a gate in front, but Mike preferred to approach



It was a Man Lying Flat on His Face

from the back, and clambering gingerly over the wall crept up to the window from which the light came.

Raising himself till his head was on a level with the sill, he peered through the uncurtained window into a barely furnished living room, lighted by a great fire of glowing turf.

A couch stood in one corner, on which lay a youngish man whose bandaged head showed him to be the victim of some accident. On a chair beside him sat a sweet-faced woman, and on the bare earthen floor played two children—a curly-haired boy of about seven, and a chubby girl a year or so younger.

But what arrested Mike's attention was a little fir tree, not more than four feet high, which stood planted in an old bucket, on the table in the middle of the room.

For a moment it puzzled Mike. Then he gave a little gasp.

"Beggor, if it ain't a Christmas tree! Why, tis Christmas, eve, I do believe, though, faith, I'd lost track of the date in the cold stone jug on the hill. But where's the presents? Tis as bare as me own pocket," he went on wonderingly.

At that moment the boy got up, and going forward to the woman, pulled at her dress to attract her attention.

"Mother, isn't Santa Claus coming? He's awful late. We shan't have no Kismas tree if he doesn't come soon."

"Tis the snow, dearie," explained the mother. "Such a bad storm that I suspect he was late in starting. But now it's cleared up, I darressy he'll be here soon."

Her words were cheery, but Mike caught the anxious glance she gave her husband.

"Go out and see if William's in sight yet, Alice," said the man. "He ought to have been here an hour ago. I only hope nothing has happened to the poor old fellow."

Mike dropped on hands and knees behind the angle of the wall as the door opened, and the woman stood on the threshold looking out down the empty snowdrift valley.

Somewhat the pathos of the bare little Christmas tree and the anxious family appealed to his hardened old soul, and when the door closed again he rose to his feet, and instead of following out his first intention and entering the house to demand food and clothes, climbed the wall again and made off down the valley.

"If William's coming this way, there'll be a road of sorts," he said to himself.

And sure enough there was. Though covered deep in snow, he found that there was a path down the valley, which he had little doubt would lead eventually to the main road to town.

He had gone another mile when a dark patch in the snow straight ahead attracted his attention, and he caught his breath sharply as he stopped beside it.

For it was a man lying flat on his face, and, judging by the snow which almost covered his body, he had been there in the same position for some time. Beside him lay a half-filled sack, also covered with snow.

Mike gave a sharp glance around. The moonlight horizon was still bare. He stooped and turned the man over.

"Dead!" he muttered. "Dead and cold!" as he laid his hand against the chill cheek.

For a moment he stood staring at the dead man's face, which was that of a little old man, wizened and bearded, and very much of Mike's own type and build.

Then, like a flash, it came to the convict that here at last was his chance, and a thrill shot through his weary frame.

"He'll not need them duds any more," he muttered, and, dropping on his knees in the snow, began with trembling fingers to strip the dead man of his clothes.

They were worn and old, but to Mike as precious as broadcloth, for once he was rid of his convict garb he had multiplied his chances of escape a hundredfold.

Not till he had completed the whole change of costume down to boots and hat, and had buried his broad arrows deep in a neighboring drift, did Mike bethink himself of the sack.

He snatched it up eagerly, hoping it might contain food, and turned the contents out upon the snow.

A small drum, a bag of lead soldiers, a cheap doll, a box of wax tapers, and one of crackers, and a couple of packets of sweets. Not an article of the lot which had cost 25 cents, and the value of the whole not five dollars.

Mike stood and stared at them. The box of soldiers had fallen open. He stooped and picked up the little painted figures, and replaced them carefully.

"So 'twas poor old Santy Claus," he muttered. "And the children will be waiting on him. 'Twas hard luck intirely."

"Tis no use," he groaned. "I'll just run back an lave them things at the door. There'll be time to reach town by midnight."

The bitter wind was in his face as he turned back up the hill, but now Mike did not hesitate for a moment. Head down, he hurried onwards, and presently was again beside the corpse of Santa Claus frozen messenger.

Without a glance at the body he snatched up the sack, slung it over his shoulder, and continued his way up the valley.

The glow from the lighted window threw its red beam across the snow as he rounded the curve and came within sight of the lonely cottage and a corresponding glow warmed Mike's heart as he thought of the pleasure of the children when they found their long-delayed Christmas gifts.

Seeing no sign of life, he slipped in at the front gate, and stepping very quietly up the path, rained the door, dropped his sack, and giving one sharp tap, turned the bolt.

But he had not counted on the eager children, and before he could get round the angle of the house curly-locks came flying after him.

"William, where is Santy Claus?" piped the childish treble.

"It ain't William, sonny. Tell your mammy as William's got lost, and I brought the things instead. Now I've got to go, for I'm in a mighty hurry."

"I expect you are!" came a jeering voice, and a blue-uniformed man carrying a carbine stepped out from the dark shadow round the corner, followed instantly by a second.

Mike gave one glance around. But he was cornered. The wall cut off escape.

"All right," he said sullenly, "I'll come quiet."

"You'd better," retorted the warder, whose temper long hours in the snow had not improved.

"Mammy, the policemen have took Santy Claus," cried the little lad.

Mike glanced up. The boy's mother was standing by, her face blank with amazement.

"What does this mean?" she cried. "Is it William?"

"Not unless he's changed his name since morning, missus," replied the warder. "He was Michael Dempsey when he bunked from Moorlands just after dinner."

"But I don't understand. He's got William Croker's clothes on, and he's brought the things from Ashampton that William went to fetch."

The other warder—a grizzled, elderly man—shook his head.

"You've got me, missus. I don't know what his little game is no more than you."

"Most like he has murdered William," put in the younger warder sullenly.

"He said William was lost, mammy," explained the boy, "so he's brought the things instead. And here they is, all safe."

"Best make a clean breast of it, Dempsey," suggested the elder warder.

"Go and find out yourself," flashed the old convict. "William's down the valley there."

ST. LOUIS GETS CONVENTION SITE OF WILSON'S RENOMINATION SELECTED.

Session to Open Wednesday, June 14—
Republicans Will Go
to Chicago.

Washington.—The democratic national convention of 1916 will be held at St. Louis beginning Wednesday, June 14, at noon. The national committee named the convention city and adopted resolutions calling for the renomination and re-election of Woodrow Wilson as "the trusted leader of national democracy."

(Chicago and Dallas contested with St. Louis for the honor of the convention, but St. Louis easily led from the start and won on the second ballot. When the trend of the voting was seen Texas moved that the choice of St. Louis be made unanimous. Dallas held second place on the first ballot but was displaced by Chicago on the second roll call.

The result of the first ballot was: St. Louis 25, Dallas 14, Chicago 13. On the second ballot the vote was St. Louis 28, Chicago 15, and Dallas 9. The majority for St. Louis gained on this ballot, when John H. McGraw arose near the end of the call and changed West Virginia's vote from Chicago to the Missouri city. Then the choice was made unanimous.

It has been customary heretofore for national conventions to begin work on Tuesday. The fact that Tuesday fell on the 13th next year may or may not have had something to do with the determination of the democratic committee to begin the proceedings a day later. The official explanation, however, was to the effect that the convention would not require more than three or four days to complete its work and it would not be too late in the week to start on Wednesday.

Political leaders in Washington regarded it as practically certain that Chicago will be selected for the republican convention when the national committee of that party meets here next Tuesday. Dates for this convention probably will be late in June.

Each of the three cities contesting for the democratic convention put in a bid of \$100,000.

St. Louis Facilities.

St. Louis.—The St. Louis coliseum at which the democratic national convention will be held beginning June 14, 1916, has a standing and seating capacity of 12,907. The coliseum was built in 1907 at a cost of \$235,000.

The structure occupies the entire block on Jefferson avenue from Locust street to Washington avenue with the main entrance on Washington avenue. It is approximately a mile and a half due west of the heart of the retail business district.

The building is the equivalent of three stories high and is an irregular octagon. Interiorly the building consists of an immense octagonal arena, circular at each end; a top of forty-eight boxes surrounding the arena several feet above the arena level, and arena balcony and above this the balcony proper.

Tentative plans for the seating of national political convention provide a speaker's platform and a platform for press representatives with a seating capacity of 1,717. This takes about half the arena floor and two sections of the balcony. The rest of the arena floor designed for delegates and alternates will seat 2,400; the boxes will seat 282, the arena balcony with two sections used for the press platform will seat 2,651, and the balcony 2,348. This gives a total seating capacity of 10,407.

Ample telegraph space is to be provided under the arena balcony with a runway leading from the press platform.

On the arena floor are two large committee rooms and on the second floor is one committee room.

The building was opened to the public during the presidential campaign of 1912 when William H. Taft, then the republican nominee, spoke here. No political conventions ever have been held in the building.

FRENCH LOSE A SUBMARINE.

Austrian Vessel is Active in the Adriatic.

Vienna.—The sinking of a French submarine boat, the Fresnel and six steamers and six large and several small Montenegrin sailing vessels in the lower Adriatic sea off the coast of Albania is reported. All the vessels were loaded with war material which they either were trying to land on the Albanian coast or to convey there.

Five of the steamers and sailing ships were sent to the bottom by the Austrian cruisers Novara and Austrian destroyers at San Giovanni di Medua, which lies in the Gulf of Drin to the north of Durrazo.

Submarine Sinks American Tanker.

Rome.—The American oil steamer Communipaw has been sunk by a submarine in the Mediterranean near Tobruk, Tripoli. No information has been received concerning the crew of the nationality of the submarine.

LANSING FIRES HOT SHOT AT AUSTRIA

NO DIPLOMATIC QUIBBLING
SUCH AS CHARACTERIZED
THE SERIES OF LUSITANIA
NOTES TO GERMANY.

SINKING OF THE ANCONA 'SLAUGHTER OF INNOCENTS'

Disavowal of Act, Punishment of Submarine Commander and Indemnity Demanded or Diplomatic Relations Will Be Severed Within a Week.

Washington.—The text of the American note to Austria-Hungary regarding the sinking of the Italian steamship Ancona, made public recently, reveals a formal demand by the United States for prompt denouncement of the "illegal and indefensible" act, for punishment of the submarine commander and for indemnity for the killing and injuring of innocent American citizens.

TEXT OF THE AUSTRIAN NOTE

Washington.—The secretary of state to Ambassador Penfold, Department of State, Washington, D. C.—Please deliver a note to the minister of foreign affairs, textually as follows:

Available information obtained from American and other survivors who were passengers on the steamship Ancona shows that on November 7, a submarine flying the Austro-Hungarian flag fired a solid shot toward the steamer, that thereupon the persons attempted to escape, but being overhauled by the submarine, and before the crew and passengers were able to take to the boats the submarine fired a number of shells at the vessel and finally torpedoed and sank her while there were yet many persons on board; and that by gun-fire and foundering of the vessel a large number of persons lost their lives or were seriously injured among whom were citizens of the United States.

The public statement of the Austro-Hungarian admiralty has been brought to the attention of the government of the United States and received careful consideration. His statement substantially confirms the principal declaration of the survivors as it admits that the Ancona, after being shelled was torpedoed and sank while persons were still on board.

The Austro-Hungarian government has been advised, through the correspondence which has passed between the United States and Germany, of the attitude of the government of the United States as to the use of submarines in attacking vessels of commerce, and the acquiescence of Germany in that attitude, yet with full knowledge on the part of the Austro-Hungarian government of the views of the government of the United States as expressed in no uncertain terms to the city of Austria-Hungary, the commander of the submarine which attacked the Ancona failed to put in a place of safety the crew and passengers of the vessel which they pursued to destroy, because, it is presumed, of the impossibility of taking it into port as a prize of war.

The government of the United States considers that the commander violated the principles of international law and board had been put in a place of safety or even given sufficient time to leave the vessel. The conduct of the commander can only be characterized as wanton slaughter of defenseless non-combatants, since, at the time when the vessel was shelled and torpedoed, she was not, it appears, resisting or attempting to escape; and no other reason is sufficient to excuse such an attack, not even the possibility of rescue.

The government of the U. S. is, therefore, to conclude either that the commander of the submarine acted in violation of his instructions or that the imperial and royal government failed to issue instructions to the commanders of its submarines, in accordance with the laws of nations and the principles of humanity. The government of the United States is unwilling to believe the latter alternative and to credit the Austro-Hungarian government with an intention to permit its submarines to destroy the lives of helpless men, women and children; it prefers to believe that the commander of the submarine committed this outrage without authority and contrary to the general or special instructions which he had received.

As the good relations of the two countries must rest upon a common regard for law and humanity, the government of the United States cannot be expected to do otherwise than to demand that the imperial and royal government denounce the sinking of the Ancona as an illegal and indefensible act; that the officer who perpetrated the deed be punished and that reparation be made for the loss of the lives of the citizens of the United States who were killed or injured by the attack on the vessel.

The government of the United States respects that the Austro-Hungarian government, approving of the gravity of the case, should accede to its demands promptly; and it trusts this expectation on the belief that the Austro-Hungarian government will not sanction or defend an act which is condemned by the world as inhuman and barbarous, which is abhorrent to all civilized nations, and which has caused the death of innocent American citizens.

LANSING.

ALLIED ARMIES FLEEING INTO GREECE

London.—The Anglo-French troops, who last week began their retirement from their advanced positions in southern Serbia, are now approaching, if they have not crossed, the Greek frontier.

Dispatches from Athens and news available in London indicate that the matter which was left to the Greek and allied military authorities at Saloniki is being amicably arranged, and that the allies will be allowed to retire to that city without any interruptions on the part of the Greeks, and will be permitted to remain there.

The British who had advanced farther from the railway to the north-east of Lake Doiran had a much more difficult feat to accomplish in retirement, and suffered more heavily. They were faced by greatly superior forces and, according to an official report, their successful withdrawal to a position extending from Lake Doiran to the Vardar valley was largely due to the gallantry of three Irish regiments.

Germany Disavows Rientelen's Acts.

Washington.—Count Von Bernstorff, the German ambassador, announced that he had been authorized by his government, to disavow Captain Franz Von Rientelen and declared he had no instructions to commit any illegal acts. The embassy said Rientelen acted solely in the capacity of a purchasing agent for private interests.

Rientelen, now a prisoner in London, has been charged with coming to this country armed with a large corruption fund to incite strikers in munitions factories.

ishment of the submarine commander and for indemnity for the killing and injuring of innocent American citizens.

The course the United States will pursue is understood to have been determined upon. The word prompt as used in the note is understood to mean that Austria-Hungary must accede to the demand of the United States within a week at the most. If the demand is not complied with, immediate severance of diplomatic relations is regarded as certain.

The situation between the two countries is complicated by the facts which have been brought to the attention of the state department in connection with the investigation of Austrian consular and diplomatic officials. These cases, involving Alexander Von Nuber, consul general at New York; Baron Erich Zweidinek, charge of the Austrian embassy here, and other officials still were under consideration.



Secretary Lansing.

de Burian, Austrian Foreign Minister



de Burian, Austrian Foreign Minister

LANSING.

RESPIRE FOR CONDEMNED MEN.

Little Rock.—Governor Hays announced that he will grant a respite of thirty days to Clarence Dewion of Belleville, Ill., and Joe Strong, each barely 21, under sentence to die in the electric chair. This will be the fourth respite that has been granted the pair since the conviction more than two years ago of the murder and robbery of an aged storekeeper at Benton, Ark. Dewion is the son of a saloonkeeper of Belleville, Ill. Strong, who is an Italian, says he has no home.