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We Wish A Merry Christmas To All The Reporter Readers.

A CHRISTMAS TELEPHONE.

By ALICE E. ALLEN.

DOROTHY left her playthings in a heap on the floor. She pulled a chair to the telephone on the desk. She climbed into it. Her curly head reached the mouth-piece. She unhooked the receiver and put it to her ear, just as father did.

"Number?" said a voice so quickly that Dorothy jumped. "Two-two-nine-six," she said clearly. That was what father said. In a minute, close to Dorothy's ear it seemed, another voice spoke. "Hello!" it said pleasantly. "Is this Santa Claus?" asked Dorothy as much like father as possible. "Yes," said the voice sweetly. "What is it?"

Dorothy hesitated. "You don't sound just like Santa Claus," she said. "Well, I am," the voice laughed. "But who is this some little girl?" "I'm Dorothy Grant." "Dorothy Grant?" The voice seemed surprised. Dorothy hastened to explain. "Dorothy Grant, 234 Park place," she said. "Don't you know me?"

"Oh," cried the voice, "of course I do now! I've never seen YOU'RE MR. JOHN YOU, have I? You GRANT'S LITTLE GIRL?" "Yes," said Dorothy. "But, you see, he isn't home. He isn't ever, 'cept Sundays and Christmas and Thanksgiving and such days. That's why I had to ask you. There isn't any one in the house 'cept Rhoda and Sofia. So she's so old she's deaf. You aren't deaf yet, are you, Santa Claus?"

"Not yet," laughed the voice. "I can hear you quite well. Go on." "Sofia takes care of the house and father, and Rhoda takes care of me. But they don't understand about Evelyn, and tomorrow, when father 'll be here, it will be too late, 'cause tomorrow's Christmas. And you must give Christmas gifts on Christmas, mustn't you?" "Yes," said the voice. "What is it you want, Dorothy?" "It's about Evelyn. I didn't hear it myself till Rhoda told me today when she dressed me—that is, I didn't hear all of it. You don't know Evelyn, do you?"

A CHRISTMAS ROMANCE BY ELLIS BROWNE



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HE took her one day in his automobile. And he was a magnate in iron and steel. Her very best gown was a cheap little lawn, but her face was as lovely and fresh as the dawn. He had horses and cattle and acres of land and servants to wait on his slightest command. A house in the country, a palace in town (But the eyes of his chauffeur were gentle and brown).

THIS captain of finance, he wooed like a king. So she did not say "No" when he brought her a ring. He showered her with presents of diamonds and pearls. And crowned her with roses, the fairest of girls. But the glittering jewels were soon pushed aside. And his roses, neglected, soon wilted and died. For the magnate was grizzled and wrinkled and old. And the locks of the chauffeur were yellow as gold.



OH, youth unto youth is forever the same. As the torch to the tow, as the moth to the flame. So the jewels and ring, with a message contrite. Went back to the elderly wooer one night. And silent and dark stood the automobile. With no lights o'er the bennet, no hand on the wheel. For a maiden in lawn and a lover in leather. Walked Christmas eve to the parson's together.

CHRISTMAS ON THE PLANTATION

By ELBERT J. LEE.

IN the antebellum days the negroes enjoyed a whole week of rest at Christmas time. Now that they are hired hands instead of slaves they cling to this privilege, refusing to work while the holiday spirit is in the air. This means that Christmas lasts a week. Every negro—man, woman and picaninny—makes the most of the week, and the fun runs high. On many plantations the negroes are almost as much a part of the "plant" as they were during slavery. They have the feeling that, inasmuch as they belong to the place the rest of the year, the place belongs to them for the holiday week, and they take advantage of the opportunity to do as they please.

For weeks in advance the holidays are anticipated with joy, though not with any great degree of preparation. The plantation negro, generally speaking, lets tomorrow take care of itself. But some of the more provident ones begin to store up for Christmas. The fattest pumpkin is picked up from the corn rows and put away for pie material. The turkey gobbler in the back yard is fattened for the occasion. Old Aunty hides her jars of preserves from the younger generation. Uncle Ike becomes a confederate in the happy conspiracy for saving things to augment the Christmas spread.

Christmas morning the negro children are up bright and early. There is method in their early rising. From time immemorial southern people, both white and black, have cherished the belief that there is much virtue in being the first to shout "Christmas gift!" in meeting a friend on the morning of the great day. In some sections this priority of greeting is expected to result in the forfeit of a gift from the other party. Accordingly the little negroes make a point of running up to the big plantation house and greeting the white people with a lusty "Christmas gift!" in the hope of receiving at least a big red apple, a fresh baked pie or a stick of striped candy such as the general store on the plantation is sure to keep in stock.

The best fiddler on the plantation is the hardest worked man of all, but he enjoys every scrap of his bow, while the dance goes merrily on. The Christmas dance is a continued story. It begins Christmas eve and continues every night in the week. If the weather is not too cold the big barn floor is cleared for the dance, but if heat is required the "function" takes place in the biggest room of the biggest negro house on the place, with a roaring fire in the fireplace and plenty of cheer on the kitchen table, both solid and liquid.

Christmas week is spent in visiting. The negroes go from cabin to cabin on their own plantation, or they hitch up the work mule or steers and visit friends on a neighboring plantation. Everywhere the Christmas spirit prevails. If one family is short of this world's cheer another family is glad to share its own. The Christmas spirit on a cotton plantation is much more in evidence than in a prosperous white folks' town.

CHRISTMAS BERRIES.

Where the Holly Grows and How to Find the Best.

The old fashioned Christmas greens were rosemary, ivy and bay, but in the 2,000 tons of wreathing and decorating material which it is estimated that we now use every year there is a much greater variety. Best loved of all is the glossy, red berried holly. "Holin" was the old English name for it, and it is thought to be identical with the "greenwood tree" of British ballads and of Robin Hood fame. On our side of the Atlantic the American holly (Ilex opaca) is found from Maine, where it grows as a shrub, to North and South Carolina, where it lifts a symmetrical cone of dark, shining leaves set with scarlet berry clusters along a beautiful trunk of gray and silver to the height of seventy or eighty feet.

Delaware and Maryland are usually credited with furnishing the best grades of holly to Christmas markets, but their "Three X" brand, as seen after shipment to northern cities, is not so finely berried as the Carolina holly, plentiful in the region around Asheville. In America there are three distinct grades of holly. Trees that stand on dry, barren hillsides, as a rule, are heavily laden with thick, knoblike clusters of berries, but their leaves are likely to be small, yellowish and imperfect. Follow some little stream to a sheltered, sunny glade where a holly trunk gleams white, and there you will find leaves large, dark and perfect, with a thick scarlet fruitage lighting the shadows evenly all over the tree.

Mine died, you know, when I came and I would like another one." "Yes," said the voice. "I'd like a pretty little one with dimples, like Connie's mother. She isn't hardly ever real cross, even when Connie tears her gown. And she kisses Connie real often, and puts her to bed every single night, and tells her stories. But most any kind would do if father liked her. She'd have to stay here, you know." A mischievous little laugh sounded in Dorothy's ear. But in a minute the voice said: "Is that all, Dorothy?" "Yes; thank you," said Dorothy, as father had taught her. "You dear, quaint little thing!" cried the voice. "May I come to see you soon?" "Why, of course, Santa Claus," said Dorothy.

"But wasn't Santa Claus funny to ask that, father?" asked Dorothy. Father had surprised her by coming home before her bedtime, and she was telling him all that had happened. "Of course he's coming. Doesn't he always? Why should he ask if he could?" Father chuckled. "What number did you ask for, Dolly?" he said. "Two-two-nine-six," said Dorothy. "The one you always say." Father gave a long low whistle. Then he asked: "Was Santa's voice deep and gruff?" Dorothy shook her head. "It was low and sweet, and every little way it had laughs in it," she said.

After Dorothy had gone her happy way to dreamland Mr. John Grant went to the telephone. "Two-two-nine-six," he said. In a moment there came to him a voice, low and sweet, with laughs in it. "Is this Miss Annie Claus?" he asked. "Yes. And this is Mr. Grant?" "Yes. You had a conversation with my little daughter this morning, Miss Claus?" "Yes—bless the child! How did she know me and my number?" "She didn't, but—bless the child—she tried the only number she remembered and found you. She was trying to get Santa Claus." "Santa Claus?" "Yes." Annie Claus laughed. "I understand now," she cried. "That was why she asked if I were deaf yet—and stout. How funny and sweet and dear of her! Well, thanks to her and to Evelyn, I've played Santa's part and had the loveliest Christmas I ever had so far." "It was good of you, Annie," said John Grant. "Good?" Annie Claus questioned.

"One would do anything for Dorothy." "Would one?" "Anything one could," amended Annie in suspicious haste. "You have Evelyn's gifts ready?" asked Mr. Grant. "All ready. You should see!" "And Dorothy's?" "Dorothy's?" "The one thing she wants—she told me, Annie. Is it ready?" "Not quite." "But, Annie, tomorrow is Christmas, and Christmas gifts must be given on Christmas." A mischievous little laugh rippled over the wire. "Dorothy stipulated that in the selection of her gift her father must be pleased," said Annie Claus. "That needn't bother you. You have more, haven't you?" "Yes; unless he has changed his mind." "He hasn't, Annie, and never will. Don't you believe that?" "Yes." "Well?" "Come over to my Christmas tree to-morrow night, you and Dorothy. Evelyn will be here. We'll talk things over." "Thank you; we'll come without fail. But Dorothy—and Dorothy's father—will be sadly disappointed if Dorothy's gift isn't ready." "Perhaps it will be." "Annie—really?" But Annie Claus had rung off.

Eight Millions For Toys. The real amount of cash money paid out in the United States alone for toys that on Christmas morning gladden the hearts of American children is conservatively estimated at \$8,000,000. This means about 60 cents apiece for the something like 13,000,000 of five to twelve year old children. The children of no other country have so great an amount expended for toys for them.

A CHRISTMAS OF LONG AGO

By MARCIA FIELD

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DEAR COUSIN JACK— Pray come to spend The Holly days with your true friend. In Hopes that Weather will permit. To your good Parents Pa has writ. And you and Ned and Frank can ride Your Ponies by the Chariot's side. I am desired to say that Nan Expects such Sport with Cousin Fan. She has a Doll from London Town. With an Egret and Tabby Gown. She is so proud! But, Jack, we Boys Can think of better Things than Toys.



Hal begs his love. Pray answer quick Your faithful, loving, COUSIN DICK. P. S.—There came a gift Gingerbread From England in a Box; for Ned There's a Dragon; for Francis, too; But, Jack, I'll save King George for you.

THE yellowed letter, so it runs, Off read by sons and sons of sons. Above the formal sheet, outspread, Dick bent his curly, ribboned head. With eight grayed goose quill moving slow, That Christmas season long ago. 'Twas sealed and sent—one must confess. Ill sealed; a finger burnt, I guess! Black Pompey rode 'twixt kith and kin. With ebony face and ivory grin. To bear such letters to and fro In Christmas season long ago. Our fancy paints the Yuletide sport. At hospitable Holly Court— How Dick and Nan and Harry ran To welcome Ned and Frank and Fan And Jack, with apple cheeks aglow. In Christmas season long ago. What mirthful games, what generous cheer. What riddles huge, what cider clear. What "puddens"—Dicky spelled it thus— What nut brown turkeys odorous. What big mince pies in spicy row. In Christmas season long ago! A round the hearth the circles smiled What log fires roared 'neath mantels tiled. Where, figuring forth the Scripture tale, Blue Jonah fed the azure whale! What singing sounds, what genial glow. In Christmas season long ago! What stories told as snug they sat By Cousin This or Uncle That. Till Dicky vowed to go to sea. But Jack a soldier bold would be. Fight for the King and make a show In scarlet coat, long, long ago. All passed, like scenes in shifting fire. And sailor Dick grew up a squire. While—strange the change the swift years bring— Sold Jack fell fighting 'gainst the King. All vanished like the melting snow Of Christmas season long ago.

TRAGIC CHRISTMAS DAYS.

World's Greatest Holiday Has Often Been Reddened by Blood.

Christmas, which should be and usually is the merriest day of all the year, has sometimes been reddened by bloodshed and blackened by tragedy. One of the most barbarous of the persecutions against the Christians was begun by Diocletian on Christmas day, A. D. 303, when a church in Nicodemia, filled with Christians, was ordered by him to be set on fire. Every way of egress was barred, and not a single worshiper escaped the flames.

Yuletide in 1066 was a melancholy time in England, which nevertheless always celebrated it with the utmost eagerness, for Harold, the last of the Saxons, had fallen before the Norman conqueror, and on Dec. 25 of that year William the Conqueror was crowned in Westminster abbey. The occasion was signalized by the slaughter of a huge crowd of Anglo-Saxons outside of the church through a mistaken idea that they had risen in revolt.

Exactly two years later there was an uprising of the malcontents in the northern counties who hoped to throw off the Norman yoke. William marched in person against the rebels and directed a universal slaughter. His men surprised several garrisons and put them to the sword. Neither age nor sex was spared, and every house in the disaffected regions was razed to the ground. It is said that over 100,000 men, women and children perished on Dec. 25, 1068.

It was on Christmas day in the year 1170 that Thomas a Becket, the greatest English cleric of his day, ascended the cathedral pulpit at Canterbury and preached what may be called his own funeral sermon. The words he made use of so angered Henry II. that he let fall those fatal words: "If anybody loved me he would rid me of this turbulent priest."

Four knights took him at his word, and on Dec. 29 they slew the prelate before the altar of St. Benedict in the northern transept of Canterbury cathedral.

On Dec. 25, 1384, John Wycliffe died as he was about to preach his Christmas sermon. One of the saddest Christmases known in London was that of the year 1663. The great plague had stricken the city, and the people were dying at the rate of 1,000 a day.

His Christmas Gift.

The following story is told of a little boy, three years old, who lives in Atlanta: His mother had been telling him the story of the birth of Christ. The next morning he went to the trunk which contained his clothing, took out a cloak and then put his cap on. "Where are you going?" he was asked. And the little fellow replied: "I'm going to God, and you have all got to go with me. I've got to take that door little baby some Santa Claus."