

A Vagrant Christmas Gift

By ALBERT EDWARD CONVERSE

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MR. and Mrs. Jackson Smith understood each other perfectly on the Christmas present proposition. This satisfactory state of affairs did not come about the first year of their wedded life, nor even the second. The third Christmas was almost at hand before Mr. Smith discovered accidentally, but to his intense joy, that Mrs. Smith relished his selection of furs, gloves, curtains, rugs, and so on, no more than did he her choice of smoking-jackets, cravats, mufflers, et cetera.

That their friends could not be taken in on the combination was, however, a thorn in the flesh of each of them.

"The worst has happened," said Mrs. Smith, interrupting Mr. Smith's perusal of the paper Christmas morning.

"A messenger just brought a present from the Snivelys, and I forgot to put them on my list. It's a book and we've got to send them something."

"Well, what are we going to do about the Snivelys?" growled Mr. Smith.

"Jack," said she in a moment, "I've had an inspiration. Why couldn't we send the Snivelys the book that Cousin Lucy sent us? Neither of them will ever know it."

"By George! We'll do it," said Mr. Smith, after considering the proposition. "Where is Cousin Lucy's book?"

"It's on the desk," said Mrs. Smith. "Just put our cards in the book and wrap it up neatly. I'll call a messenger boy."

Half an hour later Mr. Smith handed a package, addressed to Mr. Snively, to a messenger boy and saw him depart with it. He was luxuriously stretched out on a davenport when Mrs. Smith came into the room a few minutes later.

"Jack," said Mrs. Smith, holding a book in her hand, "I thought you were going to wrap this book up."

"Great Scott!" exclaimed Mr. Smith, jumping to his feet. "I did wrap up some book. The messenger has already been here and I gave it to him."

"How long has the boy been gone?" demanded Mrs. Smith.

"About ten minutes."

"Get your things on. Be quick, and maybe you can reach the Snivelys before the boy and get that dreadful book away from him! How could you have been so careless?"

Mrs. Smith was almost frantic. Down to the nearest street car tore Mr. Smith, fairly consumed with rage. He had arrived at the downtown district when, with a thrill of joy, he spied the messenger boy. Without waiting for the car to stop, Mr. Smith jumped off and started on a run for the boy.

At the same moment the messenger boy saw him, and, without knowing why he was being pursued, he obeyed his first impulse and ran too.

In a moment a dozen had joined in the chase. Down the street came the poor messenger boy, frantically straining every muscle to get away from the mob pursuing him. Suddenly two men from a cross street ran in front of the boy. One threw his arms around the fugitive, holding him fast; the other man seized the package the boy was carrying.

"Why, Snively! This package is addressed to you!" he exclaimed.

"Why, so it!" said the man who had caught the boy.

In a moment they were surrounded by a crowd. A policeman rushed up and took charge of the boy.

"Hold on there, officer, the boy's all right!" cried Mr. Smith, who had arrived upon the scene by this time.

"What do you know about this affair?" said the policeman respectfully, as he recognized Mr. Smith.

But Mr. Smith was standing as one dazed. He had caught sight of Mr. Snively with the book under his arm.

"Hello, Smith," said Mr. Snively. "I just now caught this boy, and found him carrying a package addressed to me, so took charge of it. Do you know anything about it?"

"Why—why—er—yes," stammered Mr. Smith, trying to collect his wits. "You see, I sent the package."

"Well, why were you chasing the boy?" asked the policeman, a little impatiently.

The perspiration stood out on poor Mr. Smith's forehead.

"I—I was afraid I hadn't given the boy the right address, and was trying to stop him to find out," he blurted in desperation.

The policeman looked at Mr. Smith curiously. He was convinced that he was lying, though with what object he could not imagine.

"The package has come to the right fellow anyway," said Snively, laughing. "I'm going right home, so I'll take it along with me."

"Oh, I couldn't think of allowing you to do that, old man!" cried Mr. Smith. "Just give it back to the boy;

he'll take it to the house for you."

"Nonsense!" said Mr. Snively. "It's a light package and I don't mind carrying it a particle."

Mr. Smith ground his teeth with rage. How was he to get that book away from Snively?

"Snively," said he, my office is only a few doors down the street. Come up and smoke a cigar with me. I've got some good ones."

A few minutes later Mr. Smith ushered Mr. Snively into his office.

"Sit down here, Snively," said he, offering his guest a chair. "Let me have your package; I'll put it over here on my desk."

He took the book eagerly and put it on his desk out of sight. As he smoked and talked, he racked his brain for a scheme to get Snively out of the room without his book.

"Good morning, gentlemen. Merry Christmas."

It was Smith's partner, Perkins, who thus addressed them as he came out of his private office.

Suddenly a brilliant scheme took shape in his mind. He proceeded immediately to put it into execution.

"By the way, Perkins, I have a Christmas present for you." As he spoke, he picked up Snively's package and, holding it so that Snively could not see it, walked over the Perkins and handed it to him.

"But—but—" Perkins protested.

"Take it and keep your mouth shut, or I'll choke you!" whispered Smith fiercely.

"Oh, thank you very much," said the astonished Perkins. "Well, I must be getting home. Good morning."

After talking a few moments longer, Snively rose to go.

"Can I trouble you for my package, now?" he said.

"Oh, yes," said Smith, going to his



Searching First Calmly and Then With Apparent Annoyance.

desk and searching first calmly and then with apparent annoyance.

"By George! It isn't here," he announced in a surprised tone.

"Suddenly he sat down and began laughing uproariously.

"Do you know what I've done?" he said as soon as he had his mirth somewhat under control. "I gave Perkins your package. I forgot that I took his present home last night, and my wife sent it over this morning with a present for Mrs. Perkins."

"Oh, that's all right," said Snively, laughing. "It doesn't make a particle of difference."

They parted, laughing good-naturedly over the blunder.

Smith arrived home soon after, congratulating himself on his generalship.

"Oh, Jack," cried Mrs. Smith, as soon as he stepped into the house. "I hope you haven't had any trouble!"

"Well, I've had just about the most strenuous time I've experienced in many moons," said Smith. "I came out all right though."

"I'm so sorry," said Mrs. Smith. "Now I hope you won't be angry, Jack, but you hadn't been gone but a few moments when I discovered that you hadn't sent Mrs. Snively's book, after all. I found her book lying on the floor by the center-table, where, in some way, it had been knocked off. The only book that is missing is the one that Mr. and Mrs. Perkins sent us, so that must have been the one that you sent to the Snivelys."

Mr. Smith collapsed into the nearest chair.

"Ding-a-ling-a-ling," went the telephone.

Mr. Smith, still in a dazed condition, rose and answered it.

"Hello, is that you, Smith?" said a voice. "This is Perkins."

Smith braced himself for the worst.

"I didn't quite understand about that present you gave me down at the office. When I got home I found that it had Snively's name on it."

"Oh."

"I thought there must be some mistake about it, so I didn't open it."

"You say you didn't open it?"

"No."

"Thank Heaven!"

"What do you say?"

"I said that you did right. It was just a little joke on Snively."

"Is that so? Well, I'll bring the package down to the office with me in the morning."

"Thank you. Good-by."

"Thank heaven," said Smith as he hung up the receiver and once more settled himself in comfort, "Christmas comes but once a year!"

TRUE SPIRIT OF DAY

Christmas Giving Should Be Prompted by the Heart.

Religion in the Orthodox Sense Not Necessary to Appreciate Finer Qualities of Great Christian Holiday.

By PRUDENCE STANDISH.

ONCE more the Christmastide and its beautiful meaning is with the world. Again the shepherds, watching their flocks by night, are sore afraid at the glory which shines about them. Clothed in blinding light, the angel speaks; the heavenly host that crowds suddenly about him sing of glory in the highest and peace and good will. The wise men who have seen his star in the East, kneel and spread their gifts of gold and myrrh and frankincense without question.

The miracle of 2,000 years ago is still new and glad and lovely, for, lo! in all Christendom bells peal and sweet choirs sing the message given by the blinding angel and the crowding host:

"For behold I bring you tidings of great joy which shall be to all people. Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good will toward men."

This is the message of the Christmastide, yet the bigger half of Christendom makes the period the pagan festival it once was at the time of the winter solstice. We give gifts, for sake of the gods of custom and merriment, forgetting entirely that they are for sake of the great spiritual joy "which shall be to all people."

The gold and myrrh and frankincense of the heart are withheld—we give gifts because we've got to, and keep our hearts as much closed to the Christmas child as the inn. We have our own selfish ends to gain, the rich patron to cater to, the friend to appease. We heap little children with dazzling toys, and light the starry lamps of their fir trees because it is the fashion, and we do our small Christmas charities because it would seem mean not to do them.

We have forgotten the joyous and sublime meaning of Christmas. One does not need to be religious in the orthodox sense to appreciate the finer quality of this great festival, for what is known as Christian feeling has come to be a moral obligation at this time—a point of etiquette, in truth, for the heart and mind.

In point of mere etiquette—what the social world thinks on the subject of Christmas gift giving—it is thought bad taste for a person of modest means to give presents of value to others of wealth and influence, for this savors too much like currying to continued favor if the giver is already under obligations. But some knowledge of the helpful friend's existence is necessary, and this may take the form of a pretty Christmas card with an appropriate greeting; or a knot of flowers or winter berries may be sent with a note expressing warm Christmas wishes.

That the servant who has given her bodily strength and heart's best interest to the home must not be forgotten, goes without saying; but it is certainly bad form to make the poor servant's gift an inexpensive trifle when something better can be afforded.

Then what a woeful want of taste it shows for us to defer buying a friend's or sister's present until we have found out what she means to give us, and so make the exchange a quid pro quo. The gift that goes to friend or relative is above all one for love, and it is undoubtedly better taste for the recipient to appear as pleased as if she had received something ten times its value.

But, then, what matters the nature of the gift after all? The spirit is the thing—and does not this silly picture or cushion, so unbecoming to the parlor, mean that the friend or sister has thought of us?

As for the little children, so much are their feelings painfully strained at this time that I would like to write a book on the subject. I beg every mother not to threaten the poor little heart that misbehaves sometimes with the eternal word that "Santa Claus won't come if you do that any more." The dear kiddie who forgets to be good knows better after a year or two of this harrowing threat, which makes you out a story teller. Meanwhile, there is the little heart staying awake at night with its dreadful anxieties; there are the sudden storms of bitter tears, with all the glory of Christmas sunk in the bottomless pit of absolute sureness that Santa—dear, abused, good old fat gentleman—won't come.

We remember the poor and drop a few pennies gladly for the blind children.

But, why do we do it—why? It is because a wide, sweet star has stopped over a stable in the far East, because the church choirs are singing of peace on earth and good will toward men.

So let us never lose sight of that fact with our gifts, whether our hands tender or receive them; for the heart closed to the deeper significance of Christmas may truly be likened to the inn that held no room. Let us send with each gift some of the heart's true gold and frankincense—bind it with the cord of some memory of Bethlehem. Let us receive each and every one of our gifts as tidings of great joy.

Santa Claus Says:

- Q A face wreathed in smiles is better than a mansion wreathed in holly.
- Q Better broken toys than broken hearts.
- Q Never look a gift object in the price tag.
- Q Santa Claus by any other name would cost as much—and be worth it.
- Q Do not be satisfied with wishing people a "Merry Christmas;" help make it one.
- Q Lots of men put on long white whiskers and think they look like me when they look more like a goat—and perhaps they are.
- Q If Willie wants to see what is inside the drum, for goodness sake let him.
- Q You are living in God's own country. What more do you want for Christmas.
- Q It is a wise Santa who keeps his whiskers away from the candles.
- Q Keep up the "Good will to man" part of it right through until next Christmas.
- Q It is more blessed to give than to receive, except in the matter of offense.
- Q Fortunately for most of us, we won't get what we deserve on Christmas.
- Q When Christmas giving becomes a necessity it ceases to be a virtue.
- Q There is more joy in heaven over a ton of coal given to the poor than a ton of diamonds given to the rich.

Song of the Christmas Tree

By Gene Morgan

I come from northern forest lands
Where men would tarry never,
The seasons come, the seasons go,
But I am green forever.

The flowers of spring bloom at my feet,
The shadows always spreading,
Near by there runs a forest path
Where watchful deer are treading.

The summer passes all too soon,
And autumn winds are chilly,
Poor flowers, they wither, droop and die
Amid the woodland hilly.



From every branch, sad tears I drip
In rainstorm's fierce endeavor,
The flowers may come, the flowers may go,
But I am green forever.

Now hark! the woodman's ax is heard!
A sister tree he's felling,
What can this cruel destruction mean?
The winter wind is telling:

"Do not bemoan thy mournful fate,
Thou' axmen wield with madness,
Bedecked in tinsel, bright and fine,
You'll soon bring children gladness."

"Thou canst not die, although thy trunk,
Harsh hatchet blows may sever,
Within the little children's hearts
Thou wilt be green forever!"

Origin of Christmas Tree.
The Christmas tree is supposed by great numbers of people to have originated in Germany, but from a reliable source we learn that the Christmas tree came in the first instance from Egypt, and its origin dates from a period much earlier than the Christian era. The palm tree is known to put forth a branch every month, and a spray of this tree with 12 shoots on it was used in Egypt at the time of the winter solstice as a symbol of the completed year.

SEASONABLE PRICES.
Now doth the Christmas shopper
With happiness elate,
Buy something that was forty-nine,
Marked up to ninety-eight.

A CHRISTMAS CONSPIRACY

How Grandmother's Heart Was Gladdened by Remembrances From the Children.

"Grandmother Jessup!" Stella's tone was distinctly accusing; it was evident that grandmother had something to answer for. Grandmother, from her invalid chair, looked across at the girl who stood at her bureau drawer. She had endured years of pain and weakness; but they had not succeeded in quenching the spirit in the frail figure; her voice was as saucy as a girl's.

"Not guilty—what is it?"

"It's your handkerchiefs. How many dozen have you?"

"Seven or eight. You see, I have seven of the dearest grandchildren in the world. It's queer, isn't it, that your nose should be so especially honored when you grow old?"

But Stella's gray eyes forgot to laugh back at grandmother's. Something had disconcerted her. She put the handkerchiefs back, made some trivial excuse, and ran up to her own room, where her sister and cousins were holding a Christmas conclave.

"I wonder," she burst out, "that grandmother can endure Christmas at all!"

"What under the sun do you mean?" Corinne and Isabella exclaimed together.

"Corinne, what did you give grandmother for Christmas last year?"

"A box of handkerchiefs. Why?"

"And you, Isabella?"

"An embroidered handkerchief with little weeny initials."

"Mollie?"

"Two handkerchiefs," Mollie confessed. "There didn't seem to be anything else—except slumber slippers, and Aunt Maria always knits those."

"And Laurie and I gave her handkerchiefs. We always give her handkerchiefs—because she's old, and they're the easiest thing to think of! Girls—she isn't old—she's as young as any of us down in her heart, and she loves pretty things just as much as ever. This year let's give her the biggest surprise of her life—a Christmas that will make her really happy."

"But how—what—" Corinne stammered.

"What do we like best—each of us?"

"Jewels!" "Books!" "Hand embroidery!" "Candy!" "Silk stockings!" The answers came in a laughing shower.

"Well, then, why not? Grandma'd love a bit of jewelry from us—chosen just for her. And books—not 'Thoughts of Cheer,' as if she were melancholy, but love stories that end well. And why not embroider her something? And if not silk stockings, then a pair of slippers with tiny velvet bows. As for candy, she'd love to have it to pass round, even if she couldn't eat much herself."

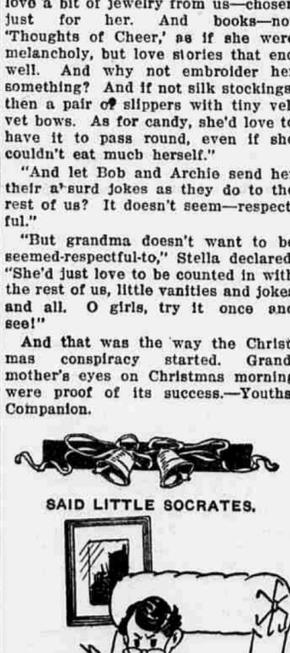
"And let Bob and Archie send her their absurd jokes as they do to the rest of us? It doesn't seem—respectful."

"But grandma doesn't want to be seemed-respectful-to," Stella declared. "She'd just love to be counted in with the rest of us, little vanities and jokes and all. O girls, try it once and see!"

And that was the way the Christmas conspiracy started. Grandmother's eyes on Christmas morning were proof of its success.—Youths' Companion.

SAID LITTLE SOCRATES.

"Some generous person," said little Socrates Bulginbrow, of Boston, "has been kind enough to send me a copy of Mother Goose's lyrics for Christmas. Do you know, the theory that a representative of the bovine genus at one time leaped over the chief luminary of the night leads to some interesting calculations as to the muscular development of the cows of that time. I have ascertained that they must have been endowed with strength proportionate to that of the flea of the present day."



THE JOY OF SHOPPING.
By Wilbur D. Nesbit.
I love to go and shop for things
To send as Christmas gifts to friends,
For then my fancy girls on wings,
I feel the joy that never ends.
O, what a rapture 'tis to stand
And be stepped upon, bumped into,
Joggled, jostled, pushed, squeezed,
Shoved, frowned at, scowled upon,
Trampled, bruised, slammed, rushed,
Hurried, jolted, and finally get up
to the counter and discover that you are
at the wrong one!

LITTLE RASTUS ON SANTA CLAUS

By WILBUR D. NESBIT

Mah mammy say dat Sandy Claus come
Ter good 'll' boys,
En bring er ho'n en er big red drum,
En yuther toys.
But why white chilluns gets dem new
I can't on'stan'.
I guess I knows whut Sandy Claus do—
He see'n han' man!



Las' yeah he clomb down ouah stovepipe
W'enat I's orlecep,
En fotch some oynges—bout half ripe—
En th'ee toy sheep,
En one dese jomp' jacks—broken, dough—
But den, my han'!
'Bout dishyere Sandy Claus—I des know
He see'n han' man!



I as' my mammy ef Sandy Claus ain'
Done know des how
Ter men' dem toys, en' fix dey paint,
En she say: "Now,
Don' worry, chile, 'bout de white folks."
'Cause
It's de good Lawd's plan."
So I guess dat mah Mistah Sandy Claus—
He see'n han' man!

REFUSED TO RECOGNIZE DAY

Puritans of England Made Christmas Illegal and Declared it a Misdemeanor to Be Gay.

English Puritans of the seventeenth century guarded against looking upon the rosy side of life.

Because Christmas is really a survival of the Celts' Yule, and is not the actual anniversary of the birth of Christ, they refused to countenance Christmas festivities. Not only did they refuse to recognize the day, but they made laws to that effect.

The parliament of 1644 passed an act ordering all law abiding citizens, to observe December 25 as a solemn fast, to be spent in silent atonement for previous Christmas days that had passed in riotous living and merry-making.

Naturally the community did not share in these hard and fast rules, and many a turkey was surreptitiously killed, and many a plum pudding quietly bolted. But woe betide the unfortunate offender against the act were he luckless enough to be discovered.

Soldiers were sent to search the houses of those suspected of harboring such delicacies as mince pies, etc., and many were the pitched battles between disagreeing sections of the public.

UNDER THE MISTLETOE

To ask a girl if you may kiss her before doing it is an insulting way of laying all the responsibility on her.

In a man's opinion a kiss is an end that justifies any means.

You needn't be afraid of a mere kiss. Thousands are exchanged daily by people of the highest reputation.

The kissed girl fears no mistletoe.

A kiss is as good as a smile—and a good deal better, too!

The ideal kiss is the kiss that is never given.

A kiss too soon may be a full stop in the tale of love.

The child who doubts about Santa Claus has insomnia. The child who believes has a good night's rest.