

Santa Claus and Little Billee

By John Kendrick Bangs

Author of "A House-Boat on the Styx," "The Idiot," etc.

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HE was only a little bit of a chap, and so, when for the first time in his life he came into close contact with the endless current of human things, it was as hard for him to "stay put" as for some wayward little atom of fotsam and jetsam to keep from tossing about in the surging tides of the sea.

His mother had left him there in the big toy shop, with instructions not to move until she came back, while she went off to do some mysterious errand. She thought, no doubt, that with so many beautiful things on every side to delight his eye and hold his attention, strict obedience to her commands would not be hard. But, alas, the good lady reckoned not upon the magnetic power of attraction of all those lovely objects in detail.

When a phonograph at the other end of the shop began to rattle off melodious tunes and funny jokes, in spite of the instruction Little Billee had received, off he pattered as fast as his little legs would carry him to investigate. After that, forgetful of everything else, finding himself caught in the constantly moving stream of Christmas shoppers, he was borne along in the resistless current until he found himself at last out upon the street—alone, free, and independent.

It was great fun, at first. By and by, however, the afternoon waned, and little Billee began to grow tired. He thought of his mamma, and tried to find the shop where he had promised to remain quiet until her return. Up and down the street he wandered until his little legs grew weary; but there was no sign of the shop, nor of the beloved face he was seeking.

Once again, and yet once again after that, did the little fellow traverse that crowded highway, his tears getting harder and harder to keep back, and then—joy of joys—whom should he see walking slowly along the sidewalk but Santa Claus himself! The saint was strangely decorated with two queer-looking boards, with big red letters on them, hung over his back and chest.

With a glad cry of happiness, Little Billee ran to meet the old fellow, and put his hand gently into that of the saint. He thought it very strange that Santa Claus's hand should be so red and cold and rough, and so shaggy; but he was not in any mood to be critical.

Santa Claus, of course, would recognize him at once, and would know just how to take him back to his



His Mother Had Left Him There in the Toy-Shop.

mamma at home—wherever that might be. Little Billee had never thought to inquire just where home was. All he knew was that it was a big gray stone house on a long street somewhere, with a tall iron railing in front of it, not far from the park.

"Howdidoo, Mr. Santa Claus?" said Little Billee, as the other's hand unconsciously tightened over his own.

"Why, howdidoo, kiddie?" replied the old fellow, glancing down at his new-found friend, with surprise gleaming from his deep-set eyes. "Where did you drop from?"

"Oh, I'm out," said Little Billee bravely. "My mamma left me a little while ago while she went off about something, and I guess I got lost. But it's all right now, I'm found again, ain't it?"

"Oh, yes, indeedy, you're found all right, kiddie," Santa Claus agreed. "And pretty soon you'll take me

home again, won't you?" said the child.

"Surest thing you know!" answered Santa Claus, looking down upon the bright but tired little face with a comforting smile. "Where do you live?"

"As if you didn't know that!" cried Little Billee, giggling.

"Ha, ha!" laughed Santa Claus. "Can't fool you, can I? It would be funny if, after keeping an eye on you all these years since you was a baby, I didn't know where you lived, eh?"

"Awful funny," agreed Little Billee. Just then Little Billee noticed for the first time the square boards that Santa Claus was wearing.

"What are you wearing those boards for, Mr. Santa Claus?" he asked.

"If the lad had looked closely enough, he would have seen a very unhappy look come into the old man's face; but there was nothing of it in his answer.

"Oh, those are my new-fangled back and chest protectors, my lad," he replied. "Sometimes we have bitter winds blowing at Christmas, and I have to be ready for them. It wouldn't do for Santa Claus to come down with the sneezes at Christmas time, you know—no, siree! This board in front keeps the wind off my chest, and



"What Are You Wearing Those Boards for, Mr. Santa Claus?"

the one behind keeps me from getting rheumatism in my back. They are a great protection against the weather."

"You've got letters printed there," said the boy, peering around in front of his companion. "What do they spell? You know I haven't learned to read yet."

"Merry Christmas to Everybody!" said Santa Claus. "I have the words printed there so that everybody can see them; and if I miss wishing anybody a merry Christmas, he'll know I meant it just the same."

They walked on now in silence, for Little Billee was beginning to feel almost too tired to talk, and Santa Claus seemed to be thinking of something else. Finally, however, the little fellow spoke.

"I guess I'd like to go home now, Mr. Santa Claus," he said. "I'm tired, and I'm afraid my mamma will be wondering where I've gone to."

"That's so, my little man," said Santa Claus, stopping short in his walk up and down the block. "Your mother will be worried, for a fact; and your father, too—I know how I'd feel if my little boy got lost and hadn't come home at dinner time. I don't believe you know where you live, though—now, honest! Come! Fess up, Billee, you don't know where you live, do you?"

"Why, yes, I do," said Little Billee. "It's in the big gray stone house with the iron fence in front of it, near the park."

"Oh, that's easy enough!" laughed Santa Claus nervously. "Anybody could say he lived in a gray stone house with a fence around it, near the park; but you don't know what street it's on, nor the number, either I'll bet fourteen wooden giraffes against a monkey on a stick!"

"No, I don't," said Little Billee frankly; "but I know the number of our orte-mobille. It's—'N. Y.'"

"Fine!" laughed Santa Claus. Then he reflected for a moment, eyeing the child anxiously.

"I don't believe you even know your papa's name," he said.

"Yes, I do," said Little Billee indignantly. "His name is Mr. Harrison, and he owns a bank."

"Splendid! Made of tin, I suppose, with a nice little hole at the top to drop pennies into?" said Santa Claus.

"No, it ain't, either!" retorted Little Billee. "It's made of stone, and has more than a million windows in it. I went down there with my mamma to papa's office the other day, so I guess I ought to know."

"Well, I should say so," said Santa Claus. "Nobody better. By the way, Billee, what does your mamma call your papa? 'Billee,' like you?" he added.

"Oh, no, indeed," returned Little Billee. "She calls him papa, except once in a while when he's going away, and then she says, 'Good-by, Tom.'"

"Fine again!" said Santa Claus, blowing upon his fingers, for, now

that the sun had completely disappeared over in the west, it was getting very cold. "Thomas Harrison, banker," he muttered to himself.

"What, with the telephone book and the city directory, I guess we can find our way home with Little Billee."

He led the little fellow into a public telephone station, where he eagerly scanned the names in the book. At last last it was found—"Thomas Harrison, seven-six-five-four Plaza." And then, in the seclusion of the telephone booth, Santa Claus sent the gladdest of all Christmas messages over the wire to two distracted parents:

"I have found your boy wandering in the street. He is safe, and I will bring him home right away."

Fifteen minutes later, there might have been seen the strange spectacle of a footsore Santa Claus leading a sleepy little boy up Fifth avenue to a cross street, which shall be nameless. The boy vainly endeavored to persuade his companion to "come in and meet mamma."

"No, Billee," the old man replied sadly, "I must hurry back. You see, kiddie, this is my busy day."

But it was not to be as Santa Claus willed, for Little Billee's papa, and his mamma, and his brothers and sisters, and the butler and the housemaids were waiting at the front door when they arrived.

Led by Little Billee's persistent father, Santa Claus went into the house. Now that the boy could see him in the full glare of many electric lights, his furs did not seem the most gorgeous things in the world. When the flapping front of his red jacket flew open, the child was surprised to see how ragged was the thin gray coat it covered; and as for the good old saint's comfortable stomach—strange to say, it was not!

"I wish you all a merry Christmas," faltered Santa Claus; "but I really must be going, sir—"

"Nonsense!" cried Mr. Harrison. "Not until you have got rid of this chill, and—"

"I can't stay, sir," said Santa. "I'll lose my job if I do."

"Well, what if you do? I'll give you a better one," said the banker.

"I can't—I can't!" faltered the man. "I—I've got a Little Billee of my own at home waitin' for me, sir. If I hadn't," he added fiercely, "do you suppose I'd be doin' this?" He pointed at the painted boards, and shuddered.

"I guess Santa Claus is tired, papa," said Little Billee, snuggling up closely to the old fellow and taking hold of his hand sympathetically. "He's been walkin' a lot today."

"Yes, my son," said Mr. Harrison gravely. "These are very busy times for Santa Claus, and I guess that, as he still has a hard night ahead of him, James had better ring up Henry and tell him to bring the car around right away, so that we may take him back—to his little boy. We'll have to lend him a fur coat, to keep the wind off, too, for it is a bitter night."

"Oh," said Little Billee, "I haven't told you about these boards he wears. He has 'em to keep the wind off, and they're fine, papa!" Little Billee pointed to the two sign-boards which Santa Claus had leaned against the wall. "He says he uses 'em on cold nights," the lad went on. "They have writing on 'em, too. Do you know what it says?"

"Yes," said Mr. Harrison, glancing at the boards. "It says 'If You Want a Good Christmas Dinner for a Quarter, Go to Smithsonian's Cafe.'"

Little Billee roared with laughter.

"Papa's trying to fool me, just as you did when you pretended not to know where I lived, Santa Claus," he said, looking up into the old fellow's face, his own countenance brimming over with mirth. "You mustn't think he can't read, though," the lad added hastily. "He's only joking."

"Oh, no, indeed, I shouldn't have thought that," replied Santa Claus, smiling through his tears.

"I've been joking, have I?" said Little Billee's papa. "Well, then, Mr. Billiam, suppose you inform me what it says."

"Merry Christmas to Everybody," said Little Billee proudly. "I couldn't read it myself, but he told me what it said. He has it printed there so that if he misses saying it to anybody, they'll know he means it just the same."

"By Jove, Mr. Santa Claus," cried Little Billee's papa, grasping the old man warmly by the hand. "I owe you ten million apologies! I haven't believed in you for many a long year; but now, sir, I take it all back. You do exist, and, by the great horn spoon, you are the real thing!"

Little Billee had the satisfaction of acting as host to Santa Claus at a good, luscious dinner, which Santa Claus must have enjoyed very much. After dinner Henry came with the automobile, and, bidding everybody good night, Santa Claus and Little Billee's papa went out of the house together.

Christmas morning dawned, and Little Billee awoke from wonderful dreams of rich gifts, and of extraordinary adventures with his new-found friend, to find the reality quite as splendid as the dream things.

As for Santa Claus, Little Billee has not seen him again; but down at his father's bank there is a new messenger, named John, who has a voice so like Santa Claus' voice that whenever Little Billee goes down there in the motor to ride home at night with his papa, he runs into the bank and has a long talk with him, just for the pleasure of pretending that it is Santa Claus he is talking to.

DOLLARS COME HOME TO ROOST

EVERY farmer who makes our town his market place has an interest in this community. The fact that he is a member of the community makes much difference to him when he considers that the prosperity of our town is his own prosperity.

But when he sends his money to the mail order houses HE DOES NOT STOP TO THINK THAT HE IS NOT HELPING TO PAY THE REQUIRED TAXES IN HIS OWN COMMUNITY; not that he does not pay his own legally assessed taxes, but that he is not helping our local merchants to pay the taxes necessary to support the community.

The mail order man has absolutely no interest in the community. He plays the part of a fisherman—strolling about, casting a line here and there, where he thinks the best fishing is to be found, and after pulling out the fish he departs. The mail order man does not contribute to the upkeep of the community. He merely takes away from it.

When a farmer sends his dollars to the mail order house he prevents a certain amount of improvements, say, for instance, in road building, here in our county. The mail order man does not help to build our roads, but the local storekeeper does.

If we keep the dollars at home they will keep on helping us all. Dollars, spent at home, come home to roost. They come back in the upkeep of our town and county institutions. We have none too many dollars at the most in our community and it seems a shame to send any of them away to the mail order houses, where we will never see them again.

The dollars we send away help the mail order man to take a vacation in Europe or at the seashore. THEY HELP HIM TO MAINTAIN HIS AUTOMOBILE AND TO RIDE ON PAVED ROADS.

If we keep these same dollars at home they will help us to have better roads in our own county. Of course, the mail order man pays his taxes in the city, which helps to pave the streets of the city, but we here in our town don't benefit by that. Therefore, the best thing for us to do is keep our money at home, where it will do us some good.

OUR LOCAL MERCHANTS WILL USE THE DOLLARS TO GOOD ADVANTAGE BY HELPING TO PAY THE TAXES HERE—THE TAXES REQUIRED TO BUILD GOOD ROADS. EVERY DOLLAR SPENT IN OUR HOME TOWN MEANS IMPROVEMENTS AT HOME.

The merchants of our town deserve the patronage of the people in our community. They are a part, a very large part, of the community and they pay a major portion of the taxes. The more business they do the more taxes they must pay and the more taxes paid into the county treasury, the more improvements we can have.

Unless we are careful and watch our own interests we will find out to our cost that the ultimate result of the mail order scheme will be the centralization of all of the country business in the large cities and the absolute destruction of the financial interests in the small cities and towns. The only way to prevent this is to stop sending our orders to the mail order houses.

Let the dollars come home to roost. That is the only way, and they will come home to roost if we do not send them too far away. The dollars spent locally will circulate around and keep things lively, but if sent away we must get more dollars from outside to take their place. It is not always an easy matter to do this. THE SAFEST THING TO DO IS TO TAKE NO CHANCES, BUT TO SPEND THEM AT HOME WITH THE LOCAL STOREKEEPERS.

If we had any expectation that the mail order man would ever do anything to help our community, things might be different. But there is no chance. He comes to us in the garb of an artful deceiver, with gross misrepresentations, false promises and a record of disappointments. But we welcome the opportunity to again place ourselves on record as being his dupes. There isn't a grain of kindness in his whole makeup. He demands his cash in advance and gives you that which he wishes to send. You have no redress. You have no rights that he is bound to respect.

The mere fact that we are silly enough to send our money away, out of our own community, to a stranger, thereby injuring our own business prospects and jeopardizing our own prosperity, justifies him in believing that he can take the most outrageous liberties with us.

Bread cast on the waters will return, not so with dollars sent to the mail order house. Turkeys will come home to roost, if somebody does not catch them.

BUT DOLLARS WILL COME HOME TO ROOST IF WE KEEP THEM IN CIRCULATION IN OUR HOME TOWN. TRY IT

A PROFITABLE FARM MUST MAKE EFFICIENT USE OF FARM MACHINERY

Records Show That the Initial Outlay Must Be Replaced Each Ten Years Because It Is the Average Life of Machines—One Good Binder Ought To Last Twenty Years At Least—Use Paint On Wood Surfaces

(By J. C. McAmis, Division of Extension, University of Tennessee.)

One of the absolute requirements of a highly profitable farm is the efficient use of farm machinery. The average farmer in Tennessee thinks so himself, because he is spending large amounts for equipment.

The strange part of it all is that he has realized so well the value of machinery, and yet has learned so little of the art of caring for it, both while in use and while it is idle. He has learned so little of it that the life of most farm machines is not more than half what it should be.

Records show that the initial outlay must be replaced each ten years, because that is the average life of machines. This means that one-tenth of the value of all machines is spent each year to buy new ones. Records further show that in special cases, the same machines have done the same work and lasted twice as long. A good binder ought to last twenty years with a crop of fifty to a hundred acres; a farm wagon should last fifty years; a hay rake or grain drill, twenty-five years; a disc harrow, fifteen years. But the fact remains that only a few of them reach this age. Why? Because they are not properly housed, repaired and painted.

This is the season of the year to do these three things. More machines rust out than wear out. The former loss is a preventable one to a large extent. It requires moisture to make rust. If there is not enough covered space on the farm to take care of the implements during the winter, a shed should be built, but not a cheap one. It is possible to build a shed that will depreciate as much as the machinery

that it stores would depreciate if exposed. But machines should be housed at all hazards where they will be dry, both overhead and underneath. If there is dampness under machinery, it will collect moisture and the iron will rust and the wood will rot very badly. Too often machines have been driven under a leaky shed, or a large tree, which is even worse than letting them stand entirely in the open. More often, however, they are stored in the big machine shed, which has the field fence for walls and the sky for a roof. It is a very expensive shed.

Many machines are ruined by not being properly oiled and not having bolts kept tight. These are less conspicuous mistakes and attract little attention, but they are expensive ones nevertheless. Those who are living on the farm know best how many trips are made to the distant shop or store for repairs to meet an emergency. They probably do not realize the expense of such trips when the teams and the men must lie idle, and the crops damage in the waiting. Surely if they had made such a calculation, the repairs would have been attended to during the winter before, when the men were idle. Now is the time when all machines should be brought from the field and note made of the repairs needed; or better still, they should be brought from the field promptly as soon as used, even if they are to be used again in a few days, and repairs made at the earliest convenient time. Dirt should be removed from all wearing parts, a coating of axle grease applied, bolts tightened, missing or broken parts replaced, and wood work painted.

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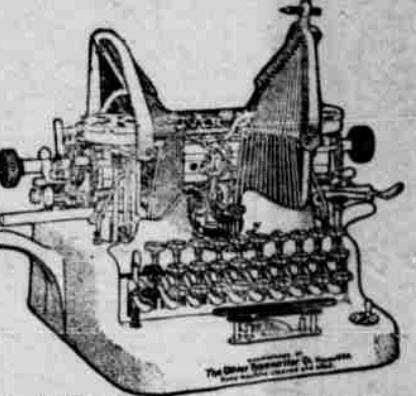
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