Jamestown, the Metropolis of the James River Valley of North Dakota.

JAMESTOWN WEEKLY ALERT.

Daily and Weekly Alert. Weekly Established 1878 Daily Established 1879.

VOL. XXVIII JAMESTOWN, NORTH DAKOTA, THURSDAY DECEMBER 22, 1904 NUMBER 18

A Doll's Christmas

A Quaint Tale of Life in the Nursery When Little Boys and Girls Are All Sound Asleep

.....By LAWTON JOHNSON

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ONE Christmas eve a wax doll sat on a chair in a pretty room in which a number of children were in bed. A fire was burning on the hearth. Stockings were hanging to the mantel to be filled with toys for the children who were sleeping soundly, doubtless dreaming of what they were to receive in the morning. The face of one of them, a delicate, fair haired boy, was turned toward the doll, and she did not tire looking at it, for the face, though pale and thin, was very delicately molded.

On the mantel were two figures in porcelain. One was a boy in an old fashioned coat and knee breeches, with a sash around his waist and a cocked hat and feather. His right hand was thrust into his coat in front, and he looked like a figure of Napoleon. The other was a girl, with a short dress and a sailor hat. Her head was poised one side, and she looked very well satisfied with herself. Indeed, she was very pretty.

"How do you do?" said the girl image to the doll. "Don't you think this a pleasant room?"

"Indeed it is, but I've not see many. I was only born"— She paused to think again when she was born, but couldn't remember, so she said instead, "Isn't it a beautiful world?"

"Do you think so?" said the boy. "My sister and I have had a hard time getting into it. We were baked in a furnace, and it was so hot"—

"Well, don't tell me about it," interrupted the doll. "I'd rather hear about pleasant places."

The figures told her a great many things, but the girl was very vain of her beauty, and the boy was taken up with what he knew about the world, of which the doll knew nothing at all, so she didn't listen long, but fell asleep while they were talking.

Suddenly she awoke with a start. What was that noise in the chimney? She had scarcely time to think about it when out on the hearth popped a little figure in fur. He unstrapped a pack he carried and filled all the stockings with toys. Then he jumped back into the chimney and was gone in a twinkling. This set the doll to wondering more than ever.

Everything was again silent except the clock, which ticked very loud. There were the children asleep in bed, the little pale faced boy with his head resting on his arm, the girl image on the mantel with her head on one side thinking how pretty she was and the boy thinking how much he knew about the world. The doll soon went to sleep again.

In the morning she was awakened by a shouting. The children were running about in their night clothes, taking their toys from their stockings and chattering like monkeys. The fair haired boy sat up in bed and looked on, for he was too delicate to get up like the other children. The doll noticed that he had great blue eyes, which seemed ever so large as he looked wonderingly at all that was going on. Then there came a knocking on the wall, and the children knew that it was a signal for them to get back to bed and not take cold, and back they scrambled, laughing and tumbling over one another, and covered themselves up.

Presently the father and mother came in and distributed the toys. The doll was for one of the girls, but the boy insisted on having it himself. Then when all were loaded with presents they carried them down to the breakfast room.

What a day it was! The children were racing about, playing with their toys, and people were coming in continually to see the presents, and the sun shone brightly on the snow outside, and the fire shone brightly within on the brass andirons and fender, and after dinner stories were told the children till they were all astonished by the number of wonderful things that happen. The boy with the light hair and blue eyes lay in his mother's arms, hugging the doll with her breast pressed against his, so that she could hear his heart beat, and she wondered why there was no such beating in her own heart. This was the happiest moment she had ever known. She was only a day old, but something told her that nothing in the world could ever make her happier.

When the children went upstairs the boy insisted on keeping the doll by him till he got into bed, when his mother persuaded him to part with it till morning. She placed it on a chair before the fire where he could see it till he should go to sleep and the first thing on awakening in the morning.

When the children were all asleep the doll looked up from the chair at the images on the mantel. She was too happy to go to sleep.

"What a lovely day I have had," she said.

"Just wait," replied the boy image, "till you have been knocked about the world awhile and you'll see." He looked as wise as an owl.

"I think it very nice," said the girl image, "so long as you are young and pretty, but I don't like the idea of getting old and cracked, perhaps having my arms or legs broken off."

The wind was rising without, and suddenly the fire blazed with a cheerful warmth. It was very pleasant for awhile, but presently it seemed to be too hot. The doll thought she began to feel a softening in her feet. She didn't know what it meant, but it frightened her. It extended to her legs; then she felt it in her arms and at last in her face and neck. A log of wood fell down on the coals, and the fire blazed higher, hotter than ever. The doll felt herself melting away.

"You're going," said the boy figure on the mantel. "It's just as well; the world isn't all like this household."

"It's just as well," echoed the girl image. "Your beauty will not have to fade."

"I don't want to go," cried the doll mournfully. "I want to stay with my blue eyed boy. The world may be full of sadness, but there must be pleasure as well, for it is here."

There was something so plaintive in her voice that even the images refrained from any further remarks. The fire blazed hotter, and the wax, which had as yet only softened, began to melt. Something spattered on the floor. It was a drop of melted wax.

Oh, that her little boy would get up and move her back from the fire! But he slept on peacefully, and as she had no voice for real children she couldn't call to him.

So the doll felt that she was melting away. Drop by drop she fell on the floor. The room, with its rich hangings, the children sleeping, the firelight flickering, the shadows and, above all, the memory of her brief existence—for, after all, a doll can only exist—seemed to be gradually fading away. She sighed to think that she couldn't have been born with a soul, to be loved and go on loving forever; that she could not grow up like a real child to see the unfolding of all the wonderful things in the world, passing from one existence to another instead of going out altogether. Then she thought that she might never have been born at all, never have had the one glimpse of the happy household, the one Christmas, the blue eyed boy and her single day of love. So she said: "I can't understand it. I will try not to murmur, but trust that it is all for the best."

* * * * * * *

And then—and then she awoke! The horror of melting had only been a dream. She had fallen asleep before the hot fire, but some kind hand had drawn the chair back, and in a few moments she was again clasped in the fond arms of her blue eyed boy.

Another Labor Saver.

An ingenious German and a professor at that, says the Cleveland Plain Dealer, has devised an apparatus by which a person lying in bed in a room electrically lighted can touch a button and tell what time it is with scarcely a movement of the body. There is a lamp that the button governs, and when the latter is pressed the lamp throws on the ceiling of the bedroom an optical representation of the watch lighted by electricity and with the time correctly indicated.

WRITING TO DEAR OLD SANTA CLAUS.

The Christmas Tree

How It Originated, How It Is Secured For the Market, and Some Interesting Legends of the Dim Past

By WALTON WILLIAMS

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THE Christmas tree goes so far back into the night of time that it is quite impossible to tell where or by whom it was first introduced. Almost every country has its legend claiming for its own the tree which bears such generous fruit. In Scandinavia it is said to have sprung from the "service tree," which germinated from soil soaked by the blood of two unfortunate lovers, a claim substantiated by the statement that at Christmastide inextinguishable lights gleamed from its green branches. In a French romance of the thirteenth century a great tree is described whose branches are covered with burning candles and on whose top is the vision of a child with a halo round its head, the tree and candles representing mankind and the child the infant Saviour.

A beautiful German story credits St. Winfred with giving the Christmas tree to the world. The story is illustrative of the gospel supplanting paganism. Before a group of converts St. Winfred felled a great oak which had been an object of the worship to the Druids. A fine young fir tree immediately appeared in its place, on seeing which St. Winfred said: "This little tree, a young child of the forest, shall be your holy tree tonight. It is the wood of peace, for your houses are built of fir. It is the sign of an endless life, for its leaves are ever green. See how it points upward to heaven. Let it be called the tree of the Christ Child. Gather about it, not in the wildwood, but in your homes. There it will shelter no deeds of blood, but loving gifts."

Many Germans hold that Martin Luther first conceived the Christmas tree. One of the most popular of German engravings represents him sitting in the bosom of his family, with a lighted Christmas tree on the table before him. Luther was traveling alone one Christmas eve. The snow covered country and the trees gleaming at every point with the reflected light of the winter moon made upon the great reformer the deepest impression. Going home, he went into the garden and, cutting a little fir tree, brought it into the nursery, put some candles on its branches and lighted them to reproduce the effect of the beautiful moonlit trees in the forest.

Antiquarians connect the Christmas tree with the great tree Yggdrasil of Norse mythology or with the pine trees of the Roman saturnalia, the pagan forerunner of our Christmas. Others look to the ancient Egyptians as originators of the idea. These men were wont to decorate their houses at the time of the winter solstice with branches of the date palm, emblems of immortality and of the starlit firmament. In mediaeval times there was a tradition that holiness invested an illuminated tree. Candles were used by the Jews in their Feast of Lights, which was celebrated at this season. The Greeks also call Christmas the Feast of Lights.

The Romans in their saturnalia decorated trees with images of Roman gods as well as with candles and burned Yule logs in honor of these gods. The early Christians, however, frowned upon all such pagan adjuncts to the Christmas celebration. With them the Feast of the Nativity was the extreme of solemnity, and they were as much opposed to Christmas trees and lights, music and laughter, as were the Puritans.

The first authentic account of the Christmas tree is not recorded until the sixteenth century. It appears in a German manuscript, and, as the Germans responded least to Latin influences of all the nations which fell heir to the Roman empire's lands, to them rather than to the Romans must be ascribed the honor of introducing it. It was the marriage of Queen Victoria to a German prince which brought the modern Christmas tree to England, and a German immigrant started the custom in America. The first Christmas tree in France was lighted in the Tuileries in 1840 by the Duchess Helena.

To view the great heaps of Christmas trees which line the market streets of our big cities just before the holidays one would fancy that scarcely a tree could be left standing of the murmuring hemlocks which constituted Longfellow's forest primeval. Every hard timber state in the Union is called upon by Santa Claus for its tribute of redolent balsam that he may have plenty of places on which to hang his presents.

There is only one true Christmas tree—the balsam fir. The hemlock proper has branches too drooping and flexible to hold a great weight of Christmas gifts, and the spruce, while otherwise suitable, lacks the spicy odor of the balsam. This is fortunate, for the tree most prized for Christmas purposes is utterly despised by the lumbermen. Before the Christmas tree industry began the fir lands of Maine were actually exempted from taxation as worthless. Now they are worth from $10 to $15 an acre.

The Christmas tree cutters begin work early, usually about the middle of October. While some of the men are cutting others follow them and drag the trees to the nearest open space, where they are bunched and tied so that they will not come apart in shipping. At the nearest depot they are loaded on cars, 2,500 trees to the car. The men receive $1.50 a day and board. It takes seven men working five weeks to get out three carloads.

The Christmas tree output depends a good deal on the weather. With an open fall, when the trees are easy to get at, the crop will be much larger than when the snow falls early and heavily. If the snow melts and then freezes on the branches it makes them brittle, and they break in transit.

The Gift I Didn't Get

A Christmas Poem by Peter McArthur

Copyright, 1904, by Peter McArthur

A Girl Who Calls Me Friend

I HAVE presents by the dozen,
Meant to make my Christmas glad.
From each uncle, aunt and cousin—
Best a fellow ever had.
There's a keepsake from my mother,
Father sent a check—and yet
I am thinking of another—
Of the one I didn't get.

THERE are gifts from all the fellows,
Pipes and things a chum will send:
There's a tie, all reds and yellows,
From a girl who calls me friend.
You would think me far from slighted
If you saw them all—and yet,
I confess, I'm most delighted
With the one I didn't get.

SHE told me it was ready,
She'd prepared it long before;
I'd been calling on her steady
For at least a year or more.
She told me all about it,
And her eyes with tears were wet,
And I'm happy, never doubt it,
For that gift I didn't get.

HER attitude was altered
When I called on her last night,
But my tale of love I faltered,
And I guess I did it right.
And this little rhyme is written
'Cause I'm full of joy—you bet!
For a frosty little mitten
Was the gift I didn't get.

TAKING HOME THE CHRISTMAS TREE.

Kuropatkin's Charger a Deserter.

General Kuropatkin has lost his famous charger, Le Marechal, a gift to him from the czar, says a special cable dispatch from Moscow to the New York American and Journal. Le Marechal, a son of Lohengrin, the English thoroughbred, has in fact deserted. "General Kuropatkin," writes the Russian commander in chief's adjutant to a friend in this city, "had thrown the bridle over his arm and was patting the horse on the neck when it kicked, tore away and galloped toward the enemy. Four Cossacks immediately pursued, but their horses were no match for the general's thunderer, and the riderless animal got clear away. At last the Cossacks came back, exhausted and afraid to show their faces. The soldiers have generally taken this to be an ill omen."

The Middle Aged and Employment.

It seems certain that the lamentable tendency to refuse employment to the middle aged increases both in America and England, says the London Spectator. The Carnegie Steel works have recently fixed thirty-five as the latest age of admission in some departments and forty in others, while in England the effect of the employers' liability act has been to produce a certain dread of employing middle aged men, who, from want of quickness, are more liable to accident. In Liverpool it was recently stated by the poor law authorities that large numbers of workmen now dye their hair, and it is well known that certain classes of skilled men, including almost all grades of male servants, such as coachmen, grooms, butlers and gardeners, never tell the truth about their ages.