The BAD CHILDREN'S CHRISTMAS

by Ethel Cook Eliot

THIS is a story of last Christmas day; and I will tell you right away that it ended happily. But it begins sadly. It was Christmas day up at the North pole, and as usual on the day before Christmas, St. Nicholas had been hurried and rather grumpy. Only this time, Mother Nicholas thought to herself that he was just a bit grumpier than she had ever known him. And at suppertime she found that she was right.

He came into the kitchen, closing his workshop door with a bang, and sat down with all the little Nicholases to his porridge.

"Well, I've said it before," he growled, "but this time I mean it. The children down there in the world will get nothing from my pack this night. It's time they were taught a lesson."

All the little Nicholases gasped, but Mother Nicholas only asked calmly: "Why, what is the matter now, father? After you've been working for them the whole year, you wouldn't go and disappoint the poor dears would you?"

"Yes, I would," declared St. Nicholas, swallowing his porridge in great gulps, and pretending that he was not a saint at all. "Half of them go around saying that there isn't any St. Nicholas, poking fun at me, and laughing in their sleeves. And the other half think it makes no difference whether they are good children or not, I'll fill their stockings just the same. It's a thankless job, I tell you. And I'm too old a man for it. So!"

"Come," said Mother Nicholas, soothingly, "here is a plate of griddle cakes. When you have eaten you will see things differently."

"No, when I have eaten I shall go to bed. That's where an old fellow like me belongs, an old fellow who children don't believe in."

Mother saw that he was determined, and that there was nothing to do for it, since griddle cakes wouldn't help. So she put her finger to her lips to motion the children silent, and went on quietly about her work. And when St. Nicholas had finished his supper, he did roll away to bed, only telling the little Nicholases to be sure to hang their stockings, for they had been good children all the year and still believed in him.

The minute the door closed behind him the little Nicholases burst into excited chatter. "Oh, what a pity! Those poor children! Surely there must be some good ones! Oh dear, what fun will Christmas be to us if all the children in the world down there are unhappy!"

"What indeed!" Mother Nicholas shook her head and looked often at

"Yes, I Would," Declared St. Nicholas.

the closed door, behind which St. Nicholas could already be heard snoring.

"And the reindeer!" cried the oldest boy, "what will they do without their yearly exercise? It seems as though father might have gone, if only for their sakes."

Mother Nicholas thought so, too. And at that minute they heard the reindeer's little hoofs beating on the hard snow crust at the door. Wise little beasts! St. Nicholas had never delayed the Christmas-Eve journey so long before, and so here they were to save him the trouble of going for them. The Nicholas children felt that they never could face the poor little reindeer's disappointment.

But what was Mother Nicholas doing so busily over there by the cupboard? The children looked in amazement. It was seldom that mother left the snowhouse at any time of day. And here she was, after dark, and Christmas Eve, too, putting on her hood and cape, and pulling on her gauntlets!

"Are you going to drive the reindeer back to the stables?" asked the oldest boy. "Oh, please, let me. Father always lets me, you know."

Mother shook her head. "I'll not be driving them back to the stables until this night's work is done," she said. "If you're awake when we get back, you may do it as always."

How the children stared! "Was little old mother going all alone on that long, wild drive over towns and forests and oceans and up and down chimneys, and goodness knows where, without asking St. Nicholas if she might?

Yes, that was just what she was going to do! "For, when a good thing needs doing," she said brightly, "no permission is needed."

"Keep the fire going, be sure that the baby has the fur rug well up around his chin, and give your father a good breakfast when he wakes," she called over her shoulder and was away out of the door almost before they had realized that she was going. They heard the scampering of the reindeer hoofs, faster the dimmer they got, and then just the stillness of the North pole.

That was last Christmas Eve. And if you ask any child who lay awake to see St. Nicholas, and peeped out with one eye, all the time pretending to be fast asleep, he will tell you that it wasn't St. Nicholas he saw at all. It was just a tiny, sprightly old lady with frosty white curls and a red hood, who filled naughty Willie's stocking just as full as good Marguerite's, and

St. Nicholas Welcomed Her Back Affectionately.

left many more bon-bons in both than was usual. That peeping child will also tell you that before she went back up the chimney, she gave baby a kiss on his pink cheek, a thing St. Nicholas (who is as afraid of babies as a burglar is, and for the same reason) has never been known to do.

And mother, will you believe me, in spite of having stopped to kiss all the babies, was back at the North pole a whole hour earlier than St. Nicholas had ever been able to make it, even in his younger days. Her work was well done, too! But in spite of the early hour, she found the children and her husband waiting for her. St. Nicholas welcomed her back more affectionately than the children.

"I woke in the middle of the night," he said, "out of such a horrid dream—all about crying children and sad mothers. Bless you, good wife, for not letting that dream come true!"

"Oh, don't mention it," said Mother Nicholas. "It was no trouble at all. Indeed, it did me good. I think, father, since you are getting so old, I will take over this job myself from now on."

St. Nicholas looked thoughtful at that. He paced up and down the floor. Then he came and stood in front of Mother Nicholas, straightening up and looking almost as young as in his early days.

"No, mother," he said firmly. "A woman's place is in the home. I'll attend to the business hereafter, thank you."

And mother, who, after all, only wanted everybody to be happy, made him some griddle cakes for his breakfast.

But that was last year, the year you got a stocking full, even though you hadn't been so very good. This year you had better watch out, for it is old St. Nicholas himself you have to deal with.

Party Supper Boxes.

Where there is seating room at the Christmas-time party refreshments are appropriately served in small boxes covered with red paper or holly patterned paper, and tied with gay ribbons in holiday color. Each box contains a sandwich, slices of cake, nuts and candies daintily wrapped in wax paper. A tissue paper napkin, in Christmas design, is folded in each box. When each person has received his or her supper box the coffee and ice cream are served and the contents of the box are eaten with it. The pretty boxes can be retained by the guests as a souvenir, or "favor," if they like such things.

Choosing the Holly.

Superstitious people assert that one should be careful about the choice of the holly for the decorations. Part should be smooth and part prickly. Then providing both kinds are carried into the house at the same time, all will be well. But should the prickly variety be taken in first, then the husband will rule the household during the coming year; if the smooth is brought in first the wife will be "top dog."

Christmas Spirit Needed.

None of us can have too much of the Christmas spirit.

Impulse Dodd's Christmas

by F. H. Sweet

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TOMMY Dodd, "Impulse Dodd," cattleman, was in Chicago, with his big sale over. And even in Chicago, where sight-seeing cattlemen were common, Impulse Dodd was a noticeable figure, with his six feet odd, free money ways, and almost perpetual smile.

He paused in front of a small, narrow store, whose one window was full of toys. Inside, the counter and shelves were paceked with the same kind of goods.

"Just Santa," said Impulse, aloud. "B'lieve I'll go in."

He closed his fingers tightly and pushed open the door with his thumb, stiffly extended.

"Put in his thumb," he grinned, "and—does he pull out a plum?"

In the shop were two men, the one in front of the counter loud-voiced and threatening. "Well," this one was finishing, as Impulse entered, "I'll give you just two more days to meet your bill, till the day after Christmas. If you don't pay me in full then, I will take possession."

As the man stalked out, Impulse raised his right foot and swung it back and forth thoughtfully.

"Can I show you anything, sir?" he asked a moment later, as Impulse turned to the counter with a half-regretful frown on his face, adding: "It's just as well you didn't do it, sir. He's a very vindictive man."

"That so? Then I sure wish I had. I don't generally hold back on things, but this city's getting me right scared. I've reined up unusual the last three days. Now 'bout the toys. That man's talk is so easy unraveled. I reckon you'll sell cheap?"

"At almost your own price, sir. There is only this one day to sell, and I can't hope to do enough. I've seen failure for a week past, though for a while I did hope to come out in condition to start again. Now what can I show you?"

"Well, not only one solitary thing in particular, I reckon," scanning the shelves judicially. "They all look right enticing, and what I didn't buy would make me feel sorry to look at. What'll you take for the bunch?"

The storekeeper moved along the counter, trying to arrange his goods more attractively.

"Look around all you want to," he said amiably. "And there is an easy chair back yonder where you can sit and rest, if you like."

Impulse followed him.

"No wonder you can't sell, if you treat all customers like me," he complained. "Now, see here," slapping a big roll of bills on the counter. "How

"How Much," Demanded Impulse.

much? Remember there's only one day for selling Santa stuff."

"Do you mean business?" asked the shopkeeper, a sudden huskiness coming into his voice.

"How much?"

"Fifteen hundred, if you mean the cost. But I warn you it's too late to sell much—"

"Oh, I'm sure a hustler down home," cheerfully, "and I've a hunch I can move Santa goods toler'ble brisk the day before the day. Now let's see, fifteen, with a fair per cent for profit and a little for good will makes it just two thousand. There you are," peeling off another bill or two, and then replacing the roll in his pocket. "Now you've got to throw in your services as clerk for the rest of the day."

"But I can't—" began the dazed shopkeeper. But Impulse was at the door.

"Back right soon," he called. "Be getting the goods ready to handle quick."

Outside, Impulse glanced up and down the street. Half a dozen urchins were playing on the sidewalk, two or three were hanging behind a dray, a newsboy was crying his papers. Other youngsters were dimly seen among pedestrians and street vehicles. Impulse put two fingers into his mouth and blew a blast that would cover a mile on the prairie. At the same time the other ... his pocket with ... gers could g... into the air. By the time ... ceased jingling on the sidewalk ... more or less grimy little hands were clutching for them.

"Now, you bunch," called Impulse. "Just listen to me for a minute. Who's the most no 'count boy in this neighborhood?"

"Crawfish Bobby," answered a voice promptly. "He never stands treat, an' carries every cent home to his ma-a-a."

"And the most unpopular girl?"

There was a short silence, then several of the boys tittered.

"Raggy Sally," said one of them. "She's Peanut Seller Bet's girl, an' when we boys throw mud she fights like a wildcat."

"And gives all of you a mighty good drubbing, I hope," commented Impulse. "Now, boys, the two who bring Crawfish Bobby and Raggy Sally to me get a four-bit piece each, and tell them they'll get another for coming. Now, the lot of you come back, for the show isn't half over."

Ten minutes later, Crawfish Bobby and Raggy Sally stood in front of him. Impulse placed a hand upon a shoulder of each.

"These two are going to be little Santas and give you all a right nice

"Mr. Santa Claus, I Believe Sir," She Began.

present by and by," he called to the rapidly increasing crowd of urchins. "Mind, you'll owe it in part to them. Now stampede into the streets and alleys of the neighborhood and corral every boy and girl you can find, and bring 'em here. Just an hour from now this store'll commence to give out presents, and you'll all get one. Nobody will be missed. Hit the street now, the whole lot of you except these two."

In an hour, the door was thrown open and the rush began, with half a thousand whooping youngsters to make the assault. It was short work, the pillaging of the store, and in forty minutes all was over. And then, just as the hilarious present bearers were scattering into every street and alley, an automobile swerved out from the street traffic and stopped at the curb. In it were an old gentleman and a lady and several girls. The gentleman motioned some of the urchins to the side of the car, where they were questioned as to the extraordinary spectacle. Then a few words passed between the occupants of the car, after which one of the girls alighted and came to the store. Crawfish Bobby and Raggy Sally were just outside the door, with their arms full.

"You're the little Santa's," smiled the young lady, as she took their hands, "and I just know you had a big time." Then she entered the store and went straight to Impulse.

"Mr. Santa Claus, I believe, sir?" she began.

"Why—er—no," stammered Impulse, turning red, "only—er—just as a sort of advance agent, named Impulse—I mean Tommy Dodd."

The girl broke into a ringing laugh.

"Impulse! I like that," she cried. "Now, Impulse Dodd, have you any definite arrangement for the Christmas holidays—any binding engagement, I mean?"

"N-o-o, nothing except to tramp sidewalks and say 'Howdy' to every stranger who'll let me."

"Good! Then there's nothing in the way of our invitation. You see, we're having a houseful of company for the holiday week, and papa and mamma suggested that I ask you. Papa owns a ranch out West, and he says he knows how a stranger must feel in a city at Christmas time, and he thinks a man who can do what you've just done will certainly be an acquisition to our party. And I may add we all feel the same way. You'll come? There is room in our machine."

Impulse nodded. He lacked words fitting to the occasion. A week at a house party! Gee! wouldn't that be stuff to tell the boys at the ranch. Start back the day after Christmas? Who? He? No, siree! That would be rank foolishness. Not till the last gun was fired.

So he walked out to the automobile with the girl, with never a thought of the emptied store behind, or of the beaming, misty-eyed man who could now stock up again without the baleful skeleton of a creditor to glare at him over the goods. And as Dodd entered the automobile, one of the girls afterwards declared that she heard him murmur, "And pulled out a plum," though she could not understand why. It was just one of his funny ways.

The Green Christmas

by Christopher G. Hazard

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IT WAS not a very cheerful boy that was looking out of the window at what little dirty ice the winter thaw had left upon the hill in front of the house. Through the fine coasting days he had heard the happy noise of the sledding while the doctor had said that he could not go out and join in it, and now, though he might soon be out of doors again, there was no surety of as good a hill again and small prospect of sport.

It wasn't a very cheerful house, either. Mr. Bondage was a chainmaker, and when he came home from his iron works he always seemed to bring his business with him. The house of Bondage was big and strong, but it was hard, and still, and dark, and too orderly. From the outside it looked like a fort, and inside, the chairs stood at attention, like soldiers. The parlor was a solemn place, where the stiff furniture was seldom prevented from looking at itself in the gilded mirror. The dining room didn't get the sun until towards evening, when the motto, "Be Good and You Will Be Happy" could be as plainly seen as the one on the opposite wall, "Children Should Be Seen but Not Heard." When the boy put on his hated bib there, it exhorted him with, "Don't Eat Too Much."

Chained to the front porch was an iron dog, whose fixed and ferocious snarl was a standing insult to all the village dogs that could get through the iron fence to dispute with him. There was some fun about the place; it was when a surprised dog retired from the attack with a new respect for the tough guardian of the Bondage interests. Even the iron-clad knight in the front hall seemed to laugh through his visor then.

Besides all this, Ishmael had had no Christmas. Mr. Bondage did not believe in Christmas; to him Santa Claus was a foolish imagination and a hurtful superstition. He had joined "The Society for the Prevention of Useless Giving," and was glad to be called a Spug. On December 25th he had presented to his son a picture of himself, standing in front of his office with the scowl upon his face that represented his idea of the expression of greatness, but the only comfort of the day for the boy had been the sweet contents of the small package that his mother had smuggled into his room just before daylight.

But Ishmael Bondage had an Aunt Sarah! And Aunt Sarah had the pleasantest home in the country. It was a low, wide, rambling old house, in the midst of the trees and hugged by the climbing vines that loved it. There wasn't a place in it too good to be used and in its snowy whiteness it seemed to shine out upon the fenceless grounds with an invitation to the hospitality of its gardens and the good

Aunt Sarah Carried Ishmael Off.

cheer of its friendly owners. That was the bright spot for Ishmael. When he went out there his aunt would hang his Fauntleroy suit up in the closet and give him a leather suit that could not be torn and tell him to go it. He could eat without a bib and there was not a motto in sight. By the time that vacation was over he was a real boy. The other boys stopped calling him "Sissy" and no longer asked him if his mother knew he was out. Indeed, he up and thrashed a bullying boy who had knocked over one of his companions who was about half his size. After this there was nothing that he could not have among his crowd. So, every vacation sent a prim but joyful boy to Aunt Sarah and closed with a more robust but rather dejected one on his way home.

But Aunt Sarah also had a mind of her own. She had so much mind that she had concluded that winter to go and give Benjamin Bondage a piece of it. She considered Ishmael's state and situation and resolved to give his father "a good talking to." When she appeared Mr. Bondage felt that his time had probably come. When she had finished he knew it had. She told him that he had forgotten that he was ever a boy, if, indeed, he had ever been one, that he had made himself into an iron man, that he was blind-eyed and hard-hearted, that he seemed determined to fasten all his chains up on Ishmael and make his son as stiff and cold as an icicle.

Mrs. Bondage, behind the door, expected her husband to object in loud and angry tones, but, to her astonishment, he was silent. He seemed to remember an old motto, "Discretion Is the Better Part of Valor," profitably, and did not interfere, even when Aunt Sarah, flushed, but triumphant, carried Ishmael off.

There was some winter play left and to come at Sweetfield, but Aunt Sarah wasn't satisfied as easily as that, for she had made up the rest of her mind into an idea that Ishmael should have the Christmas that he hadn't had, after all. It wasn't much of a Christmas day when the belated Christmas tree blossomed and bore fruit, but it was a fine tree. The snow and ice had disappeared and a warm wind made the late winter seem like early spring, but Aunt Sarah said that evergreen trees kept Christmas all the year round, and that every day was their day. Cer-

"A Wonderful Pocketknife—"

tainly it was the most interesting tree that Ishmael had ever seen, from the bundle at the bottom, through all the ornaments, lights and gifts, to the mysterious package at the top of it shone with kind and thoughtful love and sparkled with merry wishes and glad promise. They and the children from the neighborhood who had come to share the joy and the presents that Aunt Sarah had prepared were wondering what would be found in that last parcel at the top, until it was taken down, and then a part of the party, at least, was surprised when the wrapping was taken off and a wonderful pocketknife, beside a first-class football, conveyed merry wishes from Mr. Bondage to his son. Aunt Sarah said afterwards that at this she nearly "went off the handle."

When May came it seemed time for Ishmael to go home, but he was not very happy at the prospect. Indeed, he was rather unhappy about it. He felt something like one on his way to jail, and even shed tears at the thought of leaving Sweetfield, so that a squirrel, seeing him wiping his eyes under a tree, exclaimed "Oh, what a rainy boy!" but the day came and Ishmael went.

Another surprise awaited him, however, for, as he neared home and entered it, everything seemed changed. The house looked sunny and pleasant in its new colors, the fence had disappeared, the iron dog had been moved to the barn, and the mailed knight had gone down to the ironworks to be turned into plowshares.

When Mr. Bondage went out to Sweetfield to visit his sister and to report upon Ishmael's progress, Aunt Sarah had her reward. "It is all your doing, Sarah," said he. "I needed someone to show me up to myself." "Well, brother," said Aunt Sarah, "A Stitch in Time Saves Nine," as the proverb has it, and you certainly will be proud of our boy yet, as proud of him as I am of my big, new brother."

When December came blustering around again and brought Santa Claus and all his load of love and jollity, there was no place that more warmly welcomed him than Mount Freedom, as Mr. Bondage's home had come to be called, and of all the happy Christmas parties of that year, none was fuller of mirth and good cheer than the one at Mount Freedom. They danced about the tree and under the motto that hung from the top of it with its message of good will to everybody, the football was kicked all over the floor and they shouted in their glee. The squeaking toys, the tooting whistles, the happy songs, all made the time as merry as it ought always to be, while the gifts spoke messages of love.

Ishmael had prospered enough in his studies to make a picture of Sweetfield. It hung over the mantel shelf in the living room and under it he had written, "The Home of the Green Christmas." When anyone asked him about it he would tell them how spring once came in a wintry time; he would say that while Christmas comes but once a year, it sometimes comes twice, and that whenever it comes it brings good cheer; but he was never able to make a picture of his Aunt Sarah that seemed to him good enough.