



BILLY'S CHRISTMAS.

Zeph Davis didn't agree with the world at all. He found very few things which met his unqualified approval, and the more persons he found agreed upon a certain point the more certain was he to discover the utter weakness of their position. He was very shrewd and looked at the world from the heights occupied by a superior and complacent being. It amused him to see all the women agreeing on certain lines of house ornamentation. It provoked him to find all the men united on theories of improvement, dress and behavior. He particularly resented the universal surrender of the race to the spirit of Christmas. "It's all hoky poky," said Zeph. As Christmas approached his wife wondered if he would not break his usual habit and make some conventional preparation. She remembered a very pleasant gayety in these seasons when a girl, but had been unable to repeat them since becoming the wife of Zeph. And her little boy, now 6 years old, added to her unhappiness. He had caught something of the season's inspiration from the children who drifted past his cabin home and from the activities at the great house of the squire when he went up there one day to do an errand for his mother. He was full of questions which his mother could not entirely answer and which he could not suspend when his father was at home. But down through his infant consciousness at last filtered the conviction that he and his household were outside the pale embraced in the reign of Santa Claus. He had no doubt the day held a great and joyful significance to the squire's children, nor that Santa Claus came down a chimney and gave presents to all the good little boys and girls in the world. Only, of course, his house was not included. The gentle sway of the Christ child could not naturally embrace the little cabin at the edge of the woods. Yet he had an unformed, pathetic little regret that it was so. Zeph was in town Christmas eve and staid a little later than usual, though that did not trouble his wife much. He was not in the habit of coming home till he got ready, not leaving till moved by the same consideration. Only he was sure to come some time, and always sober. He was quite superior to the nearly universal habit of acquiring a dual personality by imbibing stimulants. It was altogether an unmixed folly to him. "Town's pretty lively, I reckon," said his wife as Zeph came in, and prepared for supper. He did not remove an overcoat. He wore none. He looked upon that custom as quite as unnecessary as popinjars notions usually were. "Ya-as," snickered Zeph, grinning in derision of what he had seen. "Stores all lighted up, and candy and things in the windows." "What things in the windows, pap?" inquired the boy, his blue eyes large and bright. "Oh, toys, and them things!" "What things?" again, but hesitatingly. Zeph glanced warningly at the boy and then slowly replied: "Skates and red mittens and some wooden soldiers and drums and picture books." The boy had never seen the stores, for he had never been in town, but he had in his mind a very vivid picture of the place and its glories. And he looked very straight at his father as that picture took form before him. "Many people in town?" questioned the wife. She had seen those splendors on Christmas eve, and she had counted on seeing them again this season. "Ya-as; the stores was crowded, and the streets was full of teams. Couldn't get more'n 50 cents for that oozak and had to take that in trade. Wouldn't pay no more'n 50 cents if I took it in cash. So I traded for some truck and come home. They tried to sell me a lot of plunder, but I don't go none on them things." "What plunder, pap?" asked the boy. The responses for trimming his fancy stores were really very slender. He needed more material. Just a hint would do. It seemed so real to him. "Oh, a tin horse and wagon and a candy bird and a woolly little sheep that says 'bah!'" "Big sheep, pap, or just a lamb?" "Naw. About so high." And Zeph measured a span from the top of the table. That changed the whole interior of his wonder cave for the boy. These treasures were smaller than the natural size. If smaller, why could they not be made larger? So his wonderful creations were taking delightful shape. It was quite a picture he found himself arranging when his mother said from the depths of the Algonquin, where she was finishing the supper work: "Come round supper, Billy. Go to

And he hurried into his little cot, hoping he could carry the dream unbroken. How they danced before him, those excellent animals! How gravely the birds addressed him, and how reasonably it seemed that tin soldiers should become live dogs and bark aloud, and how swift it all was, for this was morning, and Dash, the hound, was challenging some noises he heard in the woods across the road. This was just the same as any other morning to Zeph. He got up lazily and dressed in a flood of sunshine, shivering a little and complaining that his wife had no better fire. He looked out on the deep snow and knew the hunting would be excellent. Just after breakfast a sleighload of people passed, their bells jingling with tempting melody, and jingling still till the horses stopped in front of the squire's farmhouse, when they gave way to shoutings of cheer and answering shouts of welcome. "Must be Miller's folks, from Burr Oaks," said Zeph's wife, as she closed the door and wondered if her other dress was not better than this one. The boy stood there at the window, with his chin on the sill, and tried to regain his dream-estate, from which the daylight had ejected him. Presently he saw the squire's children coming down the road with a basket, and he went out and stood on the steps in the sunshine. The squire's children were taking a turkey to old Mrs. Stevens, down by the lake. They stopped at the gate, and he went down to look at their presents. They each had a pair of skates and were going to try them on the lake if the ice was good. But no ice could add to the present pleasure of ownership. They had new shoes and a silk handkerchief, with a letter in the corner of it, and a number of candy horses, and one of the girls had a gold finger ring. They had hung their stockings on a line behind the stove, and everything was filled in the morning. Little Billy added another view to his Christmas lore. It was a time for making people happy. He remembered a party of children that came down here in a light wagon when hazelnuts were ripe and stopped for a drink of water from the spring, and he found himself wondering what the day had brought to those children. Of course it never occurred to him to take a personal view of the matter. He never imagined himself included in that wondrous embrace. "For of such is the kingdom of heaven." His nose was red, and his hands were thrust deep in his pockets when he returned to the house. But he sat on the chest there by the fireplace and wondered silently. Zeph was greasing his boots and regretting that he didn't have oil instead of tallow. He rather resented the fact that the house was tidier than usual, that a plate of apples was upon the table, and that his wife was rolling pie crust and cutting cookies—her hair done up as she used to wear it when he went a-wooing. He expressed his disapproval of all this hoky poky and asked her what she was going to have for dinner. She said nothing for a time. She wished he had not asked her. There was so little, but she had planned to make it appear as fair as possible. Across her silence came the bark of Dash over there in the woods, and the hunter instinct in Zeph was roused. Since no one had asked him to go hunting he felt no disinclination to look for game. So he glanced out of the window, caught sight of the hound sitting there in the timber, looking up for one moment and then turning his eyes to the house, barking occasionally the short, emphatic statement that he had found a squirrel. Billy was in great glee. His mother had baked a colander full of cookies and had them molded with her fingers, a little crudely perhaps, a number of animals from the dough. Billy didn't recognize all of them, but when she told him he saw the points of resemblance. And when his father came back he was quite happy playing with them. Zeph cut a basal stick as he came back through the woods, and after the squirrels he had shot had been dressed he held them on the stick and broiled them before the fire. They were delicious, and there was a dish of mashed potatoes—quite an unusual thing—and some baked apples, and the wonderful cookies. Billy couldn't imagine a better dinner, than that Zeph ate with great relish, but by no means forgetting to regard the whole thing as "hoky poky." And after dinner he went down to the sawmill and told stories with the rest of the men, coming home rather before they had exhausted their jug of apple-juice. He had taken one drink himself, and it may be that made the difference. Anyway he was moved to unusual behavior. The fire was low, and he stirred up the burning ends of logs till the cabin was filled with a flood of light, and as he turned he saw there on the pillow at the side of his sleeping son's head a little little messenger of bells, brown down and knew that each animal had been perfect in the form they were

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THE MISTLETOE BOUGH. Origin of the Christmas Tree and Decoration With Evergreens. Among the votaries of the early Druids there was a superstition that the houses should be decorated with evergreens in December in order that the sylvan spirits might enter them and thus be kept free from the blast of the cold north wind and the frost until a milder season renewed the foliage of their usual haunts. The Christmas tree is really from Egypt, where the palm tree puts forth a branch every month, and where 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 year completed. Who does not know the poem beginning: The mistletoe hung in the castle hall; The holly branch shone on the old oak wall? Years ago over every man's door in England hung a sprig of mistletoe at this season. There still hovers a mystic charm about the mistletoe, and many a girl now, with a thrill of expectancy, places a branch of it under the chandelier or over the door. According to a former belief, when a girl is caught and kissed under the mistletoe a berry must be plucked off with each kiss, and when the berries have all been plucked the privilege ceases. Among the ancient Britons the mistletoe that grows on the oak tree was the kind held in favor. Because of its heathen origin it is not used often in church decorations, a fact which is referred to by Washington Irving in his "Bracebridge Hall," where he has the learned parson rebuke the unlearned clerk for this very thing. In Germany and Scandinavia the holly or holy tree is called Christ's thorn, because it puts forth its berries at Christmas time, and therefore is especially fitted for church decorations. With its glossy, dark leaves and bright, red berries, it is an attractive decoration for the house. The Jews used to decorate at their feast of tabernacles with evergreens and flowers. The laurel was used at the earliest times of the Romans as a decoration for all joyful occasions and is significant of peace and victory. In some places it is customary to throw branches of laurel on the Christmas fire and watch for omens while the leaves curl and crackle in the heat and flame. The evergreen tree is a symbol used as the revival of nature, which, astronomically, signifies the return of the sun. Hung with lights and offerings, the tree has for centuries been one of the principal characteristics of Christmas-ide—New York Mercury. THE UNIVERSAL HOLIDAY. Christmas Bells Ring Joyful Tidings to All the Earth. There is no holiday in all the long calendar of the months that is so universally and so enthusiastically celebrated as Christmas. All men everywhere take heart of grace and smile a cheery smile as the music of the Christmas bells falls upon their ears. Whoever will look back to his young days cannot help remembering what a strange, mystic time Christmas was. There was something almost awe inspiring in the music of the Christmas carols sung at midnight in the open, frosty air. And these Christmas "watts" who sang, who were they? Unseen and unknown, we almost deemed them beings of a fairer world sent down to make Christmas delightful. If we had known in those days that these men who broke the silence of the starry night to tell us what "the herald angels" sang were mortals given to the smoking of tobacco and the drinking of port, all our romantic dreams would have ended there and then. As we grow older we grow wiser, and therefore a little sadder. We know, of course, that there is no real Santa Claus; but, oh, how we wish there were!

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SANTA CLAUS IS REAL. THOUGH MANY PEOPLE SPEAK OF HIM AS A MYTH. In England St. Nicholas Was Recognized as the Guardian of Youth—Legend of the Wicked Butcher—In Germany He Put Good Things In Lucky Bags. In spite of the fact that Dec. 6 was St. Nicholas' day thousands of people talk of Santa Claus as myth. St. Nicholas was a very real personage. He was archbishop of Myra in 342, and the name under which he enjoys an annual popularity in this country is the German form that came with the German custom of the Christmas tree and all the rest of it. St. Nicholas is a great saint with all the Teutonic and Scandinavian peoples. It was his prerogative, says the New York Recorder, to manifest his piety when at his mother's breast, for even then he is said to have fasted Wednesdays and Fridays. As a matter of course he soon became famous in working miracles, and here again he appeared to seek favor with the young people. An innkeeper having killed two young gentlemen and put them in the pickle tub, intending to sell them as pickled pork, the saint, who, in a vision, had seen the deed done, decried he would put a stop to the business, and thereupon he transformed himself from Lycia to Athens and stood before the astonished innkeeper and said, "What hast thou done?" The man trembled, confessed and implored forgiveness. Having parted the man on the back and said, "Don't do it any more," the holy man turned to the pickle tub, when the imitation sides, legs and hands of pork began to stir, and in quick succession there came forth two boys merely, but three, as may be proved by reference to the Salisbury missal of 1634, wherein there is a picture of the event, and one of its peculiarities is that, as the three boys rise complete out of the pickle, the barbarous butcher is still busy in cutting one of them up. St. Nicholas established yet another claim to be regarded as the friend of youth, for he was partial to boxing and employed his skill in the "manly art" upon the heads of bishops. The guardianship of the young by Santa Claus was of old recognized in England by the custom of choir boys in cathedrals choosing a boy bishop on the day of St. Nicholas, Dec. 6. This was a very important event, as may be seen by Hous' "Every Day Book," 1, 1359, where there is an entry of a boy bishop from Salisbury cathedral. The custom was in full observance from early times until 1543, when it was abolished by a proclamation of Henry VIII. According to the old north German custom, the happy time for the children is the vigil of St. Nicholas, the night of Dec. 6. Then it is that he glides about, putting good things into lucky bags and spying out the merits and demerits of boys and girls and sometimes unsparingly praising or rebuking them. The north German fashion requires the saint to pay a visit to the house where the young are assembled in festivity on the night of his vigil. He speaks in kindly words to the juvenile throng, reproving some, encouraging others. On retiring to rest, each member of the party places an empty shoe on the table, and the door of the room is at once locked, and behold! when morning dawns and the doors are opened in the presence of all, the shoes are found to be filled with gifts for their owners and the table is covered with trinkets and sweetmeats. We have simply incorporated St. Nicholas' day with Christmas day and made the night of Dec. 6 the time of the saint's visitation. But he is not a myth now any more than he ever was. He is a very real as well as a very good saint indeed, and for the children's sake, may his shadow never grow less! THE BIRD OF DAWNING. A popular superstition is that on the eve of Christmas the bird of dawning sings all night long to frighten off any evil thing. It was from this belief that Shakespeare wrote: Some say that ever 'gainst that season comes wherein our Saviour's birth is celebrated, The bird of dawning sings all night long. And then, they say, no spirit dares stir abroad. The nights are wholesome. Then his plumes strike! No fairy takes, nor witch hath power to charm, So hallow'd and so gracious is the time. St. Nicholas In France. St. Nicholas holds a prominent position in France as the dispenser of gifts, though in many places it is the Christ child who distributes them. The Christ child frequently appears to children as Santa Claus does with us. He is usually assisted by a company of angels. In Alsace he is represented by a maiden in white, with a silver bell in one hand and a basket of sweetmeats in the