

IF I WERE FATHER CHRISTMAS

By Robert Power. (Author of "Two Minutes Talks.")

"If I were a millionaire" was the subject of a series of articles which I read some years ago, articles in which men, celebrated in various walks of life, set forth what they thought they would do if they had a million pounds to their credit at the bank.

Those were interesting articles, but, as I read them, I wondered whether any of these men, if they found themselves in possession of a million, would really behave as they said they would.

Of course, they all proposed to be very generous, to bestow money just where it was most needed, and where the greatest good would come of their gifts. But I thought, and still think, that a great change must come over a man when he finds himself entitled to call himself a millionaire, for there are already in the world many millionaires, and none of them do as these men would have done.

Perhaps it is that the getting of a million involves such a narrowing of outlook, such a suppression of the more generous impulses of the heart, that, by the time the million is made, the millionaire is bereft of those good intentions which might have been his when he first set out upon his wealth-pursuing career.

That is why I have always thought it so much fun to speculate on what I would do if I were a millionaire; for, somehow, despite the lavish generosity of some wealthy men, the millionaire is regarded as being either a miser or one who lavishes money only upon his personal comfort or upon ostentatious extravagances.

But to picture oneself as Father Christmas—that is different! Father Christmas does not measure his beneficence in terms of money. He seeks simply to give happiness. Sometimes his gift is only a sixpenny toy, but it is just the playing some child has craved.

Here, then, is the principle which guides those who maintain the myth of Father Christmas; here, then, is the principle upon which Father Christmas does his good deeds.

In that spirit I would go my way, bestowing gifts upon mankind, if it were in my power to do so, I would endeavour to give to each just that gift which might be necessary to happiness, though it might not always be the thing which the receiver believed to be necessary.

First come the children, of course, Father Christmas must carry a varied stock; his sack is not filled at a mass production warehouse, but a certain uniformity would be inevitable, if I were Father Christmas. On most of the children I would bestow that gift which, apart from a God-fearing heart, is needed by nearly all of them in after-life.

Some need physical courage; some have that, but need moral courage. Most children need one or other. Only the favoured of the gods have both. I would give each just the brand of courage necessary to ensure that, in after life, he or she would be a winner and not a loser.

As a secondary gift, I would bestow the emotion of gratitude upon certain children, on those of the type we call "modern." I would give them the power to see how children are lacking in a sense of gratitude, and it saddens the parents' hearts, brings a cloud into the home, and fortifies in a strong element of selfishness in the man or woman of the future.

The elder children, those who have crossed the junction of brook and river, and are now on the threshold of manhood and womanhood, these, too, would I endow with a sense of gratitude. I would have them feel thankful that they were born when they were, and not a little earlier. For their own happiness they should be intensely thankful that they were not called upon to make the sacrifices that their elder brothers and sisters had to make in order to ensure that those who followed them would be able to go their ways free from the menace of war and the domination of force.

Too few of the youths of to-day appreciate what was won for them, and at what cost. Few young girls appreciate that, unlike the generation of women before them, they will not know the anguish of being widowed early in life, or of seeing the man to whom they have

given their hearts, blinded, crippled, or cut off in the very noon-tide of life. If these facts were realised, there would be less grumbling and discontent, less seeking after excitement, and a greater appreciation of the simple joys of life whose continuance has been made possible by the inestimable sacrifices of a generation, even now, is but a little older than themselves—the generation that lost its youth.

To those who are worried and full of apprehension concerning the future, I would give peace of mind, by presenting them with a record of their past fears and of past events, arrayed side by side, I would enable them to see how seldom in the past, were their fears justified, and how often the future brought unexpected joys instead of expected troubles.

By the besides of those who regard themselves as soldiers of idealism, those who fight for great ideas which they believe to be right, I would leave a generous measure of tolerance. So often, people with the highest motives, people of great moral courage, stultify their power for good by being utterly intolerant of the views of others. By the gift, I would bestow, they would be made much happier than they imagine, because they would find that, sweetened by tolerance, their advocacy would be all the more effective.

An idea whose hour has come is stronger than armies" wrote Victor Hugo. But the hour does not arrive until the advocates of the idea have converted the majority to their way of thinking; and intolerance never yet made a convert.

To the lonely I would give, not friends for that would be encouraging a serious fault which usually exists in the friendless, but the power to make friends. Be their exteriors what they may, there is no doubt that the majority of people have kindly, friendly hearts. Those who do not feel the warm glow of human friendship, need to be enlightened, so that they may see that their isolation can easily be cured by drawing their chairs up to the fire.

To the lovers, need anything be given? Surely, they have all that is essential to happiness? Yes, but I would give them a specific to "fix" their love, something to fulfill the same purpose as the chemical which fixes a photograph so that time shall not fade it nor bright light obliterate the images it bears. My specific would be a mixture compounded of much patience and a liberal sense of humour. With this, lovers might maintain, throughout life, the love that is now their precious possession, and enable it to resist the ravages of time and harsh glare of realities.

Thus I would proceed, visiting the country cottages, the long monotonous rows of town-dweller's houses, the complacent suburban villas, and the mansions of the well-to-do. All their inhabitants have needs, and some do not know what they need, save that it be a thing that will make them happy.

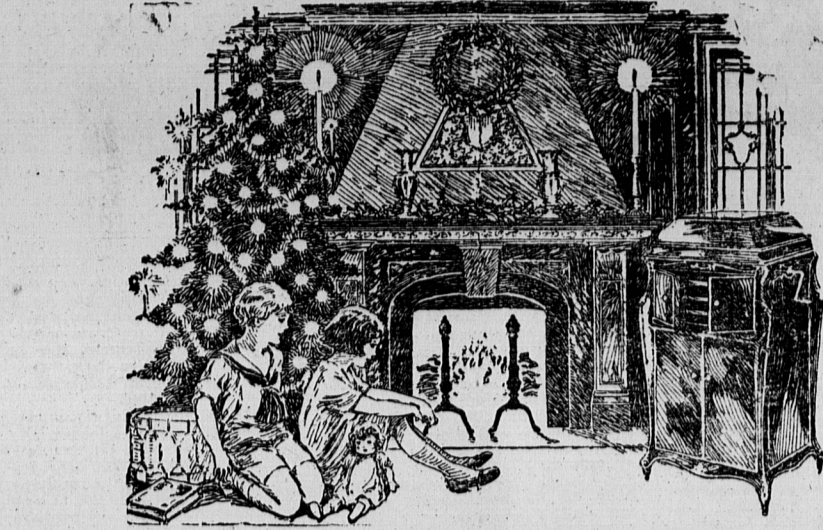
Why not play this game of Father Christmas for yourself? Why not enjoy the luxury of doing good? Here are some suggestions.

If you are fortunate enough to have parents, give them news that will make them proud of you. If you have children, give them the best example of which you are capable. If you have enemies, give them pardon. To your friends, give the key to your heart. To those who have fallen by the way-side, to the outcasts, give your hand and sympathetic understanding, thanking God the while that your own misdeeds have escaped similar punishment.

And when you have finished your round, perhaps there will be something left in the sack for yourself. Probably it will be a packet marked "self respect," and labelled with Shakespeare's potent words: "This, above all, to thine own self be true and it must follow as the night the day, thou canst not then be false to any man."

—John Beresford.

Dinner for nothing is more desirable than nothing for dinner.



CHRISTMAS EXPECTANCY.

THE SILENT GUEST

By DIXON KAYE.

The first born son knocked at the farmer's door. "There's an old gentleman with white hair, sitting before the fireplace downstairs," he announced. "Don't disturb him," came the muffled voice of the farmer through the closed door; "it's Christmas morning, and he is some visitor no doubt."

When the farmer presently descended to the hall—their common living room—he found an old white-haired man sitting in a frayed tapestry chair, once part of the furniture when the place was a Manor House. The farmer stood, puzzled. His visitor had the undoubted appearance of a country gentleman, but of long ago. He wore a brown velvet jacket, and a silk handkerchief almost hung from his pocket in an old-fashioned way. His white hair and clean-shaven face gave him a distinguished appearance.

"Good morning, sir," began the farmer. "I wish you a Merry Christmas. You're hearty welcome." There was no reply and he continued. "You see," he said, "we only came in last Michaelmas, and we don't know all our neighbors yet. Might you be Squire Penfold, sir?" he asked.

There was still no answer, and then he noticed that the old man was holding a faded letter in his right hand. It rested on his knee, and was covered with small writing. The farmer, more puzzled than ever, went on tip toe out of the room after shaking the smouldering fire together and putting on a log.

"Mother," he said, when he got to the kitchen, "this is a very strange affair. No doubt Harry has told you all about it."

"Yes," the farmer's wife replied. "Harry has told me about the old gentleman sitting by the great fireplace in the hall. But don't you think, John, he is some neighbor, who has come down for Christmas? Perhaps he is staying with Squire Penfold."

The farmer took his head. "I don't think so, wife," he answered, "because when I mentioned his name, he took no notice."

"But he takes no notice of anyone," she answered. "No, he just sits there and seems to be reading an old letter."

A few minutes later, John Troliske, the farmer, called his family together in the kitchen. Three fine boys, and a corresponding number of girls, responded.

"Children," the farmer began, "there is something happening in the house this Christmas tide which I don't quite understand, but which other people may. But we are newcomers, only here three months, and we cannot be expected to know everything."

"As you no doubt know, we have a Christmas visitor in the hall, an old gentleman, and must treat him in the spirit of Christmas. If he wishes to sit by the fire and not speak to us, let him do it. Don't interfere with him in any way. In fact, we will keep our Christmas in our own style, just as if he were not there; except that he must be treated with the greatest respect as an honored guest. And now let's go to breakfast."

It was a curious meal that breakfast on Christmas morning; for, in spite of their father's warning, furtive glances were continually going in the direction of the silent guest. When a cup of coffee and a plate of sizzling sausages and bacon were placed on a little table at the guest's elbow, they remained untasted, but it created only a mild surprise.

It was a most extraordinary situation. The farmer, after brushing the crumbs off his best waistcoat, rose, and the others did with him, but not a move nor a sign from their silent visitor.

turning her head away to hide her blushes. "Ah, I heard talk of him," Barbara replied, "he's flesh and blood alright. There's no ghost about him. Yes, he do look a perfect gentleman, that he do."

And so the fears of the maids were calmed. The farmer headed the detachment for church while his wife was left behind to supervise that great annual effort, the Christmas dinner. A well-stuffed turkey already performing pirouettes on a jack before the great kitchen fire, a huge ham, and a plum pudding that would not have disgraced the table of a Lord Mayor, were among the principal items which were to feed the eight mouths of the family and two maids! All the other farm servants, in the modern manner, lived out.

It was a most anxious morning for the farmer's wife, and amidst her tasks and those of the maids, their visitor in the hall was forgotten. The elder of the maids, who occupied the position of cook, although most of the cooking was done by the farmer's wife herself, exhibited great curiosity on the subject of the unexpected guest; her duties taking her into the hall, she had a good look at the silent figure sitting in the old frayed tapestry chair by the great fireplace.

She returned to the kitchen quite satisfied. "Oh, yes, mum," she announced. "I've seen him. I had a good look at him. He being deaf didn't hear me coming. He's all right, there's no doubt. Nobody but a gentleman would wear such boots."

And Hannah, the pseudo-cook, wondered deep down in her soul whether the old gentleman would wake up and give her self-a-sovereign on Boxing Day!

Farmer Treliske walked home from church with the steward of the estate. "Yes, the man I succeeded told me many a tale of the old Hall you lived in, before it was burnt down. It was a grand place in those days, although I never saw it; about twice as big as it is now. But there was some mystery about it. I never got to the bottom of it. Foltstephen, the old steward, having been a servant of the family for over fifty years, would say nothing, especially to me; he looked upon me as an interloper and an upstart, when I came here to learn my business under him. But anyhow the place had been shut up for twenty years before the fire."

The farmer was meditating; he knew it was no use trying to stop the children's mouths. The fact that they had a mysterious visitor was all over the village by this time. He decided to tell Mr. Durward, the steward, all about it.

"We've got a visitor at the farm," he began. "A relative from London down for Christmas?" the other ventured to ask.

"No-o," answered the farmer dubiously. "I don't know who he is." The steward stopped and looked at him. "You mean to say," he asked, "that you have got a visitor in the house and don't know who he is?" The farmer answered at once. "I don't," he replied; "I wish I did."

Durward, the steward, looked more puzzled than ever. "Then how did he come there?" he asked. "In a few words, Farmer Treliske explained the situation as well as he could. "And he doesn't speak or eat or drink," the steward commented. "Is he real flesh and blood?"

"He looks as much a man as you or me," was the answer. "Would you like to come and have a look at him?" "Well, if I shan't be in the way I should like to look at him for a minute," Durward answered.

They were close to the road leading up to the old Hall, and they turned into it. It was but a step from the door into the big hall, and Durward stood before the fire old fireplace in wonderment; but he shook his head as he turned away. "He's a stranger to me," he said. "To the best of my belief, I have never seen him before. And yet, he continued, deep in thought "there is something about it all which seems to awaken a history in my mind, but what it is I cannot tell you. I cannot recollect."

Treliske insisted on the steward having a glass of cherry brandy; then, having wished each other a Merry Christmas, they parted.

"If he doesn't come to life by tomorrow morning," were Treliske's last words. "I shall consult Parson."

The next great event was the Christmas dinner. The farmer and his children entered the hall and took their places, just as if no silent visitor had appeared. The old gentleman retained the same position by the fire and—his silence.

Presently Mrs. Treliske came in smiling in her best dress; victory over the many difficulties of the Christmas dinner was written in every line of her face. "I think you will like the turkey," she announced with a glance at the old velvet-coated gentleman by the fire. "The ham may be a little over-boiled, but not much."

"Better over-boiled than under-boiled," commented the farmer. "The pudding," announced Mrs. Treliske with a glance at the sparkling eyes of her children. "I think will be a success."

But no mention of these dainties had any effect upon the visitor sitting by the grand old fireplace; his eyes were upon the logs, and his old yellow letter lay in his listless grasp. The Christmas dinner proceeded as it had always done in the farmer's family, in peace and goodwill. Determined to carry out the laws of hospitality as he understood them, to the letter, the farmer carved for the visitor and the plate was placed on a small table with a glass of sherry near him, but neither by word nor sign did that white-headed figure signify that he knew what was there.

"Nobody shall come to my house on Christmas Day without having food offered to him," remarked the farmer, when the plate had been carried to the stranger.

When the turkey had been demolished and a great gap made in the huge ham, Mrs. Treliske said: "This was the long looked for signal for cries of joy and a general rustle of excitement among the children, during which in a whisper Mrs. Treliske gave orders for the removal of the stranger's untouched plate."

"Use it in the kitchen," she said. So the kitchen was richer by a heaped plate of turkey and ham, over and above its usual portion, through the visit of the silent and fasting old man.

The pudding came in with the time-honored ceremonies of blazing brandies and holly, and was greeted with a rousing cheer by the children; but the old man by the fire moved not, neither did he take heed when a plate with a liberal slice was placed at his elbow. The pudding and the sherry stood untasted.

The farmer, however, helped himself to a second glass of the latter and filled up his wife's; the old gentleman was getting on his nerves. But it was not until the pudding was taken away and pears and apples and oranges, and the much beloved almonds and raisins were put on the table, that the fun really began. Inserted among the fruit were various crackers, and amid the liveliest of these, the old man by the fire was forgotten; but not by the farmer, who filled himself a glass of port and served out half a one to each of the children.

He rose and raised his glass in the direction of the visitor. "Although we haven't the pleasure of knowing your name, sir," he began, "I assure you that you are hearty welcome, and we all hope that you will make a long stay and spend a Merry Christmas."

But kind as the words were, they produced no response. The farmer sat down almost with a bump, and regarded his visitor for the first time with some impatience. The children's revels went on as if the stranger had not been there; the shadows of the winter day deepened and the glow of the great log fire on the big open hearth grew a deeper crimson and flooded the old hall with its light, amid which little flames were ever starting up and dying down again, with little twinkles on the walls and the framer's modest table silver.

The farmer opened the window for a moment as it was growing late. "There will be a hard frost to-night," he announced, "and the ground will be as hard as a rock tomorrow. I never saw the stars with that clear sparkle in them in winter time, but a frost followed, and a good one."

DON QUIXOTE'S XMAS ADVENTURE

DON Quixote waked and stretched ed himself sleepily. Rosinante still slept, leaning his tired old head against a tree. Sancho Panza snored vigorously, while his grey mule cropped the grass at his feet, now and then taking a bite out of the toe of his boot. The last bite hit the flesh and roused Sancho, who leaped to his feet and chased the mule with many maledictions.

Don Quixote considered their both dreamily, but when the Squire returned astride the mule, a sudden memory struck him. Was it thus that they had started forth on their adventures, Sancho astride the grey mule, and he on the good Rosinante, that mighty steed, of whose skin and bones he saw nothing, having in imagination clothed him with mighty muscles and sinews of steel?

Rosinante Quivers All Over

"What! Rascally clown! Haat thou not searched me out a brave adventure, this fair morn?" shouted he to Sancho, with such vehemence as to cause Rosinante to start and quiver all over. "Ever sleeping, dullard, though centuries passed over thee, still wouldst thou lack an idea." As indeed, centuries have passed over both, and little did either know.

"Sir, Don Quixote," quoth Sancho, "Lead on, I follow." With greatest difficulty the valorous knight climbed into his saddle. He guided the good Rosinante along a gravelly path into a wide avenue, on the one side of which strange monsters raced madly in one direction and on the other of which they raced equally as madly in the other direction, snorting and grunting at each other. Of a sudden a red light flashed on. Thereupon all the monsters ceased to speed madly and drew up in groups on either side of the tower at the foot of which stood a stout figure clothed in blue, with a good oaked staff at his belt.

They Observe a Marvel!

For a long moment Don Quixote and Sancho Panza observed this marvel and then another marvel, for the red light disappeared and above it the green appeared, whereupon all the monsters dashed forward at such a speed as though they would be sure to strike each other. For all that, and before the valorous Don Quixote and his good squire had scarce drawn a deep breath, the red light appeared again, and all stopped racing, snorting, however, and anxious to be off.

"There are the famous Racing Monsters," quoth the Don. "And these I shall attack alone, that the good favor of my Dulcinea of Tobeoso may be won, and the world well rid of a strange and mighty peril."

"Nay, nay!" quoth Sancho. "Good Sir Knight, let me beg of you to let them be. It is not a purpose of all Knight-errant to rescue those in distress? Let me ask you brave man, who doth not fear them, where some good folk may be, toward whom all these monsters fling themselves?"

Seeks Another Adventure.

"Go then and return right quickly," quoth the Knight, "for I would seek a new and fair adventure." Again, the red light caused that great marvel that all the monsters should stop together, and so trotting at his best speed, Sancho Panza reached the stout man.

"Good Sir Knight, let me beg of you to let them be. It is not a purpose of all Knight-errant to rescue those in distress? Let me ask you brave man, who doth not fear them, where some good folk may be, toward whom all these monsters fling themselves?"

Monsters Make Rush

Sancho could not find words, for the monsters had shot forward again and he found himself between two swiftly moving streams. The next pause, he grasped—"My Master would succor those in distress."

Study the Buildings

After studying the buildings opposite for sometime, they discovered that each bore a number in a sequence, and that their number might be closed by.

Strange Person Appears

"My Master would help those in distress," quoth Sancho as before—"we were sent her—he, the stout one with the truncheon saith—to the Good Fellows—wherever they may be."

"Here, step in, ninth floor, Good Fellows—"

And Sancho walked into a tiny room with much gold paint and mirrors. In a moment he staggered against the wall, and clutched at his portly waist, for the room seemed to be rising at a breathless speed. His heart leaped and fell, for the room stopped rising and the courteous person who guided it said beneath floor, please, first door to the right for Good Fellows."

Manhattan in December

As the door opened a blond young man seated at a desk closed the book with a sigh—it was "The Delightful History of the Most Ingenious Knight, Don Quixote of the Mancha." He stared at the intruder and rubbed his eyes and pinched himself and stared again. It was the Squire, no less—and this was Manhattan in December.

Food for Christmas Dinner

"To be sure, to be sure—let us go to him at once. Has he many ducats do you think? For with these we can buy food for this pleasant Christmas season for those who would otherwise want for it and relieve their distress." (Thus came the language easily to the blond young man, for he had but closed the book.)

Sancho would not try the little room that had shot him up, so down many, many stairs he walked and found the Don at his curbside.

Come with me, said the young man, and led them into a rich and mighty market, where strange foods and fruits were displayed for sale. Of these they bought great quantities and went forth again to a monster standing quietly at the curb.

Sit with me, Squire, and you, Sir Knight, guard these foods in the rear seat.

Relieves Self of Bundles

Clumsily Don Quixote disposed himself with all the bundles while the squire set beside the young man in the front part of the monster.

CARRYING THE BANNER

One day, during the prohibition campaign in Ontario, a number of children from the various day schools were in a temperance parade through the streets of Ottawa. After the parade was over the son of a well-known business man entered his office.

THE SONG OF OLD

It came upon the midnight clear, The glorious song of old, From angels bending near the earth To touch their harps of gold; "Peace on the earth, good-will to men," From heaven's all gracious King, The world in solemn stillness lay, To hear the angels sing.

For lo! the days are hastening on, By prophet-bards foretold, When with the ever-circling years Comes round the age of gold; When peace shall over all the earth Its ancient splendors fling, And the whole world give back the song, Which now the angels sing.

