

# Is There A Santa Claus?

## IT'S 40 YEARS OLD BUT EVER NEW

Editor's Note: Due to requests each year we are publishing the following Christmas editorial, originally printed in the New York Sun, Sept. 21, 1897.—

We take pleasure in answering at once and thus prominently the communication below expressing at the same time our great gratification that its faithful author is numbered among the friends of the sun.

"Dear Editor—I am eight years old  
"Some of my little friends say there is no Santa Claus.  
"Papa says, 'If you see it in the Sun it's so'  
"Please tell me the truth, is there a Santa Claus?"  
"Virginia O'Hanlon,  
"115 West Ninety-fifth Street.

Virginia your little friends are wrong. They have been effected by the skepticism of a skeptical age. They think that nothing can be that is not comprehensible by their little minds. All minds, Virginia, whether they be men's or children's are little. In this great universe of ours, man is a mere insect, an ant, in his intellect, as compared with the boundless world about him, as measured by the intelligence capable of grasping the whole of truth and knowledge.

Yes, Virginia, there is a Santa Claus. He exists as certainly as love and generosity and devotion exist, and you know they abound and give to your life its highest beauty and joy. Alas! how dreary would be the world if there was no Santa Claus! It would be as dreary as if there were no Virginia. There would be no childlike faith, no poetry, no romance to make tolerable this existence. We should have no enjoyment, except in sense and sight. The eternal light with which childhood fills the world would be extinguished.

Not believe in Santa Claus? You might as well not believe in fairies! You might get your papa to hire men to watch in all the chimneys on Christmas Eve to catch Santa Claus, but even if they did not see

Santa Claus coming down what would that prove? Nobody sees Santa Claus, but that is no sign that there is no Santa Claus. The most real things in the world are those that neither children nor men see. Did you ever see fairies dancing on the lawn? Of course not, but that's no proof that they are not there. Nobody can conceive or imagine all the wonders that are unseen and unseeable in the world.

You tear apart the baby's rattle and see what makes the noise inside but there is a veil covering the unseen world which not the strongest man that ever lived, could tear apart. Only faith, fancy, poetry, love, romance can push aside that curtain and view and picture the supernatural beauty and glory beyond. In it all what is real? Ah, Virginia, in all this world there is nothing else real and abiding.

No Santa Claus! Thank God, he lives and lives forever. A thousand years from now, Virginia, may ten times ten thousand years from now, he will continue to make glad the heart of childhood.

### "Christmas Man," Name Given to Kris Kringle

Santa Claus does not visit the children of Lithuania on Christmas eve as he does the children in this country, but there are all kinds of Christmas celebrations in which they have a part, and many good things to eat. In Germany and Norway old Kris Kringle hides gifts for the children in many out of the way places, and Christmas day is spent chiefly in hunting for them. In Holland Saint Nicholas dispensed Christmas cheer, but when the Hollanders came to this country his name was changed to Santa Claus. In Sweden Santa Claus is much like he is in America, but he does not come down the chimney, but in the night he comes into the room where the Christmas tree is and leaves gifts for all. His name is not Santa Claus, however, for he is called "The Christmas Man."

# "On Earth Peace..."

## A PRAYER

With the lowering clouds of war again darkening the earth after a brief interval, how fervent is our prayer that peace shall once more prevail, that the words "goodwill toward men" shall cease to echo hollowly in a war-torn world.

Growth of the Christmas tradition has never ceased since the Fifth Century when the birth of Christ was first generally celebrated. With it has come a spirit of universal happiness; old customs have survived although time has brought changes in them.

And this year, the season will be observed much as usual. It is not our first war-time Christmas and although the thoughts of many of us may already be sorrowful, those of others distracted, there will be much that is the same.

We who live in Canada may well count our blessings. We are a young, virile nation that is part of a great Empire. Already we have displayed a spirit of helpfulness and national unity in time of stress. And we shall continue to fulfill our obligation.

In spite of our wish for peace on earth, a battle is to be fought—a battle that right may prevail, that persecution may be wiped from the face of the earth, that men may move, work and play one with another in a spirit of well-being. In this Canada is playing her part— with her men, her natural resources and her material goods.

As a result, it is our constant hope that the Christmases of the future will come to a world more worthy of having Christmases

# Christmas Tit-Bits

The first Christmas card was designed in 1844 by W. C. T. Dobson, R. A.

December 25 was long observed by non-Christian peoples as a Festival of the Sun.

Although early observed as a feast, the English term *Criste's Mass* (Christmas) is said to date from 1038.

The first mention of Santa Claus in English literature occurs in a Bret Harte sketch written in 1872.

The eve before Christmas Day is celebrated "because Christmas Day, in the primitive Church, was always observed as the Sabbath day, and, like it, preceded by an eve, or vigil." (Brand).

The carol "Christians Awake!" was written by John Byrom as a Christmas gift for his little daughter, and it was sung at the doorway of Byrom's house, Kersal Cell, near Manchester, on Christmas Eve, 1750.

The earliest authentic reference to a Christmas tree occurs in a Strausburg manuscript dated 1699, and the first description of one in modern literature is in "The Nutcracker," a fairy tale by Hoffmann.

It was once believed that if we were to enter a cow-house at midnight on Christmas Eve all the cattle would be found kneeling. Many also firmly believed that bees sang in their hives on Christmas Eve to welcome the approaching day.

The early Christians celebrated Christ's birthday on varying dates throughout the year, and did not definitely fix on December 25 until about the fourth century, when they transformed the old pagan sun festival into a festival of the Sun of Righteousness.

A fitting conclusion to Christmas merriments in some places is the good old pastime mentioned in Addison in the "Spectator"—yawning for a Cheshire cheese. He, or she who yawns widest, and most naturally, producing most yawns from the spectators, wins the cheese.

The Christmas cake varies considerably in different parts of Britain. In Northumberland and Durham, for instance, there is given to the children a cake called a "Yule Babby" or "Yule Dough." It consists of dough flattened to represent a figure with head arms and body. Currants are set in its face for eyes, and pieces of candied peel represent nose and mouth.

In 1652 it was proclaimed that "no observation shall be had of the five and twentieth day of December, commonly called Christmas Day, nor any solemnity used or exercised in churches." The order was enforced by soldiers, Ovens and larders were searched, and where reasonable dainties or decorations were found they were carried away and destroyed.

The old Christmas begging songs were mostly threatening in tone, as this example, collected in Somerset: Here comes I, liddle man Jan, Will of five, The church was surounded, but search revealed that the belfry was empty, although the bells were still vibrating. The last stroke sounded as the Roundheads entered.

"Christmas cheer" is mentioned in this verse, dated 1695: Now, thrice welcome, Christmas, Which brings us good cheer— Mincee-pies a d plum-porridge Good ale and strong beer; With pig, goose, and capon, The best that may be. So well doth the weather And our stomachs agree.

Cromwell forbade the observance of Christmas and banned, under very severe penalties, the ringing of church bells. Staying in Norwich at Christmas, he was angered by the joyous and defiant—chiming of a peal of five. The church was surrounded, but search revealed that the belfry was empty, although the bells were still vibrating. The last stroke sounded as the Roundheads entered.

In the good old days country gentry kept open house for twelve days at Christmas. An historian, after describing the usual farings—the beef, goose and puddings—

# Dutch Honor Santa

The early Puritans who landed on the shores of New England banned Santa Claus as a Pophish invention, but the Dutch of New Amsterdam (now New York) welcomed and honored old Santa Claus. Tradition, in fact, has it that the figure of St. Nicholas presided as the figurehead of the ship that brought the first settlers of Manhattan Island, and he was esteemed the patron saint of the city, giving his name to the first church built within its walls. As the little village grew into a town, the yearly celebration of Christmas was endorsed by the authorities, and the business of the community suspended, not only for one day but for several days in succession, even all unnecessary housework being laid aside until the end of the holiday season. Churches and houses were trimmed with evergreens, and these, as a rule, were not removed until Candlemas.

Santa Claus, in the minds of the Dutch youngsters, was a round rosy-cheeked old man, with a low-crowned hat, a pair of Flemish trunk hose and a pipe of surprising length, who drove his reindeer sleigh loaded with gifts from the frozen regions of the North over the roofs of the sleeping town, and stole down each chimney to fill with toys the stockings of all good children, while the Christmas tree was adopted in New Amsterdam long before its appearance in any other colony.

"A roundabout fireplace was surrounded with stone benches, where the young folks sat and cracked nuts and diverted themselves; and in this manner the sons and daughters got matching without going much from home."

It is still the custom to serve food at Christmas in Queen's College, Oxford, as a form of thanksgiving for a remarkable escape of a former scholar from danger. The legend relates how the young man, while strolling in a nearby wood perusing a weighty volume of Aristotle as he walked, encountered an enormous wild boar. The scholar escaped with his life as the result of ramming the book down the throat of the boar.

It is to the Dutch—not to the Germans, as is commonly supposed—that we owe Santa Claus. His prototype was the boy bishop St. Nicholas, who on December 5 used



Printed Christmas Card Was Issued Back In '44

to go round punishing little children who did not say their prayers and rewarding the good children with presents. Gradually St. Nicholas was changed from a boy bishop to a jovial old man, and the sleigh and the reindeer are modern additions to the legend.

When Christmas Day is on a Monday, Old lines run: "Let Christmas Day on a Monday be And winter long and cold you'll see; Whistling winds shall freeze your bones, And farmers' men cry out in groans. Spring, summer, autumn, all shall show How the tempest wild shall blow. More men shall arm at battle's roar, And cattle die than e'er before."

There survives in Buckinghamshire a fine old game called "Lang-erloo"—a sort of skittles, in which the score must mount to 32 exactly before a game is won. On a Christmas eve, as you pass along a Buckinghamshire lane, you may chance to hear from some old inn the singing chorus of the game:

All along, all along, langerloo, Langerloo, merry-go-down, Twice fifteen is half-a-crown, Half-a-crown, I lay it to you, The very next stroke is thirty-two. "Merry-go-down" is an old name for ale.

There is more humanity about the Victoria and Albert museum than its stiff brick exterior suggests.

The director has sent me a Christmas Picture Book says a writer in the London Star. It reveals the fact that the first Christmas was only as recently as 1843.

The card, which was printed for Sir Henry Cole, first director of the South Kensington museum is reproduced, along with many other efforts by artists to celebrate the nativity. They range from a walrus ivory relief from Cologne to a modern woodcut by Eric Gill. It is strange to see how the artistic wheel has turned full circle back to the medieval austerity. But I can't help liking the first Christmas card, which features, as the films say a hearty meal. As the fat boy would say, "I likes eating best."

### SHEPHERDS AND WISE MEN

It is not clear from the Scriptural allusions that the shepherds who visited the new-born Jesus were the same as the wise men who saw his star in the East. Only Matthew records the story of the magi, and only Luke mentions the shepherds. Mark and John do not refer to either the shepherds or the wise men.

# Gifts for Everyone!

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**— FOR GENTLEMEN —**

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- Camp Axes
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- Rifles
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**— FOR YOUNG FOLK —**

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- Sleighs
- Shovels
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- Flashlights
- Tool Kits
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