

YES, VIRGINIA, THERE IS A SANTA CLAUS

In there a Santa Claus? Millions of children have asked that question, since visits from St. Nicholas began to be associated with the observance of Christmas. In 1897, one girl wrote to the editor of the New York Sun, asking him about Santa, and the next day an editorial appeared, an editorial that has been reprinted thousands of times since.

Here is that famous editorial:

The Editorial

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

Dear Editor—I am 8 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 affected by the skepticism of a skeptical age. They do not believe unless they see. They think that nothing can be which 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 truth and knowledge.

Yes, Virginia, there is a Santa Claus. He exists as certainly as love and generosity and devotion exist, and you know that they abound and give to your life its highest beauty and joy. Alas, how dreary would be the world if there were no Santa Claus! It would be as dreary as if there were no Virginia. There would be no child-like faith then, no poetry, no romance to make tolerable this existence. We should have no enjoyment except in sense and sight. This 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 or man can 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 all the wonders there 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, not even the unit-

ed strength of all the strongest men 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 behind it. Is it all real? Ah, Virginia, in all this world there is nothing else real and abiding.

No Santa Claus! Thank God, he lives and he 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.

The Mystery of God's Firmament

The "STAR" which signaled "the First Christmas" may be interpreted in many ways. In all such interpretations we must put ourselves as nearly as possible into the social and psychological frame of mind of those whom we try to understand. The astronomer knows that through the ages the word "star" has been used to indicate almost any celestial phenomenon. We still speak of "falling stars" or "shooting stars" which we know quite well are not stars at all. In more ancient times the comet was called a "hairy star" and was derived from the Latin word *coma*, meaning hair. The planets were called "wandering stars" as opposed to the "fixed stars," and from the Greek word for wanderer we derive our word "planets."

The Star of Bethlehem could have been any of these. It could even have been a "new star" or nova which suddenly burst forth with a many-thousand-fold increase in brilliance, due to some great stellar catastrophe. These are all explanations of what the "star" could have been. Had it been any of the above, it would have been seen by many peoples, and in literature would have been found references to the appearance of the object which attracted attention. But nowhere in the literature or in the folklore of any of the peoples noted as astute observers of celestial phenomena do these references exist.

A Christmas Prayer

Soon will be the midnight hour
And the joy-bells forth shall ring
From every steeple, every tower—
To herald the new born King.

Holy! Holy! the choirs will sing—
Babe of Bethlehem, Holy One!
Peace and joy to the faithful bring
At this hallowed Christmas dawn.

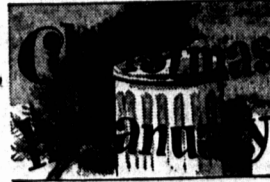
Faith and hope we all must show
As we kneel and pray to Him,
Pray the wicked through Him
I shall know.

Pray every man from malice part
That no one e'er the Christ deny,
Supplication from each one's heart
Will richest garlands multiply.

Pray they'll find the joy of living
In God's peace and tranquility—
He, the breath of life is giving
From His Heart so full and free.

May the star that led the Wise Men
To the Infant's lowly bed
Brightly shine on Earth again—
These seeing—may to Christ be led.

—Lena Vessey.
Portland 5, Maine.
(Formerly of Montague).



(By Lorna Boone)

Nevvy wished his worn shoes wouldn't make so much noise on the cobblestoned alley. In the darkness, he saw the discarded Christmas tree standing tall beside a trash barrel and even the rank odors of the alley couldn't drown out the faint fragrance of pine needles.

Nevvy shivered, taking his hands from the dubious protection of his pockets to pull his one mitten on. The tree, his tree! (Just as he hefted it, he heard a shout.) Someone was coming down the path that led from the big house to the alley.

For an eleven-year-old Nevvy was fast, but the shout came again and then hard, pounding steps. Then, abruptly, he stopped as a large hand grasped his shoulder.

The grip on Nevvy's thin shoulder tightened as a loud voice demanded: "Where're you going with our tree?"

Nevvy twisted around to face a husky boy in a letterman's sweater. "You threw it out."

"Does that mean you can take it? You alley kids start in young."

"I wasn't stealing," angrily, Nevvy heard his voice shake. "Tomorrow the trash man would have got it."

The light from a neon sign spotlighted them. "You are young," the boy said, letting him go.

"Thirteen," Nevvy spoke quickly. "Don't lie," the older boy countered sharply. "Look, this is my tree."

"All right, so I'm eleven and I know it's your tree."

"But today's the third of January," the boy said, in a friendlier voice. "What do you want an old dead tree for anyway?"

Nevvy wanted to say, "You couldn't understand," but then he looked at the tree, still green and fragrant even if the needles were shattering, and spoke carefully. "We haven't had Christmas at our house yet and... and we need a tree."

"That's tough," the boy said; "how come?"

"Reasons."

"Tell me why or I won't give you this tree."

Nevvy let the tree go, watched it rock back and forth on its

Every Christmas, the Greenside Sword Dancers perform their Yuletide dance on the turnpike in the centre of their village near Sheffield. The dancers are local workers from the mines and quarries, and this traditional Christmas custom can be traced back to the days of the Norman Conquest.

standard, and, thinking of his mother, hardened his voice. "Reason we didn't have a tree is we couldn't afford it. No job for my dad, no dough. And the reason we didn't have any Christmas sooner was because of my mother. She was in the hospital having a baby. Then they let my mother come home, right before New Year's, 'cause there wasn't anybody to keep care of the little kids 'cept me when my dad was job hunting."

"Tell me the rest," the boy said. "Please."

"Not much to tell. Only the hospital kept the baby 'cause it's premature and they aren't sure it's going to live. But the little kids—there's five of them—we promised them Christmas and we're going to have it. I was going to take this tree home for a starter. Me and my dad have been making presents, but, my gosh, you gotta have a tree! Even they know that."

The boy was quiet a long time. Then, "Your brothers and sisters still believe in Santa Claus?"

"Oh, sure, I gave them a story about Santa Claus waiting until my mother got home to come to our house. They're beginning to wonder though."

"Listen," the boy's voice was eager, "let me be Santa, will you? We have a suit I could wear with some pillows. How about it?"

Nevvy felt the boy's enthusiasm. "Sure," he answered, off-handedly.

"If you want to." Inside he was thinking how thrilled the kids would be.

"That'll be keen," the boy said. "Are you sure you don't mind?"

Nevvy knew then that the boy really wanted to do it. "Heck, no," he said sincerely; "they'll love it. Look, I'll give you the address and you come down in an hour—I'll leave the toys outdoors for your pack. Oh, and I'll have the window—the front one—open for you. I'll take me awhile to get the trees up."

"Swell," the boy sounded excited. "Merry Christmas," Nevvy called after him and picked their Christmas tree up, not caring how much noise his shoes made as he ran down the alley.



Greetings

The Management and Staff

of

MARITIME CENTRAL AIRWAYS

wish their many friends and patrons

a Joyous Christmas Season

and a

Bright New Year

SWEET CHIMING BELLS

Christmas Bells! What a jubilant note rings out as they clash and clang in the clear, frosty air! Nothing so truly symbolizes the hilarious joy of the Saviour's birth as peal after peal of tumultuous bells. When Old Scrooge stuck his head out of his upstairs window immediately following his amazing series of dreams that God used to change him from a miserly, cranky old man into a human being, it was the bells that enhanced his new-found joy. They were fairly rattling out from Old London's steeples—St. Clements, St. Brides, St. Dunstons, St. Giles, All-Hallows and the rest—and the sound fairly thrilled the rejuvenated Scrooge, whilst the picture presented by the sparkling snow and the happy people hurrying to divine services made him bubble over with goodwill and genuine happiness.



Bells are a wonderful invention, whichever way you look at it. Their origin is shrouded in mystery, but that they go a long way back is evidenced by mention of them in ancient literature. Bells (little tinkling ones) were said to have been attached to the garments of the High Priest in Bible times—as far back as Moses day—and the Prophet Zechariah speaks of horses being adorned with them.

Early Uses

But the large-sized church bell does not appear on the scene—at least, not that we can discover—until the sixth century. Their use was not merely to summon worshippers to church; early Christians believed that their peals drove the devil away from the souls of dying believers. Perhaps there was a modicum of science in the belief that their brazen cacophony would dispel a threatening storm, for rain-makers have provided that a violent noise, the blast of a cannon or something similar can and does affect the weather. As recently as 1852 the Bishop of Malta ordered the bells to ring out at the approach of a fierce gale, which they did for an hour. Whether it accomplished anything is not recorded.

It must have been a glorious day for England after the war when the long-absent clamor of bells began again. They were ordered to be silent during the recent war, as their distinctive sounds would disclose towns and villages to aircraft; also, it had been agreed that, in the event of a sudden invasion by sea, the church bells would ring out in unison as a sign for England to awake and resist the foe. Luckily, that eventuality did not arise and, on the cessation of strife, the ban was lifted and the bells chimed out again.

Bells seem to belong to a church, but they have been used in other connections. As clock-chimes they serve well to mark the passing hours, quarters and halves; as a similar service, they are found useful on board ship, while the thundering fire-engine clears a way for itself by the clattering bell. But few folks liked them on the locomotive. Overseas immigrants were puzzled and a little amazed as their vessel approached Canada's shores or wended its way up the St. Lawrence. To hear what they thought were church bells, only to find the sound emanating from a railway engine. This practice has ceased.

Bells started out modestly small, but grew larger and larger. It seemed to be the ambition of the founders to make larger and still larger bells, although they knew that it would take a massive tower

to support the dead weight of a huge chime, and a derrick to get it into place. The largest bell to be cast was termed, "The great bell of Moscow"—weight, 200 tons; height, twenty-six feet. It cracked at the first attempt (1735) and was merely set up on a pedestal to be viewed with awe. However, another try was made and succeeded, ringing out its deep-toned diapason from the great cathedral for many years.

Weighty Bells

The second largest bell is at Rangoon, Burma, and is reckoned the world's most perfect large bell. Big Ben, London's best-known bell, is thirteen and a half tons in weight, and his voice is known the world over, thanks to radio's magic scope, for it tells the world what time it is in London. A bell that is decidedly unpopular to young folk is the school bell. Don't we remember hurrying to school, praying that we might get these in time to avoid the master's sharp eye and tongue, suddenly hearing the blatant clamor of the bell, and realizing, with sinking heart, that we couldn't "make it?"

Jingling Sleigh Bells

Perhaps the most charming bell is the sleigh-bell variety—strings of them being draped over the horses' backs and suspended from the shafts of the cutter or bob. Some horses even boasted a fine brass bell, dangling from an archway above the animal's neck. There is but a step between these bells and "dear old Santa's jingle bells," the mention of which sets the kiddies' hearts throbbing with Christmas anticipation.

But how bells can change their mood! The same church chimes that rang out the news of peace or poured out a psalm of praise for some wedding, can strike a poignant note of awe and sadness to the heart when they tell the world of the death of some devout worshipper. "Toll" is the word used then; "chime" is when the bells strike the merry note. "Toll" is also the word used when the grim jail bell indicates that a wretched murderer has paid the penalty for his crimes. Bells can ring the changes on a variety of expressions.

But, coming back to Christmas, the bell is a reasonable symbol. Think of the gleaming, silvery ones that adorn the Christmas trees. Picture the fancy, paper ones that dangle from the doorways of our homes. Think of the ecstatic tinkling of sleigh-bells—still heard in many parts of Canada (not quite obliterated by the hideous chug-chug of motor vehicles) coming to us faintly across the glittering snow. The rhythmic beat of the sounds speak to us of joyfully speeding horses for, the faster the animals trot, the quicker the stroke of the bells, only slowing to a stop and a final jangle when the creatures stop in front of the farmhouse, clouds of steam issuing from their wide nostrils. Then their jolly passengers tumble off into the snow, rosy faces and sparkling eyes telling of glowing health and radiant hap-

piness—not only at the thrill of the gliding ride but at the prospect of roast turkey and good fellowship within.

Reminder of the First Christmas

"Ring out, wild bells"; may your voices never be silent; remind us again and again of that first Christmas, when the joybells were set a-ringing at the tremendously exciting news that the world's long night was over—that God had—in the fulness of time—at last sent a Saviour whose coming meant "peace and goodwill" and a happiness men had never dreamed possible.

I heard the bells on Christmas Day
Their old familiar carols play,
And mild and sweet the words repeat,
Of peace on earth, good will to men.

"The good old days" are always represented on Christmas cards and calendars as "white", yet records show that even in Dickens and coaching times, Yuletide weather was more often of the warm variety. In 1852, for instance, the Christmas Day temperature reached 56 degrees, while in 1898, spring flowers were picked in the South of England and birds were seen building their nests out in the open. On the other hand, Christmas 1860 was attended by thick snow and 17 degrees of frost.



Are you willing to forget what you have done for other people, and to remember what other people have done for you; to ignore what the world owes you, and to think what you owe the world; to put your rights in the background, and your duties in the middle distance, and your chances to do a little more than your duty in the foreground; to see that your fellow-men are just as real as you are and try to look behind their faces to their hearts, hungry for joy; to own that probably the only good reason for your existence is not what you are going to get out of life, but what you are going to give to life; to close your book on complaints against the management of the universe, and look around you for a place where you can sow a few seeds of happiness—are you willing to do these even for a day? Then you can keep Christmas.

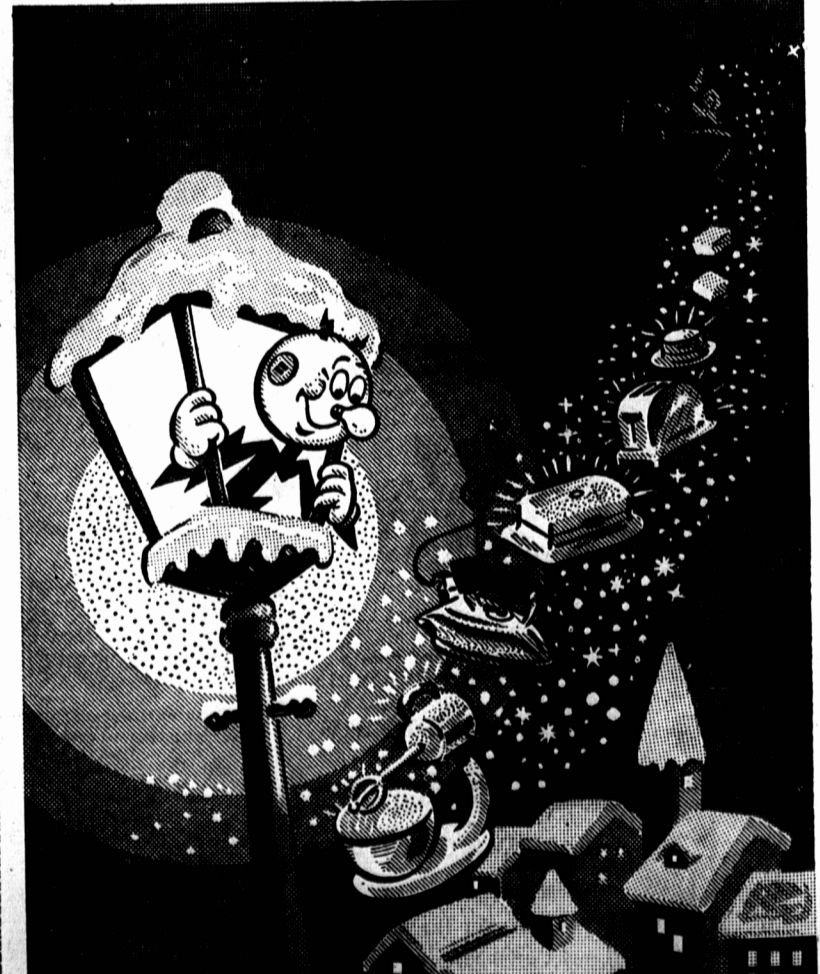
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