

Our Young Folks

Christmas Dinner in the Mountains

How a Pioneer Family Entertained Immigrants.

Steadily and silently fell the snow, and the white robe spread out in all directions. The old town of La Grande was nearly buried under the fleecy garment. It was in 1855, and the joyous Christmas season was approaching. The vanguard of the great immigration train was slowly vanishing up the old immigrant road on its way to the "Wallamut" Valley, the earthly paradise, the hope of reaching which cheered the faint hearts of the thousands of otherwise desolate men and women who had endured the hardships encountered in crossing the "Great American Desert." The fall of snow had come early, and very soon the road through the Blue Mountains was blocked. Already several families of belated travelers had disposed themselves the best they could in the Old Town, at that time a cluster of box shacks and log cabins.

In a two-story log cabin lived a pioneer family. The house fronted directly on the road over which many thousands of travel-stained immigrants had passed. In one end of the house was an immense fireplace nearly 10 feet across, whose cheerful glow illuminated the ample room with a brightness that cheered many a weary immigrant, worn out by the long trip. Many a sad-hearted mother of a family, who had broken up the far Eastern home to come to Oregon, gathered about the old fireplace with her children, thankful that there was one spot in the long journey where she could be welcome and comfortable.

Not to betray the identity of the pioneer family, for the descendants still live, for the purpose of this Christmas sketch they will be called Mr. and Mrs. James Baxter. There were four children in the family, one girl and three boys. The father had a pack train of horses and did much hauling of supplies. Though Christmas was coming the little readers of this page may know that these pioneer people had little of the cheer and beauty of home life, and the approach of Christmastide meant little to this family, or to any of the other families in the place, although there was some attempt to celebrate the holiday. Only the bare necessities could be obtained in that early day and a great celebration was impossible.

The fare was exceedingly plain. It consisted of beans, bacon and coffee and flour. Turkey, such as will be found at the homes of my readers of today, was an unheard-of luxury. On the fireplace swung a great iron pot filled with beans. There were some rare occasions when the family had boiled wheat as a special luxury. The bare, unfinished rafters were fantastically hung with dried herbs whose pungent odor filled the great room. Over the doorway there had been fastened a deer's head, the horns serving as a rack for the pioneer's gun. But the boys and girls had their fun. They rolled and tossed about in the snow, had great snow-fights, or coasted down the steep foothills of the mountains. They could slide two miles at a stretch and regarded this as a great sport and a great amusement. Healthy and happy were these children and their deprivations gave them little concern.

Great logs had been dragged from the mountains, fuel for the winter was abundant. At this pioneer home was a Christian woman who had been raised in a Christian home in Ohio, and Christmas was never permitted to pass without some provisions for reminding her children of the Great Redeemer, humble though they were. There was little to do with, but she made the most of the little.

So, the day before Christmas, there was a great pot of beans and wheat on the fire all simmering and giving forth a savory odor. It cost only \$10 and was something of a luxury. The three cans of oysters, of which the soup was to be made, cost \$5. All day the preparations went on in the log house. Some of the neighbors were to come in during the early part of the evening and there was a fiddler to furnish music for the occasion.

All went well, only it was difficult to keep the boys out, for a surprise was intended for them. They knew something was going on and were full of curiosity to find it. At last the evening came and the children, with those of the neighbors, trooped in. There was the long table spread behind a big wagon sheet, which shut off the view from the door of the house. Boiled wheat, bacon and coffee. What would you think, children, of such things for your Christmas dinner?

Just before all were ready and the curtain was about to be dropped, there came a timid knock at the door. A terrific storm was raging, the snow was drifting in every direction, and all wondered who could be out. Mr. Baxter opened the door, and to his amazement, saw a pale-faced woman with an infant in her arms. "May we come in, and get warm?" she faintly asked.

Mr. Baxter quickly took her to the fire, for he saw that she was nearly frozen. She pointed to the door and faintly said something about "the children." Then Mr. Baxter and the boys, forgetting about the Christmas dinner, dashed out in the storm and found a four-ox team hitched to a covered wagon. In the wagon was a sick man, a boy of 16 and two girls of about 8 years. They were hurried into the house and divested of their damp clothes and warmed before the great fireplace, which had been heated with blazing pine logs. The father, who was too ill to walk, was carried into the house and laid on blankets before the fire. The boys unyoked and took care of the oxen, and saw that they were housed from the storm and well fed.

All this took half an hour, but no one thought of the supper until the family had been rescued from the storm. With tears in her eyes the poor mother thanked Mr. and Mrs. Baxter for their hospitality. They would have perished in the storm but for it. Her husband was seriously ill, but grew better under the warmth of the cheery fireplace.

Then the curtain was dropped and the belated supper began. I doubt very much whether there is any boy or girl who made this simple little sketch who ever enjoyed their Christmas eve supper better than

did the boys and girls gathered about the rough table on which it was spread. The eyes of the weary mother who had just come in from the storm were filled with tears of gratitude as she saw how her half-famished children enjoyed the plain fare. A little popcorn, which she had put in when the household goods were packed into the wagon for the trip, was added to the feast, which was a great treat to the Baxter children.

Memories of the old home that had been left many months before far back in Wisconsin came to the belated travelers. They thought how they had toiled on and on through the long marches. Then came the delays, and, instead of reaching the Willamette Valley, the land of milk and honey to the immigrants, in the early

the feeding lots and the open pastures, where they can be near the cattle. The same, cow birds or cow-pen buntings, is well given to them, as they are rarely seen feeding except among cattle or horses. It is a pretty sight to watch a flock of them flying high overhead, and then sweep down when they spy a herd of cattle feeding in the open pasture-land.

The birds walk sedately about among the cattle, never seeming to be on the lookout, and yet always moving just in time to miss being trampled upon. They allow the moving cattle to frighten the insects from the grass and then they suddenly take the bugs on the wing in fly-catcher style.

When one watches Nature's children



"Think he's comin', Jimmie?"
"Course he's a-comin'. It's only 5 o'clock, 'n' he's still got an hour before sunrise."

in the Fall and Spring, these birds remain in small, loose flocks, frequenting the mountains. Just at the moment of starvation and possible death by freezing, the unfortunate family had been taken in and afforded opportunity that Christmas eve of enjoying unlimited good cheer. As these thoughts flashed through the mind of the mother, she turned to thank Mrs. Baxter, but her words were hushed by that lady, who said:

"Why, how lucky you came just when you did! We needed you people to make out our Christmas party. We want you to feel at home here, you and your husband and children. I am so glad you came to our door this Christmas eve. You are going to stay right here until your husband gets well and the storm breaks."

"We can never repay you," she exclaimed. "We would have perished in the storm had it not been for you."

"Don't think of it, and have a good time," warmly responded Mr. and Mrs. Baxter.

The little children of the immigrants soon overcame their shyness, and the supper lasted two hours. There were no delicacies except the "luscious" and popcorn, but the little immigrants thought it was the finest Christmas supper they had ever eaten.

Afterwards the rough planks that made up the table were removed, and for an hour or more the children danced and played every game they could think of. Their laughter and shouts rang merrily through the rough log house as they played puss-in-the-corner, or the frog-in-the-meadow, or romped gaily through a lively Virginia reel.

As the wind had subsided and the snow ceased falling, all the merry crowd of youngsters went outside and played in the snow and coasted the hill just in front of the log house. In the meantime Mr. and Mrs. Baxter listened to the story of the hardships encountered by the immigrants on their way across the plains. It was nearly midnight before the young people were called in. They were all taken upstairs, and, with thick blankets piled on them, were soon sound asleep on the floor.

The strangers remained at the home of kind Mr. and Mrs. Baxter until the man was completely restored. Then they obtained a cabin a short distance off and spent the winter at the place. In the Spring they came on to the Willamette Valley. Just before leaving they declared that the Christmas they had spent at the log house was the best they had ever had, and the succeeding Christmases proved that they never enjoyed another so much.

ALICE M. WELLS.

PECULIAR HABITS OF COWBIRD.

One Songster That Does Not Build a Nest Nor Rear Her Own Young.

Early some Spring morning, while the cows wait at the bars to be milked, you may see a small flock of black birds fly down into a near-by treetop and whistle a few low notes. The series of notes can hardly be called a song, but it is very pleasing, as the notes have a bubbling, explosive sound, as though they were being forced through a throat full of water. If you look at these birds carefully you will notice that they are much smaller than any of their relatives, the blackbirds proper. The cow bird is stouter and more compact than the other blackbirds, and the tail is shorter.

During the Summer months, as well as

motherhood for her. Her methods are exactly like those of the European cuckoo. Strange to say, our cuckoos are generally very fond parents, and this little black-bird is our only parasitical bird.

The female cow bird shows her cunning by usually depositing her eggs in the nest of some smaller bird. If the egg was placed in the nest of a larger bird, the young cow bird's chances of getting a good supply of food would be slim; but, being among smaller birds, it usually obtains the lion's share. Sometimes the little homemaker discover the imposition which is being forced upon them and throw the egg out of the nest. At other times they desert their nest and build a new one.

I remember seeing a beautiful photograph of the nest of a warbler in which a cow bird had slipped an egg. On discovering the strange egg, the warbler had built another story on the nest, completely covering the egg of the cow bird. Again the cow bird had laid another egg in the new nest, and another story was added to the already tall home. No cow bird's egg being placed in this third story, the warbler hatched and reared her brood in peace and quiet.

The peculiar custom of building no nest and allowing some other bird to rear its young is even more remarkable when we know that this little bird belongs to a celebrated family of weavers. He is a close kinsman to the common red-winged blackbird, which weaves a beautiful nest in the cat-tails in swampy ground, and is a devoted parent. His cousin, the Baltimore oriole, is our most wonderful nest-builder, making long, pendant nests, which hang from the ends of swaying branches. Really the case of these birds becomes more and more perplexing the more one studies it.

As I have stood watching these birds sitting in the treetops near the feeding cattle, the males swelling themselves as they force their low, liquid notes up through their glossy throats, I could not feel that they were such knaves, after all. Man is prone to say that this animal or that bird is cruel or heartless, that this one is lazy and that one useless; and he fails to realize that he himself is the most cruel of all Nature's children. All of our higher and better qualities and sensibilities are largely a matter of culture and education. Few young children have any idea of the proper treatment of the lower animals. It requires a great amount of patient training to get a child to mentally put itself in an animal's place, and realize that it can feel pain just as the child can.

Man having become the dominant animal of this globe, feels that all else in Nature was designed for his use and pleasure. Why he feels this it is hard to say, unless he has trained his senses until he is capable of enjoying a wide and varied range of nerve sensations. But who can or dare say what the lower animals know and feel? We have absolutely no way to find out. Who can say what sounds a male warbler makes in the damp woods when he is mated to a female? A soil may hear? Is it possible for him to hear the roots at work as they force their way through the ground, and can he hear the glad rush of the sap as it wakes in early Spring and climbs upward to paint the woods again? When one begins to speculate about Nature and her children, there is no stopping place. The best plan is simply to learn to love and appreciate the beautiful in all Nature.

The male cow bird has a handsome suit of black, and wears a fine brown collar on head and neck. His mate is not nearly so large, and is quite dull-colored, showing no jet black at all, but an almost uniform brownish black. As the female does not build a nest and does not incubate, it seems rather peculiar that she should have such marked protective coloring. It may be useful to her as she slips through the trees on the lookout for some other bird's nest in which to place her egg—(Copyright, 1901.)

Over the hills and far away there comes a tinkling sound,
'Tis a Christmas eve and the house is dark,
And over the beeches that grace the park
Ring hoofs on the icy ground.
It's late, and the little ones, all aglow, are
hiding their curly heads,
For they know that Chris and his sleigh are
'round,
And he'll never stop if awake they're found,
Way up in their trundle beds.

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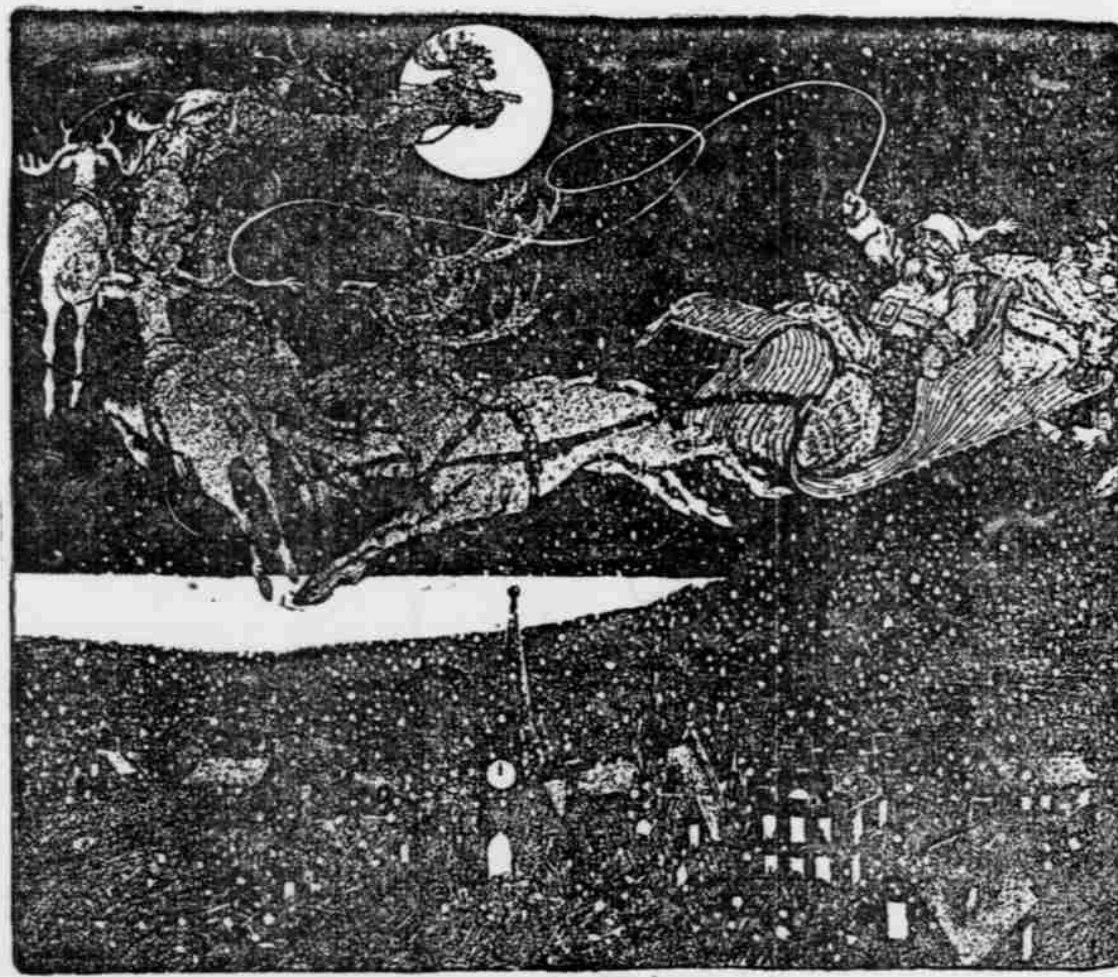
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SANTA'S VISIT



Over the hills and far away there comes a tinkling sound,
'Tis a Christmas eve and the house is dark,
And over the beeches that grace the park
Ring hoofs on the icy ground.
It's late, and the little ones, all aglow, are
hiding their curly heads,
For they know that Chris and his sleigh are
'round,
And he'll never stop if awake they're found,
Way up in their trundle beds.

And there! did you hear the reindeers stop and
gruff old Santa's "Whoa!"
And there in the chimney black and wide
You can hear the old fellow above inside
Preparing to come below.
So cover your heads and go to sleep, and never
wake up till dawn.
For Santa is cross and his games and toys
Are not for wide-awake girls and boys.
Quick! or he'll soon be gone.
—Jean C. Hayes.

Harry's Visit to Santa Claus' Land

How He Met Jack Frost and the North Wind.

"Papa, where does Santa Claus live?" asked 7-year-old Harry, one evening as he ran in from play and took his accustomed place on his father's knee. "Far away in the cold, cold Northland, in beautiful palaces of silver," replied his father, lovingly stroking his golden hair. "I wish I could go there and see him."

Just then he heard a thump, and looking up, saw the fire was all out and in its stead stood a tiny Brownie dressed in brown from head to foot. Said he, stepping out of the fireplace: "I heard your wish, and have come to take you to see

he could see were little round houses made of snow, and Eskimos sparring fish and riding on sleds drawn by dogs, and icebergs floating on the ocean, like he had read about in his story-book, but he had never seen the snowhouse, the igloo. All of a sudden there loomed up among the ice and snow a beautiful high wall, made of silver, with little watch-towers on top, where watchmen stood dressed in armor. When they reached the gates they swung open and they drove in. Harry looked around and saw thousands and thousands of beautiful castles. They drove up to the largest and grandest. As soon as they jumped out of the sled the Brownie blew a horn, which Harry had

chief he could get into. Here, Sonny, shake hands with me," said the North Wind. Harry stepped forward and grasped his hand, but let go as soon as possible, for if it had not been for the quick gloves he wore it would have frozen in his hands.

"Ha! ha!" laughed the North Wind, "don't you like to shake hands with me? Just then Jack Frost came. He was covered with frost from head to foot. "How do you do, Stranger?" said Jack Frost, touching Harry's face with a wand which he had in his hand. It made Harry shiver with cold.

"Well, I guess we will have to go home now," said Santa. "It is growing late." When they returned to the castle they found a nice warm supper waiting, after which Harry was put to bed. They went to sleep, and woke up hearing his mother calling him, and found he was in his own little bed at home. He rubbed his eyes, looking around in great surprise. When he told his mother of his visit she only laughed and said it must have been a dream, but he believed it true, and wished to visit Santa Claus Land again. LE ROY R. RUSSELL. Brownsville, Or. Age 14.

WHISKERS OF MICE.

Eyebrows of Bears and Human Eyebrows Used in One Trade.

The business done in mouse whiskers is considerable this year, for they are used in the making of the wonderful new fly for fishermen—the "new gray goat." And they are expensive—nearly two cents per whisker. Trout rise very much better at mouse whisker flies than at the same "goat" dressed in Jimcock hackles, which look much like them.

The trade of artificial flymaking is the lightest-fingered business in the world, and it is not one man or woman out of 500 who can learn to tie flies. These tiers are remarkable for the beauty and delicacy of their hands, and only the cleverest of fingers can deal with the "niggling" work of knotting hairs that can hardly be seen.

In making a fly the earth has to be ransacked for precisely the correct feathers and hairs, and one hour's work will make all the difference. It takes an expert tier only 15 minutes to turn out a fly, which consists of a tiny hook, with wings of Egyptian dove feathers, legs of fox hair and a body of mouse fur, wound round with a stiff, and exactly the right shade, and used in a newly-invented fly that is killing quantities of salmon this year, and these eyebrows come from the Himalayan brown bear and cost about \$20 per set. There are always agents all over the world searching tropical forests for the right birds to supply fly hackles, and one of the most sought-after skins is that of the rare "green screamer," an African bird, about the size of a fowl, which has a tiny bunch of feathers on each shoulder that are worth \$15 per bunch to the flymaker. One of these birds is worth \$100 to a collector, and for half a dozen flies. Numbers of men spend their lives—and lose them, too—in collecting the right kinds of birds for fly feathers.

There is no limit to the enthusiasm of an artistic fly tier, who will use hair from his own eyebrows to finish off an extra special fly. Baby's hair is a much-sought-after material if of the right shade—golden yellow—for all the lighter salmon flies, and one curl will make a dozen first-class flies. There are many salmon and trout fishers who pay \$500 a year for their flies alone.

An Honest Monkey Messenger.

Of the countless numbers of cases of monkeys' cleverness, there is still none to beat the record held by a spider monkey that belonged many years ago, to the Governor of Carthage, in South America. One of its duties was to fetch and carry the wages for its master. A pot being placed in one hand and money in the other, away went the monkey to the tavern down the town. Here it presented the pot, but would not part with the coin till the pot was handed back filled with wine. On the return journey it carried the pot with a care that many a human porter might envy, but coming to a crossroad, as boys sometimes will, took to throwing stones at it, the pot was put down on the ground, and the monkey, also boyish and especially boy-messenger-like, began to throw stones at it. Although, said to say, fond of wine, not a drop would he touch until leave was granted. It is refreshing to read of such fidelity and honesty, although only a monkey.

A Letter to Santa.

"Dear Mr. Santa Claus, I want
A warship painted white;
I want a cannon an' a sword,
All polished up to the hilt;
I want a lot of soldiers, too,
With horses, flags an' guns.
An' I would like a train of cars
At whiskies when it runs.
I want the biggest rockin' horse,
'At gallop all alone;
An' I would like a tooter horn
'At making the loudest tone.
I want a drum 'at's bigger'n mine,
A pair of skates, I guess;
An' I would like some candy, too,
The awf'lest, biggest mass.
I want an ax, a box of tools
To build a house an' shed;
A kite, a wheel, a phonograph,
A reindeer an' a well.
I want a magic lantern, too,
A houseboat painted red;
A jumpin' jack 'at goes hisse',
'N a piggie in his bed.
I want a top, a bat an' ball,
An' war-books full of fights;
An' I would like a Christmas tree
All full of candle lights.
Oh, dear! I want a lot of things,
But I'm too tired to write;
'Ats all 'at I can think of now,
So, Santa Claus, good night!"
—Joe Cone.