SANTA CLAUS AND TWO JACK-KNIVES

MARY E. WILKINS TELLS OF TWO YOUNGSTERS WHO SUFFERED BEFORE THEY WOULD "BLAB."

The desire of possession is a curious thing. None can tell what an ignoble object even in a great mind may serve as a nucleus for its pearl of price. Tommy Barlow had not, presumably, a mind of unusual greatness, being only an ordinary village boy. Still he might have had as great an ambition of possession as a George Washington, but all his desires were concentrated upon a jack-knife.

When the school teacher, stepping forward from behind her desk to the front of the platform that she might be heard to better advantage, held forth upon noble aims in life, and the duty of constant striving towards the distant heights, and wound up with a ringing quotation from "Excelsior," Tommy Barlow thought of a jack-knife, a jack-knife with four blades. So also did Zelotes, commonly called Loty, Dickinson, only his ambition was more circumscribed. He did not specify so clearly and determinedly the number of blades. He would have been contented with less than four, so long as he had the jack-knife. Loty Dickinson and Tommy Barlow were close and inseparable friends, and shared wishes and aspirations, though Tommy was generally the leader, having a stronger imagination. Loty, in the state of his family finances, could scarcely, left to himself, have imagined even the possible possession of a new jack-knife, of any jack-knife at all, except the slender chance of his elder brother's with one broken blade.

When the elder brother grew old enough to go to work and earn a knife for himself, his old one might possibly fall to him; but it was a long wait, for the brother was only three years older than Loty, who was 10. As for Tommy Barlow, his chances were a little better, or he considered them so. Tommy had a rich uncle, his great-uncle, who was an old bachelor, and there was always a belief in the family that his uncle, after whom Tommy had been named, might some day do something for him. He never had, even to the extent of a silver spoon for his name; as Tommy's mother often remarked; but the belief always remained. Tommy's parents' imagination in that direction took the form of an education and a start in business; Tommy's took the form of a four-bladed jack-knife.

"Mebbe my Great-Uncle Thomas will give me a jack-knife some day," he said to Loty Dickinson. "He's rich as mud, you know."

"Wish I had an uncle," returned Loty, kicking his heels against the rail of the fence.

The two boys sat on the top rail of the fence of the corner lot, where they would naturally have sat to whittle, if they had owned the jack-knives.

"Well, I'll let you use my knife if you're careful," said Tommy, generously.

"Hour to a time?" inquired Loty, eagerly.

"Mebbe."

At the right of Tommy, removed to a distance which indicated to a nicety the deference due a large boy from a small one, sat little Fanny Chase. His name was Francis, but he was so small and timid, and pink and white, that the boys had nicknamed him "Fanny." Even Tommy and Loty called him Fanny, though they had been fierce in his defence against a petty persecution when he first came to school. The Chases were under a sort of ban in the village. They were poor and shiftless, and had been so for generations, and there had been an occasional outbreak of actual crime. They were under a standing conviction of poverty and laziness, with a standing suspicion of something worse. There was always a large family of Chases, for they multiplied like the sprawling burdock weeds around their old shackly house, and a swarm of children, puny and dull for the most part, with their diseased hereditary tendencies strengthening with their growth, infested the schools. Fanny was the youngest, and the best of them, the school teacher said. There was something about Fanny's little pink-and-white face, his blue eyes full of fear, yet with a lingering confidence in one's kind intent towards him, his slight, puny little figure shrinking against the wall, falling to the rear of a pushing crowd, which appealed to a woman, but the boys had been merciless when Fanny Chase first appeared at school. It was one morning in September, the teacher had not arrived, and Tommy and Loty were late. When they reached the schoolyard this little new boy, pale and wild-eyed and dumb, cowering with utter defeat and helplessness, was the center of a crowd of little, yelling, hooting, taunting savages. They were good-natured in a way, not one of them would have harmed the child; but the delight of the human boy in the torment of that which can be tormented, had awoke within them and made them drunk and mad with it.

Then it was that Tommy arose. Very probably had he been on the scene from the first, he might himself have led the tormentors. Coming late he had an outside point of view, and the enormity of the failings of his kind were clearly evident to him.

"They are plaguein' that poor little chap," he cried to Loty, "an' it's a mean shame. He's awful little, an' he's scared 'most to death, an' now he's beginnin' to cry. Come on, Loty."

With that Tommy, with Loty, who loved a row, at heel, dashed into the crowd and carried the day by the suddenness and unexpectedness of the assault. Two boys, one of them bigger than either Tommy or Loty, were laid prostrate, and sat on, and pommelled, amid hoarse shouts of "Lemme up! Lemme up, I say, will ye?" while the intimidated crowd half circled at a distance, and little Fanny Chase was nowhere until he reappeared, bringing a fence rail much longer than himself to Tommy with the wise idea that it could be used effectually for further chastisement of the enemy. Then there was a roar of mirth, and the teacher's blue-ribboned hair was seen above the green bushes in the road, and in a second the noise had subsided, the prostrate boys were up, dusting their jackets and muttering, and Tommy and Loty were walking off with their triumph of victory concealed under a mien of general peacefulness. But from that day both of them, and Tommy especially, had a most devoted and loyal follower in little Fanny Chase, though he followed them at a respectful distance. He never presumed. He always kept a space indicative of respect and deference, and the wide difference between their age and wisdom and his youth and ignorance between them, as he did now. He heard every word the two said with adoring interest, but he said nothing. Fanny never spoke to his two chiefs unless they first spoke to him. When they jumped down from the fence, where they would have sat to whittle if they had owned jack-knives, he jumped down also, and followed them down the road. The two older boys scuffled their bare feet as they went along, and so did Fanny. The three disappeared in a great cloud of dust.

That was in August, too early to think of Christmas, but two months later, Tommy, not Loty—he had too little hope—began to talk about the possibility of attaining the jack-knife as a Christmas present.

"'Spose my Great-Uncle Thomas should give me that knife for a Christmas present," he said to Loty.

"Never did give you anything, did he?" said Loty, who was at times a little envious of the ownership of this rich great-uncle.

"Well, no, he never has yet," admitted Tommy, "but, then, he might."

"Well, I ain't got any rich uncles," said Loty, "and I don't see any chance of me gittin' any knife, 'less I find one."

"Mebbe you will," said Tommy. "Folks do lose jack-knives, and it stands to reason that somebody has got to find 'em."

"Well, if we knew who lost it I'd have to give it back, I'spose. Mother'd make me," growled Loty, who was pessimistic that day.

"Mebbe you wouldn't know who lost it," suggested Tommy, hopefully.

"It would be just my luck to see him drop it," said Loty, "and I ain't goin' round hunting for jack-knives."

This time Tommy and Loty were on their way to school, with little Fanny Chase trotting after them. It was a cold day in late October, and Fanny had just put on shoes for the first time that season. They were his brother's old ones, the soles of one flapped, and he walked with difficulty. When they reached the schoolhouse, some girls standing in the door began to laugh, and Tommy turned to see what the matter was. He could not attack girls for making sport of his protege, but he looked at them fiercely. When he saw Fanny's clapping shoe, he seized him by the shoulders and ordered him to hold up his foot.

"Lemme see that shoe, kid," said he. "Loty, bring us a stone, will ye?"

Loty fetched the stone and assisted Fanny to stand on one foot, while Tommy hammered away industriously at the sole of the shoe.

"It ain't any use," said he, finally. "The nails are all gone. There ain't any way but to cut off that sole up to where it's loose, and the bell's ringing'. Now is the time when a feller had ought to have a jack-knife. Seems to me a jack-knife is more necessary than some other things."

"That's so," said Loty.

"I told mother I'd rather have that knife than a new cap; and I'd make my old one do this Winter," said, Tommy. "And she said mebbe it would, but she didn't get the knife; said we needed the money to buy flour. I don't care much for bread, never did. 'Nough sight rather have cookies. Now, look at that, will ye? There, this kid has got to go into the schoolroom with that sole clapping the floor every step and all the fellers laughin' and makin' him cry, poor little chap, just because we haven't got any jack-knives."

"That's so," said Loty.

The bell was ringing towards the finish. Suddenly Tommy made a motion of decision.

"Off with that shoe, youngster," he ordered, and while the wondering, half-whimpering little fellow obeyed, Tommy pulled off his own shoe and extended it to the other.

"Here, get into that quick," said he.

"What you going to do yourself?" inquired Loty, astonished.

"I'm going barefoot," said Tommy, stoutly. "Guess it won't hurt me any; my feet are about as tough as leather, anyhow. Give me that shoe, youngster; I'm goin' to get father to fix this tonight—reckon he can."

So Tommy went barefoot into the schoolroom with his pockets bulging with shoes, and when the teacher investigated and found the broken one, said never a word in explanation; but he had established a stronger bond, if that were possible, between his little follower and himself.

There was a week's vacation at Christmas time. Christmas came on a Thursday, and the vacation began on the Monday before. Tommy hung his stocking on Wednesday night. He knew he was too big a boy, and he felt mortified that he did so, and made up his mind to never speak of it even to Loty; but he had a hope, though his mother had told him that it was a vain one. "You can hang up your stocking, if you want to," said she, "but you know well enough you can't have any Christmas present in it. Your father got all behindhand with his sickness last year, and we've got to be careful of every penny if we don't want to mortgage the place. I'm sorry, and so is your father; we'd both of us give anything, if we could buy you a jack-knife, or anything you'd set your heart on; but we can't, and you must be a good boy and make the best of it."

"I don't expect you and father to buy me a jack-knife," said Tommy, "but I thought mebbe Uncle Thomas—"

"Your Uncle Thomas has never given a Christmas present in his life," said Mrs. Barlow, "and he's just given $5000 to the town toward a library. He believes in giving big things that show; he isn't going to come down to anything so small as jack-knives, so don't you get your hopes up, child."

A long struggle, not with poverty, but with scantiness, had made the woman bitter, and deprivation had caused her to value unduly that of which she was deprived. That night, after Tommy had gone to bed, her heart failed her at the sight of his much-mended stocking hanging limply from the mantel-shelf. "See, the poor child has hung his stocking, and I haven't got a thing to put in it!" she said to Mr. Barlow. "I told him I hadn't; but he wanted to hang it. He always has a forlorn hope that your Uncle Thomas is going to give him a jack-knife."

"Catch him giving anything, except in big things that pay him well in praise and credit," said Tommy's father. He looked angrily and sadly at the hanging stocking. "Seems to me Tommy is too old to hang his stocking," said he, impatiently.

"Oh, he isn't very old, John—only 10," said his mother. "Poor little fellow, how he has wanted a four-bladed jack-knife!"

"Well, he'll have to go without," said his father; "I never had one. I'm a poor man, and Tommy is the son of a poor man, and most likely he will be one himself. He's got to make up his mind that he can't have things, and make the best of it."

"If we can leave this place clear, Tommy will have something, and we ain't so poor after all, John; we have all we need. Folks can get along without four-bladed jackknives, and not be poor, seems to me. I'm going to make some molasses candy and put it in his stocking, and cover his ball new—that will be better than nothing," said Tommy's mother.

Tommy's father said nothing, but he came home that evening from the store with a big orange and a little paper parcel. "Here's an orange to put in the stocking," said he, "and I met his school teacher and she gave me this for him. Said she had hoped she could have a tree at the school this year; but she wasn't able to, and so she'd send this by me."

"Wonder what it is?" said Mrs. Barlow. "If it was only a knife, wouldn't he be tickled!"

But it was a little instructive book instead of a knife. "It's a pretty little book," said Tommy's mother, "and it looks real improving and interesting. It seems to be about Africa, and I should think he might be interested to read about Africa. I suppose it is a wonderful country; but I wish it had been a jack-knife. Who's that at the door at this time of night? Do ask who it is before you open the door, John."

"It's somebody to ask the way, I guess," said Mr. Barlow. "I heard a team stop out here."

"Well, do ask who it is before you open the door," charged Mrs. Barlow. She was very timid, and she ran upstairs to Tommy's room, while her husband went to the door. She listened and heard a man's voice, and her husband ask some one in. Finally, when she heard the front door shut, she went to the head of the stairs, and called to know who it was. "It was Uncle Thomas; he was driving past, and he wanted to know if I had the deed of this house handy," said Mr. Barlow.

"What for?" asked Mrs. Barlow, going downstairs. "He ain't goin' to overreach you, anyway, is he?"

"No; don't you be scared; it was only about the boundary lines; he's going to buy that piece of land south of the field; it's all right—just the way he thought it was."

"Well," said Mrs. Barlow. "I do wish your Uncle Thomas had brought a jack-knife for poor Tommy.

"Well, he didn't," replied Mr. Barlow. "Catch him; but I've thought of something else to put in the stocking—that Spanish silver dollar that belonged to father."

"Well, maybe he'll like it, said Mrs. Barlow, doubtfully; "but I don't know just what he can do with it."

"He can look at it," said Mr. Barlow, taking the great Spanish dollar out of the desk drawer and putting it on top of the stocking. It had been one of the wonders of his own childhood, and he thought his son must prize it.

So it happened that Tommy Barlow, when he crept out in the pale dawn of Christmas morning to the cold sitting-room to inspect his stocking, found quite a full one. His heart gave a great leap of delight as he caught sight of the bulging stocking. He took it down and crept back upstairs, and took it into bed. He hardly dared open it; he felt it first—it certainly did seem as if there was something which felt like a knife.

Then he began pulling out the parcels with his trembling fingers, and opening them one by one. He found the dollar, orange, the candy, the ball and the school teacher's little book, whose title he did not even look at; then he came to the last parcel, and it was—a jack-knife with four blades.

Tommy looked at it; he was fairly pale. It was the first real joy of possession of his whole life, and he would never, if he lived to be a man, and became as rich as Croesus, have a greater. He opened the blades one after another; he tried one a little on the bedpost. He found it was very sharp; there never was such a knife.

But when he dressed himself and went downstairs to show his mother, she turned so pale he thought she was going to faint away. "Why Tommy Green Barlow," said she, "where did you get that knife?"

"Why, it was in my stocking, mother," replied Tommy, staring at her in bewilderment.

"No, it wasn't in your stocking. It couldn't have been in your stocking. Where is your father? John, come here; see this!"

When Mr. Barlow looked at the knife he turned to Tommy more sternly than he had ever done in his life. "Where did you get this, sir?" said he. When Tommy's father called him "sir," it was serious.

Tommy began to cry. His joy over his new knife seemed of short duration. "It—it was in my stocking, father," said he.

"No, it was not in your stocking. Your mother and I know it was not in your stocking. We know just what was in your stocking. Where did you get this knife, sir?"

"It was in—my—stocking," repeated Tommy, amid his sobs.

Tommy's father and mother looked at each other. They did not know what to think. Tommy had always been a truthful boy, and yet here was the knife, and here was the story which they knew, or thought they knew, to be a downright falsehood. Tommy's father was a very decided man, and when it came to a question like this, he was resolved not to give Tommy the benefit of a doubt. "Give me that knife, sir," said he, "and you go straight back upstairs till I tell you to some down."

When the sound of Tommy's sobs had died away, and they had heard his chamber door shut, Mr. Barlow turned to his wife.

"I can't believe it," said he.

"Neither can I," said she.

"A downright lie like that," said Mr. Barlow.

"And where did he get the knife? Oh, John," she cried, "it looks as if— Oh, John, our Tommy never stole!"

"I don't believe he did," said Mr. Barlow, "but everything is against him. Here he's been wanting a jack-knife all this time, and he got up first this morning."

"He'd have done that anyway," said Mrs. Barlow, suddenly. She looked at her husband. "John, you don't suppose your Uncle Thomas put that knife in that stocking, do you?" she cried.

"Oh, he couldn't," replied Mr. Barlow, but he looked reflectively.

"Now, John Barlow, I ain't so sure. You know Tommy is a pretty boy, and you know old bachelors sometimes takes fancies, and you know he's eccentric. Did you leave him alone in the room?"

"Well, yes, I did," admitted Mr. Barlow. "He was alone quite a spell, while I was in the bedroom getting the deed out of the box under the bed."

"Uncle Thomas put that knife in that stocking," said Mrs. Barlow, conclusively. Then she went to the door, and called "Tommy, Tommy; it's all right. Mother's found out all about it. Come right down and get your breakfast. Poor little boy;" she said. She was half weeping over the cruel injustice with which they had treated Tommy. "Right after breakfast he must get dressed up and go and thank his Uncle Thomas," said she.

And so Tommy did, going down the street spick and span, in his little Sunday suit, with his hair very smooth, and his rosy cheeks shinning with soap and water, and the precious knife in his pocket. But he came home rueful. "He says he didn't give it to me," he whimpered out; "he says he ain't got money to throw away on jack-knives, and he acted real mad."

"Then where did you get that jack-knife, Tommy Barlow?" said his mother, and his father echoed her, in a sterner voice than he had used before.

But Tommy refused to tell, and upstairs to his chamber he went again, sobbing all the way. "I'd rather not have had—a jack-knife," he wailed out, and he snatched the knife out of his pocket and flung it on the floor hard, then he dived head foremost into his bed, and sobbed until he fell asleep.

In the evening of Christmas day came still further developments. Loty Dickinson appeared with his father and mother, each holding a hand and dragging him reluctant and bewildered as before some tribunal of justice. Loty had a jack-knife which had been found in his stocking in the same mysterious fashion, and they had come to see if Tommy knew anything about it.

"We hate to think our dear little boy would do such a dreadful wicked thing as to steal," said his mother, tearfully, "and then tell lies to keep from being punished; but we can't account for it. Your Tommy didn't give it to him, did he?"

"Tommy didn't have any money to buy jack-knives," said Mrs. Barlow; "and he's got one we can't account for, too. He's upstairs in his chamber. We sent him up there because he wouldn't tell."

An audible sniff came from Loty at that. He had red curly hair which stood out fiercely, and his face was red and rasped and wild. "You stop crying, sir," said his father. Then Loty burst out in a loud, irrepressible wail.

They called Tommy down stairs, and the two little boys were together subjected to a cross-examination from their parents, but all to no purpose. Not one word, beyond the simple reiteration that they did not know where the knives had come from, could be forced from either of them.

"I declare," Mrs. Barlow said to Mr. Barlow, when the Dickinsons had gone, "it most makes me believe in Santa Claus!"

"Nonsense!" said Mr. Barlow.

"Well, I'd rather believe in Santa Claus than to think my dear, precious Tommy could steal," said Mrs. Barlow, with a sob. She was getting fairly childish and hysterical.

"We haven't heard the last of it yet," prophesied Mr. Barlow, gloomily.

And it transpired that Mr. Barlow was right, for the next day came Mr. Ezra Tubbs, the storekeeper, who had heard of the mysterious jack-knives, and asked to see Tommy's. He looked at it, he opened the blades, he put on his glasses, and took it to the window, and squinted at it first with one eye, then the other, first on one side, then the other, while Mr. and Mrs. Barlow looked on trembling, and Tommy glared from the position which he had been bidden to take, with fear and despair.

"H'm! I thought so," said Mr. Ezra Tubbs at last.

"Oh, don't tell me it is—don't!" cried Mrs. Barlow.

"Yes, it is," said Mr. Ezra Tubbs, solemnly.

Then Mrs. Barlow flew to Tommy and caught him in her arms, and held him, and looked fiercely over his head at Mr. Tubbs. "You shan't touch him, you shall not," she said. "His father can pay you. We'll mortgage this place; we'll do anything. You shan't touch him."

"Gracious! I ain't goin' to touch him," said Mr. Ezra Tubbs, with a sort of angry statelness. "What do you suppose I am goin' to do with a child like that? He is a badly trained child, and he'll fetch up on the gallows most likely, but I ain't goin' to set the law on him. All I want is either the price of that jack-knife or that jack-knife. He ain't whittled none with it, has he?"

"No, he ain't," said Mr. Barlow, stiffly. "Here's the knife, and I'd rather have cut off my right hand with it than have this happen, and that's all I can say; and he won't fetch up on the gallows if not sparing the rod can save him!"

So it happened that Tommy Barlow felt the rod, that he might be saved from the gallows, and so did Loty Dickinson, at whose house a similar scene with Mr. Ezra Tubbs had been enacted. Take it all together, it was the saddest Christmas which Tommy Barlow and Loty Dickinson had ever known.

It was two days after Christmas that Tommy and Loty, coming home from the long hill where they had been trying to solace themselves with a little coasting, met little Fanny Chase. He caught hold of Tommy's jacket sleeve and stood looking palely up at him, his face twitching.

"Say," he whispered, "I—stole 'em."

"Jack-knives?" cried Tommy and Loty together.

Fanny nodded, swallowing hard.

"How, how?" gasped Tommy. "Did you get 'em into the stockings?"

"Yes," gasped Loty. "How? Oh, my!"

"Winders," replied Fanny, faintly. Then he twitched loose and ran, while a long wail floated back from the depths of the poor little heart which had sinned for love.

Tommy and Loty looked at each other. "Say," said Tommy, then he stopped, but Loty nodded as if he had said something more.

"He'll have an awful time; get licked as bad as we was," said Tommy.

"Mebbe they'll put him in a gaol 'cause he's one of those Chases," said Loty.

Then the two boys looked at each other.

"It's no use, said Tommy, "we can't tell on him."

"No, we can't," said Loty.

And they did not. For a week to come the two experienced all the woes of scorn and contempt, and more. People began to say that they should not be allowed to go to school, that they would remove their own children rather than have them brought in contact with such youthful depravity. Then there came a night when the school committee, headed by the chairman, who was Uncle Thomas Barlow, who was resolved to be pitiless for the sake of justice, even when the culprit bore his own name, appeared at Tommy's father's. The three committeemen sat in an awful row in the Barlow sitting-room, and Tommy stood before them. His heart beat loud in his ears, his hands and feet were like ice. He did not know what could be coming, but he was resolved never to tell on little Fanny, come what would.

Uncle Thomas began to talk, and Tommy listened without comprehending more that it was something awful, and that the words fell on his ears like blows. He heard his mother sob.

Then there was a knock on the door. Mr. Barlow tiptoed solemnly to open it, as if it were a funeral, and in came Fanny Chase and his mother. She was a small, nervous woman, and she was quivering all over like a wire spring. She made nothing of interrupting Uncle Thomas.

"The Chases be poor and low down," said she; "but they don't lie nor steal if I know it, without somethin' is done about it, and they don't let other folks suffer for what they did. My boy here was the one that stole them jack-knives to give to them boys, cause they took his part agin' the other boys in school, and he's jest come and told me about it, and asked me if I wouldn't come here and tell the selectmen, so Tommy and Loty shouldn't git dismissed from school. An' here he is, and' now I'll take him home an' punish him."

Then Uncle Thomas Barlow did something unexpected. He caught hold of little Fanny, who was cowering before them all so pale that he looked as if he would fall, and he sat him on his magisterial knee.

"You are not going to punish this boy, madam," said he, "until we have sifted this case to the bottom."

Then between them all, they got at the curious, unbelievable, pathetic truth, that poor little Fanny had stolen the knives for the sake of his love and gratitude to his two champions, and how he had told, and Tommy and Loty had gone on bearing blame and ignominy to shield him.

"I declare," said Uncle Thomas Barlow, to the committeeman nearest his own age, who was a crony of his, as they were going home after the call was ended, "I don't know but every one of those little fellows ought to be given a sound whipping, but I know one thing—that boy of John's a smart fellow, yes he is, holding his tongue rather than have the little one blamed. He ought to have been pummeled for making his father and mother all that trouble, he ought. But he's a smart fellow, and so is the Dickinson boy, though I guess Thomas is the leading spirit. And I know one thing, those boys are going to have those jack-knives, and that little Chase boy isn't going to be let grow up like the rest of the Chases if I can help it."—Copyright.

IN THE MISTLETOE DAYS

The crowds come and go in the busy street,
With smiles that are sad and smiles that are sweet,
With a merry glance or a longing gaze
At the green mistletoe in the Mistletoe Days.

There's a sprig in the coat and a leaf in the hair,
A garland is here and a basketful there,
While, laughing and jostling in merry maze,
We scatter our gifts in the Mistletoe Days.

CHRISTMAS CUSTOMS

Christmas is the universal holiday of the Christian world. Its observance does not belong to any country or people as does the celebration of some national occurrence or achievement like the King's birthday, or the American Fourth of July. It belongs to all, and wherever the story of the birth of the Christ Child has gone, with it has gone the celebration of that day. Feasting, merry-making and the exchange of gifts mark the usual acceptance of the day, but each country has its own peculiar customs handed down from father to son through the long vista of 1900 years.

A Christmas Practice in Roumania.

From time immemorial it has been the custom in Roumania, at Christmas, to bless the Danube. Formerly, a scaffolding was erected on the frozen river, and on this was a large cross of ice; but owing to the extraordinary number of people who presented themselves, the ice frequently gave way, and many were drowned. The ceremony now takes place on the bank of the Danube. The people, in recognition of the occasion, wear turbans of colored paper and carry long, white wands. These people, who are dressed to represent Pontius Pilate, Herod, and other religious characters, go from place to place singing hymns, which are almost similar to our own Christmas carols. At the appointed hour of the ceremony the notabilities arrive in processional order, accompanied by the priests. This service lasts half an hour, at the close of which the ice is broken, and a small wooden cross is thrown into the water. Hundreds of people rush in after it, and the person who is successful in recovering it is considered very lucky. Sometimes the struggle to possess these crosses is attended with several fatalities, owing to disputes arising as to the ownership of the cross. In the scuffle which ensues it is said knives are sometimes drawn and used without scruple.

In the Fatherland.

The Germans have a truly childlike love for Christmas. The spirit of Kris Kringle animates the hearts of rich and poor; faults and foibles are covered with a kindly mantle, and mirth and jollity reign. Every family wants a Christmas tree, of couse; but if too poor to get a tree a bough will give them just as much genuine pleasure, and if not a bough, then a twig will do very well. It is a home festival; and the gifts, however small, are pretty sure to be love-gifts. All through the land there is mirth and laughter and the spirit of Christmas, and we feel that here the holiday retains the charm it once had when we were little ones. In the distribution of gifts every one is remembered, usually with only a trifle; but it is beautiful as expressing remembrance. There is a general caring for the poor. In the schools, children are requested to bring garments, money, or whatever may be convenient, and in each ward a certain time is appointed for the distribution of these. Rich families care for poor families individually and choose gifts which will be of real benefit to them. Bags and baskets are packed with substantial presents and toys, and in every house plenty reigns for the time. The Pfeffer Kuchen, a sort of hard ginger or spice cake, is the distinguishing delicacy; it is in the house of every one in the land, from the highest to the lowest.

An Old Belgian Custom.

In some of the old Belgian towns a beautiful spectacle may be seen on Christmas eve. Amid the sound of drum, cornet, cymbal and a whole orchestra or instruments, with the soft chanting of old carols, a long, gaily decked procession marches through the principal streets; children of all ages, each division dressed in its special color—white, blue, pink or yellow—and all bearing some badge or emblem, or grasping some bright ribbon attached to shrine or crucifix. The effect of grouping and color is very artistic. Here and there in the throng older, stronger hands bear aloft precious relics, upon which the spectators reverently gaze. Many novel features come into view as the procession passes along; but the prettiest sight is the train of beautiful children, in fantastic dress, marching over the flower-strewn pavement, each small person gravely absorbed in the special part it performs.

Russian Festivity.

Ancient Christmas customs are passing away in the larger cities of Russia; but in some of the remoter provinces of the empire the old-fashioned forms linger. Once upon a time the festival seemed to be devoted to the amusement of young girls; nor is this practice entirely obsolete. The house of some wealthy family was chosen for the place of festivities, in order that there might be no lack of "good cheer." Long before the day arrived, the hostess formally invited her friends and relatives; and later the family nurse repeated the invitation to the young girls. Custom also required the hostess to select a young man, who was called the "elected," as a companion for each of her young lady guests, and he was expected to devote himself exclusively to her entertainment during the festival. In this choice the hostess was obliged to exercise the greatest discretion. On Christmas eve the fair maidens were carried to the place of entertainment with great ceremony, long trains of sledges, containing friends and servants, attending them. The girls were left together to spend the evening in feasting and games. The next day, in the midst of the sports, the "elected" arrived, and were presented to the young girls. Other guests followed, and a series of gaities began which lasted until Twelfth Night. Of course, these festivities were only indulged in by the rich; the poor never gained admittance to them except, occasionally, as maskers or mummers.

Christmas in Servia.

In Servia they keep Christmas eve in a somewhat peculiar way. The father of the family goes into the wood and cuts down a straight young oak, choosing the most perfect that he can find. He brings it in, saying: "Good evening, and a happy Christmas," to which those present reply: "May God grant both to thee, and mayest thou have riches and honor!" Then they throw over him grains of corn. Presently the young tree is placed upon the coals, where it remains until Christmas morning, which they salute by repeated firings of a pistol.

The national dish in Servia is pork. The poorest family in Servia will pinch themselves all through the year so as to have money enough to buy a pig at Christmas. Skewered to a long piece of wood, the pig is turned over a blazing fire until cooked, the guests watching the process with increasing interest. After dinner, stories are told and songs sung. Santa Claus, who, in the person of an honored guest, is present to receive instead of to give presents, departs, after the feast, decorated with a long ring of cakes around his neck, and laden with such gifts as his friends can bestow.

THE PALATIAL

OREGONIAN BUILDING

Not a dark office in the building; absolutely fireproof; electric lights and artesian water; perfect sanitation and thorough ventilation. Elevators run day and night.

Rooms.
AINSLIE, DR. GEORGE, Physician...608-609
ANDERSON, GUSTAV, Attorney-at-Law...612
ASSOCIATED PRESS, E. L. Powell, Mngr.504
AUSTEN, F. C., Manager for Oregon and Washington Bankers' Life Association of Des Moines, Ia.....502-503
BANKERS' LIFE ASSOCIATION, OF DES MOINES, IA., F. C. Austen, Mgr....502-503
BEALS, EDWARD A., Forecast Official U. S. Weather Bureau 010
BENJAMIN, R. W., Dentist.....214
BINSWANGER, OTTO S., Physician and Surgeon 407-408
BROCK, WILBUR F., Circulator Oregonian 501
BROWN, MYRA, M. D.....313-314
BRUERE, DR. G. E., Physician..412-413-414
BUSTED, RICHARD 303
CAMPBELL, WM. M., Medical Referee Equitable Life 700
CANNING, M. J. 602-603
CAUKIN, G. E., District Agent Travelers' Insurance Company 718
CARDWELL, DR. J. R.....506
CHURCHILL, MRS. E. J. 716-717
COLUMBIA TELEPHONE COMPANY.... 604-605-606-607-613-614-615
CORNELIUS, C. W., Phys. and Surgeon..206
COLLIER, P. F., Publisher; S. P. McGuire, Manager 415
DAY, J. G., & I. N.....318
DICKSON, DR. J. F., Physician.....713-714
DWYER, JOE E., Tobaccos.....403
EDITORIAL ROOMS.....Eighth Floor
EVENING TELEGRAM.....325 Alder Street
EQUITABLE LIFE ASSURANCE SOCIETY; L. Samuel, Mgr.; G. S. Smith, Cashier 306
FENTON, J. D., Physician and Surgeon.509-10
FENTON, DR. HICKS C., Eye and Ear..511
FENTON, MATTHEW F., Dentist.....509
GALVANI, W. H., Engineer and Draughtsman 600
GAVIN, A., President Oregon Camera Club 214-215-216-217
GEARY, DR. EDWARD P., Physician and Surgeon 212-213
GIESY, A. J., Physician and Surgeon...709-710
GILBERT, DR. J. ALLEN, Physician.401-402
GILLESPY, SHERWOOD, General Agent Mutual Life Ins. Co.....404-405-406
GOLDMAN, WILLIAM, Manager Manhattan Life Ins. Co., of New York.....209-210
GRANT, FRANK S., Attorney-at-Law....617
GRISWOLD & PHEGLEY, Tailors..... ..... 131 Sixth Street
HAMMAM BATHS, Turkish and Russian. 300-301-302
HAMMOND, A. B.....310
HOLLISTER, DR. O. C., Physician and Surgeon 504-505
IDLEMAN, C. M., Attorney-at-Law.416-17-18
JOHNSON, W. C.....315-316-317
KADY, MARK T., Supervisor of Agents Mutual Reserve Fund Life Assn....604-605
LITTLEFIELD, H. R., Phys. and Sur.....208
MACKAY, DR. A. E., Phys. and Surg..711-712
MANHATTAN LIFE INSURANCE CO. of New York; W. Goldman, Manager....209-210
MARTIN, J. L. & CO., Timber Lands....601
McCOY, NEWTON, Attorney-at-Law.....715
McFADEN, MISS IDA E., Stenographer..201
McGINN, HENRY E., Attorney-at-Law.311-12
McKENZIE, DR. P. L., Phys. and Sur.512-13
METT, HENRY 218
MILLER, DR. HERBERT C., Dentist and Oral Surgeon 608-609
MOSSMAN, DR. E. P., Dentist.....513-514
MUTUAL RESERVE FUND LIFE ASSN; Mark T. Kady, Supervisor of Agents.604-605
McELROY, DR. J. G., Phys. & Sur.701-702-703
McFARLAND, E. B., Secretary Columbia Telephone Company 606
McGUIRE, S. P., Manager P. F. Collier, Publisher 415
MUTUAL LIFE INSURANCE CO., of New York; Sherwood Gillespy, Gen. Agt..404-5-6
NICHOLAS, HORACE B., Attorney-at-Law.715
NILES, M. L., Cashier Manhattan Life Insurance Company of New York.....209
OLSEN, J. F., State Agent Tontine Savings Association, Minneapolis 211
OREGON CAMERA CLUB.....214-215-216-217
OREGON INFIRMARY OF OSTEOPATHY 409-410
OREGONIAN BARBER SHOP; Rudolph Marsch, Prop.....129 Sixth street
OREGONIAN EDUCATIONAL BUREAU; J. F. Strauhal, Manager 200
PORTLAND EYE AND EAR INFIRMARY, ...Ground Floor, 133 Sixth street
QUIMBY, L. P W., Game and Forestry Warden 515
REED, WALTER, Optician....133 Sixth street
RICKENBACH, DR. J. F., Eye, Ear, Nose and Throat 701-702
ROSENDALE, O. M., Metallurgist and Mining Engineer 516
RYAN, J. B., Attorney-at-Law.....515
SAMUEL, L., Manager Equitable Life....300
SHERWOOD, J. W., Deputy Supreme Commander K. O. T. M.....517
SMITH, G. S., Cashier Equitable Life.....306
SMITH, DR. L. B., Osteopath.....409-410
SMITH, GEO. S., Cashier Equitable Life...306
STUART, DELL, Attorney-at-Law....617-618
STOLTE, DR. CHAS. E., Dentist.....704-705
SURGEON OF THE S. P. RY. AND N. P. TERMINAL CO..... 706
STROWBRIDGE, THOMAS H., Executive Special Agent Mutual Life of New York..406
SUPERINTENDENT'S OFFICE.....201
"THREE IN ONE" QUICK ACCOUNT SYSTEM COMPANY, OF OREGON.....518
TONTINE SAVINGS ASSOCIATION, Minneapolis; J. F. Olson, State Agent.....211
TUCKER, DR. GEO. F., Dentist.....610-611
U. S. WEATHER BUREAU...907-908-909-910
U. S. LIGHTHOUSE ENGINEERS, 13TH DIST., Captain W. C. Langfitt, Corps of Engineers, U. S. A.....803
U. S. ENGINEER OFFICE RIVER AND HARBOR IMPROVEMENTS, Captain W. C. Langfitt, Corps of Engineers, U. S. A..810
WATERMAN, C. H., Cashier Mutual Life of New York 400
WILSON, DR. EDWARD N., Physician and Surgeon 304-305
WILSON, DR. GEO. F., Phys. & Surg.706-707
WILSON, DR. HOLT C., Phys. & Surg.507-508
WILLAMETTE VALLEY TELE. CO.....613
WOOD, DR. W. L., Physician....412-413-414

Offices may be had by applying to the superintendent of the building, room 201, second floor.