

JOHN HEARTY ON CHRISTMAS PRESENTS by George Hobart.

SAY! did you ever take what little was left and start out to buy a friend wife a Christmas token? A quaint pastime, is it not?

Well, to make a long story lose its cunning, I clicked a few iron men together one morning recently and started out to find something new and fifty in the gift line for Peaches. I was bustling for a department store when I ran across Hep Hardy, limping in the direction of a taxicab stand.

"Up late, aren't you, Hep?" I inquired, glancing at the Waterbury.

"I sure am running behind my schedule this morning, John," Hep wheezed.

"Accident?"

"What's the matter? Fuss blow out and leave you and your favorite bartender in darkness?" I ventured.

"Nix," he answered; "I interpolated a new step in the Tango about 5 this A. M. and my partner, an impulsive little thing from Spokane, didn't get my signal, with the result that she stepped on me and lost one of her French heels somewhere between my ankle and my instep. I had to wait till a Doctor Shep was open so he could probe for it. The medicine peddler found it all right, but he said it was a bit wobbly, but I'll be in the roped arena tonight when the bell rings, clamoring for my favorite rag, you can bet on that. But I'm just a little behind."

"The dance bug has you for fair, hasn't it, Hep?" I laughed.

"Not at all," Hep came back; "but like a lot of folks, I've been going through life with stoop shoulders and plantation feet. I've suddenly discovered how to be graceful and I have to stay up all night to see if other people notice it. Where are you going?"

"I'm going down to see one of those stores and make a fool out of fifty dollars—little Christmas present for Peaches," I answered.

"Fifty dollars?" Hep answered. "Say, John, if I had a wife, and we were speaking to each other, fifty dollars wouldn't buy the ribbon around the bundle, fifty dollars! You make a noise like a pike."

"Sure!" I snapped back. "If you had a wife you'd take her down to your favorite jewelry store and let the clerks throw diamonds at her till they fell exhausted. But I'm just a little behind, working for a living, and every time I see a hundred dollar bill I get red in the face and want a drink of water. You think the father didn't spend his life wrapping it up in bundles and throwing it into an iron wooded against the time I became old enough to use it?"

"Say!" chirped Hep, who hadn't paid the slightest attention to what I was saying. "Why don't you get her an emerald necklace? Some of the boys I saw one the other day for \$3000. Wait a minute, I'll give you a card to the manager."

"Give it to the chauffeur," I said as I pushed Hep into the taxi. "By the time he gets you home you'll owe him enough to buy emeralds."

"Then I left him flat and moaned



"They Certainly Taught Me the Huerta Grade All Right"

off for a department store to get a Christmas present for friend wife.

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How sweet it is to mingle in the arms of utter strangers and to feel the gentle pressure of a foot we never hope to meet again!

I was standing by one of the counters on the second floor when shrill voice crept up over a few bales of dry goods and said, "Are you a buyer or a händler?"

"I am looking for a Christmas present for friend wife," I answered. "I want to get something that will look swell on the parlor table and may be used later on as a tobacco jar or a trouser stretcher."

"Fourth floor, to the left, take the elevator," said the shrill voice, but shrilled.

With bowed head I walked away. I began to feel sorry for friend wife. Nobody seemed to be very much interested whether she got a Christmas present or not.

On the fourth floor I stopped at a counter where a lot of eager dames were pawing over some chinchilla ribbon and chiffon undershirts.

It reminded me of the way an emotional hen digs up a grub in the garden.

I enjoyed the excitement of the game for about ten minutes, and then I said to the clerk behind the counter, who was refereeing the match, "Can you tell me where I can buy a sterling silver Christmas present for friend wife, which I could use afterward as a night key or a bath sponge?"

"Fifth floor; to the rear; take the elevator," said the clerk.

On the fifth floor I went over to a table where a young lady was selling "The Life and Libraries of Andrew Carnegie" at \$4 a month and 50 cents a week, and in three years it was yours if you don't lose the receipts.

She gave me a glad smile and I felt a thrill of encouragement.

"Excuse me," I said, "but I am looking for a Christmas present for friend wife which will make all the neighbors jealous, and which I can use afterward as an ash receiver or a pocket flask."

The young lady cut out the giggles and pointed to the northwest.

To my surprise, I found another counter.

A pale young woman was behind it. I was just about to ask her the fatal question when a young man wearing a ragtime expression on his face rushed up and said to the pale young lady behind the counter: "I am looking for a suitable present for a young lady friend of mine with golden brown hair. Could you please suggest something?"

The pale young woman showed her teeth and answered him in a low, rumbling voice, and the man went away.

Then came an old lady who said: "I bought some organdie dress goods for a shirt waist last Tuesday, and I would like to exchange them for a music box for my daughter's little boy, Freddie, if you please!"

The pale young woman again showed her teeth and the old lady ducked for cover.



"Lost One of Her French Heels Somewhere Between My Ankle and My Instep."

After about 50 people had rushed up to the pale young woman and then rushed away again, I went over and spoke to her.

"I am looking," I said, "for a Christmas present for friend wife. I want to get something that will give her a great amount of pleasure and which I can use later on as a pipe cleaner or a pair of suspenders."

The pale young woman flinched, so I moved over.

At another counter another young lady said to me, "Have you been waiting on?"

"No," I replied; "I have been stepped on, sat on and walked on, but I have not been waiting on."

"What do you wish?" inquired the young woman.

"I am looking for a Christmas present for friend wife," I said. "I want to buy her something that will bring great joy to her heart, and which I might use afterward as a pair of slippers or a pair of slippers."

The young lady caught me with her

dreamy eyes and held me up against the wall.

"You," she screamed, "you complete a total of 25,493 people who have been in this department store today without knowing what they are doing here, and I refuse to be a human encyclopedia for the sake of eight dollars a week. Go on, now; throw yourself into second speed and climb the hill!"

I began to apologize, but she reached down under the counter and pulled out a club.

"This," she said, with a wild look in her side lamps, "this is happy Yuletide, but, nevertheless, the next guy that leaves his brains at home and tries to make me tell him what is a good Christmas present for his wife will get a bitter wallop across the forehead!"

"The girl was right, so I went home without a present."

I suppose I'll have to take Hep's tip and get those emeralds after all.

But first I'll go down to the delicatessen store and see if there's anything there. (Copyright, '13. Rights reserved.)

Santa Claus and Little Billie..... by John Kendrick Bangs.

HE was only a little bit of a chap, and so, when for the first time in his life he came into close contact with the endless current of human things, it was as hard for him to "stay put" as for some wayward little atom of flotsam and jetsam to keep from tossing about in the surging tides of the sea.

His mother had left him there in the big toyshop, with instructions not to move until she came back, while she went off to do some mysterious errand. She thought, no doubt, that with so many beautiful things on every side to delight his eye and hold his attention, strict obedience to her commands would not be hard. But, alas, the good lady reckoned not upon the magnetic power of attraction of all those lovely objects in detail. She saw them only as a mass of wonders which, in all probability, would so dazzle his vision as to leave him incapable of movement; but Little Billie was not so indifferent as all that.

When a phonograph at the other end of the shop began to rattle off melodious tunes and funny jokes, in spite of the instructions to keep his feet planted as fast as his little legs would carry him to investigate. After that, forgetful of everything else, finding himself caught in the constantly moving stream of Christmas shoppers, he was borne along in the restless current until he found himself at last out upon the street—alone, free and independent.

It was great fun, at first. By and by, however, the afternoon waned; the sun, as if anxious to hurry along the day of Christmas, sank early in the west, and the electric lights along the darkening highway began to pop out here and there like so many merry stars come down to earth to celebrate the gladdest time of all the year. Little Billie began to grow tired; and then he thought of his mamma and tried to find the shop where he had promised to remain quiet until her return. Up and down the street he wandered until his little legs grew weary, but there was no sign of the shop or of the beloved face he was seeking.

Once again, and yet once again after that, did the little fellow traverse that crowded highway, his tears getting harder and harder to keep back and then—joy of joys—whom should he see walking slowly along the sidewalk but Santa Claus himself! The saint came steadily decorated with the queer looking boards, with big red letters on them hung over his back and chest; but there was still that same kindly gray-bearded face, the red cloak with the fur trimmings, and the same dear old cap that the children's friend had always worn in the pictures of him that Little Billie had seen.

With a glad cry of happiness, Little Billie ran to meet the old fellow, and put his hand gently into that of the saint. He thought it very strange that Santa Claus should be so red and cold and rough, and so chapped, but he was not in any mood to be critical. He had been faced with the very disagreeable situation. Then, when things had seemed blackest to him, everything had come right again, and he was too glad to take more than passing notice of anything strange and odd.

Santa Claus, of course, would recognize him at once, and would know just how to take him back to his mamma at home—wherever that might be. Little Billie had never thought to inquire just where home was. All he knew was that it was a big gray stone house on a long street somewhere, with a tall fir tree in front of it, not far from the park.

"Howd'ee, Mr. Santa Claus!" said Little Billie, as the other's hand unconsciously tightened over his own.

"Why, howd'ee, kiddie!" replied the old fellow, glancing down at his new-found friend, with surprise gleaming from his deep-set eyes. "Where did you drop from?"

"I don't know," said Little Billie bravely. "My mamma left me a little while ago while she went about

something, and I guess I got losted."

"Very likely," returned the old saint with a smile. "Little two-by-four fellows are apt to get losted when they start in on their own hook, specially days like these, with such crowds bustlin' around."

"But it's all right now," suggested Little Billie hopefully. "I'm found again, ain't I?"

"Oh, yes, indeed, you're found all right," replied Santa Claus. "And pretty soon you'll take me home again, won't you?" said the child.

"Surest thing you know!" answered Santa Claus, looking down upon the bright but tired little face with a comforting smile. "What might your address be?"

"Your address," repeated Santa Claus. "Where do you live?"

The answer was a ringing peal of childish laughter.

"As if you didn't know that!" cried Little Billie, giggling.

"Ha, ha!" laughed Santa Claus. "Can't fool you, can it? It would be funny if all the boys and girls who were born years since you was a baby, I didn't know where you lived, eh?"

"Awful funny," agreed Little Billie. "But you do know, Mr. Santa Claus, what sort of a boy do you think I have been?" he added with a shade of anxiety in his voice.

"Pretty good—pretty good," Santa Claus answered, turning in his steps and walking back again along the path he had just traveled—which Little Billie thought rather a strange thing to do. "You've got more white marks than black ones—a good many more—a hundred and fifty times as many, kiddie. Fact is, you're all right along with the good boys; though once or twice last Summer, you know—"

"Yes, I know," said Little Billie meekly, "but I didn't mean to be naughty."

"That's just what I said to the book-keeper," said Santa Claus, "and so we gave you a gray mark—half white and half black—that doesn't count either way, for or against you."

"Thank you, sir," said Little Billie, much comforted.

"Don't mention it; you are very welcome, kiddie," said Santa Claus, giving the youngster's hand a gentle squeeze.

"Why do you call me 'kiddie' when you know my name is Little Billie?" asked the boy.

"Oh, that's what I call all good boys," explained Santa Claus. "You see, we divide them up into two kinds—the good boys and the naughty boys—and the good boys we call kiddies, and the naughty boys we call kiddies, and there you are."

"Just then Little Billie noticed for the first time the square boards that Santa Claus was wearing.

"What are you wearing those boards for, Mr. Santa Claus?" he asked.

"If the lad had looked closely enough, he would have seen a very unhappy look come into the old man's face; but there was nothing of it in his answer. "Oh, those are my new-fangled back-and-chest protectors, my lad," he replied. "Sometimes we have bitter winds blowing at Christmas, and I have to be ready for them. It wouldn't do for Santa Claus to come down with the sneezes at Christmas-time, you know—no, street! This board in front keeps the wind off my chest, and the one behind keeps me from getting rheumatism in my back. They are a great protection against the weather."

"I'll have to tell my papa about these boards," said Little Billie, much impressed by the simplicity of this arrangement. "We have a glass board on the front of our automobile to keep the wind off Henry's—oh, chuffler—but papa wears a fur coat, and sometimes he says the wind goes right through that. He'll be glad to know about these boards."

"I shouldn't wonder," smiled Santa Claus. "They aren't very becoming, but they are mighty useful. You might save up your pennies and give your papa a pair like 'em for his next Christmas."

"Santa Claus laughed as he spoke; but



there was a catch in his voice which Little Billie was too young to notice.

"You've got letters printed there," said the boy, peering around in front of his companion. "What do they spell? You know I haven't learned to read yet."

"And why should you know how to read at your age?" said Santa Claus. "You're not more than—"

"Five last month," said Little Billie proudly. "It was such a great age!"

"My, as old as that!" cried Santa Claus. "Well, you are growing fast! Why, it don't seem more than yesterday that you was a pink-cheeked baby, and here you are big enough to be out alone! That's more than my little boy is able to do."

Santa Claus shivered slightly, and Little Billie was surprised to see a tear glistening in his eye.

"Why, have you got a little boy?" he asked.

"Yes, Little Billie," said the saint. "A poor, white-faced little chap about a year older than you, who—well, never mind, kiddie—he's a kiddie, too—let's talk about something else, or I'll have icicles in my eyes."

"You're awful kind, aren't you?" said Little Billie, squeezing his friend's hand affectionately. "It must make you very happy to be able to be so kind to everybody."

"I do, too, know my last name!" blurted Little Billie. "It's Billie."

remark, beyond giving a very deep sigh, which Little Billie chose to believe was evidence of a great inward content. They walked on now in silence, for Little Billie was beginning to feel almost too tired to talk, and Santa Claus seemed to be thinking of something else. Finally, however, the little fellow spoke.

"I guess I'd like to go home now, Mr. Santa Claus," he said. "I'm tired, and I'm afraid my mamma will be wondering where I've gone to."

"That's so, my little man," said Santa Claus, stopping short in his walk up and down the block. "Your mother will be worried for a fact; and your father, too—I know how I'd feel if my little boy got losted and hadn't come home at dinner-time. I don't believe you know where you live, though—now honest! Come! Pass up, Billie, you don't know where you live, do you?"

"Why, yes, I do," said Little Billie. "It's in the big gray stone house with the iron fence in front of it, near the park."

"Oh, that's easy enough!" laughed Santa Claus nervously. "Anybody could say he lived in a gray stone house with a fence around it, near the park; but you don't know what street it's on, nor the number, either. I'll bet fourteen wooden giraffes against a monkey on a stick!"

"No, I don't," said Little Billie frankly; "but I know the number of our oryrmobile. It's—N. Y."

"Fine!" laughed Santa Claus. "If you really were lost, it would be a great help to know that; not being lost, as you ain't, why, of course, we can get along without it. It's queer you don't know your last name, though."

"I do, too, know my last name!" blurted Little Billie. "It's Billie."

That's the last one they gave me, anyhow.

Santa Claus reflected for a moment, eyeing the child anxiously.

"I don't believe you even know your papa's name," he said.

"Yes, I do," said Little Billie, indignantly. "His name is Mr. Harrison."

"Well, you are a smart little chap," cried Santa Claus gleefully. "You got it right the very first time, didn't you? I really didn't think you knew. But I don't believe you know where your papa keeps his bakeshop, where he makes all those nice cakes and cookies you eat."

Billie began to laugh again.

"You can't fool me, Mr. Santa Claus," he said. "I know my papa don't keep a bakeshop just as well as you do. My papa owns a bank."

"Well, you are a smart little fellow, I suppose, with a nice little hole at the top to drop pennies into," said Santa Claus.

"No, it ain't either," retorted Little Billie. "It's made of stone, and has more than a million windows in it. I went down there with my mamma to papa's office the other day, so I guess I ought to know."

"Well, I should say so," said Santa Claus. "Nobody better. By the way, Billie, what does your mamma call your papa? 'Billie,' like you?" he added.

"Oh, no, indeed," returned Little Billie. "She calls him papa, except once in a while when he's going away, and then she says 'Good-bye, Tom.'"

"Fine again!" said Santa Claus, blowing upon his fingers, for now that the sun had completely disappeared over in the West, it was getting very cold.

"Thomas Harrison, banker," he muttered to himself. "What, with the telephone book and the city directory,

I guess we can find our way home with Little Billie."

"Do you think we can go now, Mr. Santa Claus?" asked Little Billie, for the cold was beginning to cut through his little coat, and the sandman had started to scatter the sleepy seeds all around.

"Yes, indeed," returned Santa Claus promptly. "Right away off now, instantly at once! I'm afraid I can't get my reminder here in time to take us up to the house, but we can go in the cars—bump! I don't know whether we can or not, come to think of it. Ah, do you happen to have 10 cents in your pocket?" Santa added, with an embarrassed air. "You see, I've left my pocketbook in the sleigh with my toy pack; and, besides, mine is only toy money, and they won't take that on the cars."

"I got twenty-four cents," said Little Billie proudly, as he dug his way down into his pocket and brought the shining silver piece to light. "You can have it, if you want it."

"Thank you," said Santa Claus, taking the proffered coin. "We'll start home right away; only come in here first, to let me telephone to Santaville, telling the folks where I am."

He led the little fellow into a public telephone station, where he eagerly scanned the names in the book. At last it was found—"Thomas Harrison, seven-six-five-four Plaza." And then, in the seclusion of the telephone booth, Santa Claus sent the gladdest of all Christmas messages over the wire to two distracted parents:

"I have found your boy wandering in the street. He is safe, and I will bring him home right as fast as I can."

III.

Fifteen minutes later, there might have been the strange spectacle of a footsore Santa Claus leading a sleepy little boy up Fifth avenue to a cross street, which shall be nameless. The boy, who was named Little Billie, was the companion to "come in and meet mamma."

"Aha!" said one of the police, seizing Santa Claus roughly by the arm, and eyeing the child anxiously. "Where have you been with this boy?"

"You let him alone!" cried Little Billie, with more courage than he had ever expected to show in the presence of a policeman. "He's a friend of mine."

"That's right, officer," said Little Billie's father; "let him alone—I haven't entered any complaint against this man."

"But you want to look out for these fellows, Mr. Harrison," returned the officer. "First thing you know they'll be makin' a trade of this sort of thing."

"I'm no grafter!" retorted Santa Claus, indignantly. "I found the little fellow wandering along the street, and as soon as I was able to locate where he lived, I brought him home. That's all there is to it."

"He knows where he lived all alone," laughed Little Billie, "only he pretended he didn't, just to see if I knew."

"You see, sir," said the officer, "it won't do him any harm to let him cool his heels."

"It is far better that he should warm them off," said Mr. Harrison kindly. "And he can do that here! Come in, my man," he added, turning to Santa Claus with a grateful smile. "Just for a minute, anyhow. Mrs. Harrison will wish to thank you for bringing our boy back to us. We have had a terrible afternoon."

"That's all right, sir," said Santa Claus modestly. "It wasn't anything, and I didn't really find him—it was him as found me, sir. He took me for the real thing, I guess."

Nevertheless, Santa Claus, led by Lit-

tle Billie's persistent father, went into the house. Now that the boy could see him in the full glare of many electric lights, his furs did not seem the most gorgeous things in the world. When the policeman, front of his red jacket flew open, the child was surprised to see how ragged was the thin gray coat it covered; and as for the 5000 old hairs, comfortable stomach overhanging into a chair, and covering his face with his hands, wept like a child.

"I guess Santa Claus is tired, pap," said Little Billie, snuggling up closely to the old fellow and taking hold of his hand sympathetically. "He's been walkin' a lot today."

"Papa's trying to hold me up," said Mr. Harrison. "These are very busy times for Santa Claus, and I guess that, as he still has a hard night ahead of him, James, he'll be better rings and tell him to bring the car around right away, so that we may take him back—to his little boy. We'll have to lend him some more money, 'cause the wind out, too, for it is a bitter night."

"Oh," said Little Billie, "I haven't told you about these boards he wears. He says he's been riding all night, and they're fine, papa!" Little Billie pointed to the two sign-boards which Santa Claus had leaned against the wall. "He says he's been riding all night, and they're fine, papa!" Little Billie pointed to the two sign-boards which Santa Claus had leaned against the wall.

"I've been joking, have I?" said Little Billie's papa. "Well, then, Mr. Billiam, suppose you inform me what it says."

"Merry Christmas to Everybody," said Little Billie proudly. "I couldn't read it myself, but he told me what it said. He has it printed there so that if he misses saying it to anybody, they'll know he means it just the same."

"By Jove, Mr. Santa Claus," cried Little Billie's papa, grasping the old man warmly by the hand. "I owe you a million apologies! I haven't believed in you for many a long year; but now, sir, I take it all back. You do exist, and you're a great horn spoon, you are the real thing!"

Little Billie had the satisfaction of acting as host to Santa Claus at a good, luscious dinner, which Santa Claus must have enjoyed very much, because, when explaining why he was so hungry, it came out that the poor old chap had been so busy all day that he had not had time to get any lunch—no, not even one of those good dinners at Smith's cafe, to which Little Billie's father had jokingly referred. And after dinner Henry came with the automobile, and bidding everybody good night, Santa Claus and Little

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