

small storekeepers along the line to the determination that something must be done to put a stop to the holdups by the desperate highwaymen. So bold had the robbers become that not infrequently passengers were shot down before they had even offered the slightest resistance.

Something must be done, and G. Frank Willard, the agent at Flagstaff, finally made up his mind to drive the coach on its next trip. He announced his intention to his assistant and told the new driver that he could lay off a trip.

"I will find out who are killing our passengers and robbing the company on almost every trip," said Willard, the night before his departure, to a group of ranchmen who had come down the mountains to purchase trinkets and provender for the Christmas days. Every effort had been made to apprehend the stage robbers without success. Not even a trail in the deep snow could be discovered. Footprints of a man or men within a radius of twenty feet of the robbed coach were all that was ever seen. They could be traced nowhere. Only the single print of an elk's hoof could be found, and elks, as a rule, do not rob stage coaches. It was a mystery, but Agent Willard was determined to unravel it.

When the incoming coach from Volunteer Springs got into Flagstaff to transfer its freight to Willard's care it was found that he had entrusted to him a most precious burden wrapped snugly in warm, soft blankets. Opening the bundle a pair of big blue eyes, shaded by clusters of golden curls, gazed at him in babyish wonder.

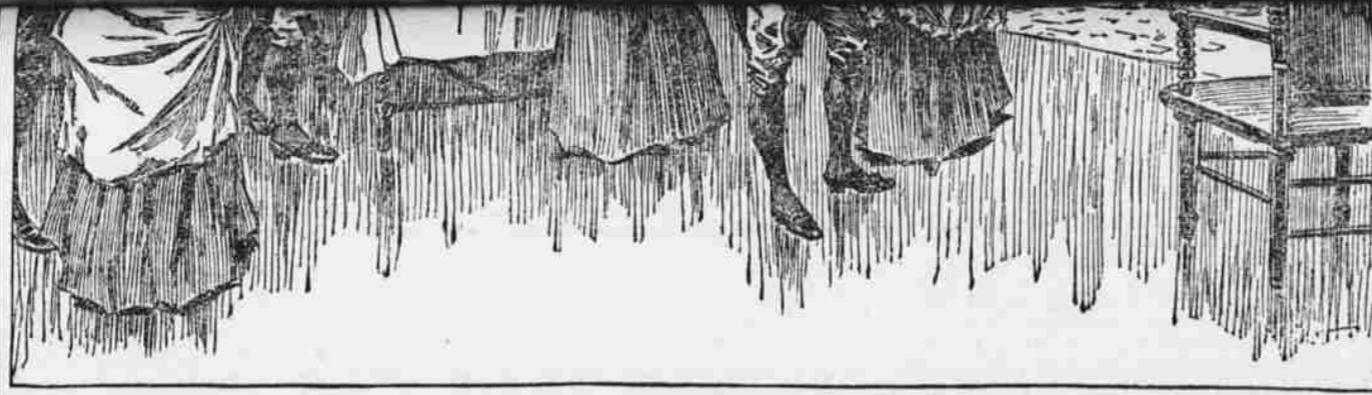
A note pinned to the blanket near the throat of the little one stated that the



"ALL THESE IS YOUR'N."

baby was named Helen Grace Morris and that she was sent to her father at Pittman Valley as a Christmas gift from her mother, who was too poor in health and purse to make the trip.

"Truly a precious present if her father is anything of a man," mused Agent Willard, as he tenderly took the little one in his arms and placed her in his own com-



ing, and was startled by hearing a wee little voice say:

"Is you my papa? I'm his Christmus gif'; mamma sent me."

"You bet I'm your papa, and I take you as the most precious Christmas gift mortal man ever got."

Fondly clasping the cooing baby in his big brawny arms, he leaped from the coach, cut loose the dead horse and its living companion, and then lashed the remaining pair into a run in the direction of Pittman Valley. A moment later, as he stood in the middle of the pass, he gave a shrill whistle, and from a clump of pine trees on the side of the road emerged a tall and powerful elk. Without hesitation the stately animal moved quickly to the side of the robber, who hastily tied on its back the box of money, and then, still hugging the precious bundle, he leaped on the elk's back and was soon lost to sight in the valley below.

The clattering of the maddened coach horses as they dashed into the little town of Pittman aroused its citizens, who soon learned from the wounded agent, who had recovered consciousness, what happened. A posse was at once formed, and with the sheriff in the lead set out for the scene of the robbery and attempted murder. Arriving there they were nonplused at failing to find any trail in the deep snow except the hoofprints of an elk or stag.

"Don't see how we can make a move without a trail to work on," said the sheriff. "Might as well give it up."

But this did not suit Wesley Hawkins, an old mountain trapper.

"These elk hoofprints are a mystery to me," he said. "I know positively that there are no elk this high up in the mountains now and haven't been for goin' on three year. They are all in the valley below, and for one I think we ought to follow this trail."

"Mebbe you're right," said the sheriff, who set off on the elk trail, followed by his posse. Two hours of quick walking brought them to a cavernous-like opening, around which were seen innumerable human footprints. Cautiously they bent to their hands and knees and began to crawl in at the mouth of the cavern. In a few moments they heard voices and came to a small, stout door, which stood partly ajar. The poorly furnished room they peered into was ablaze with the light of a huge log fire, and seated in the middle of the floor was little Helen Grace Mor-

ris gazing in rapt wonder at the big Christmas tree laden with articles which the highwayman had at various times secured in his forays on the express coach.

"All these things is your'n, little one," said the rough-visaged robber as tears stole down his coarse, weather-beaten face. "You are my Christmas present, an' all them things is your'n. I've taken many a chance for my life to get 'em, but I never will do it again for your sake, for I've got somethin' to live for, an' I'll raise you like a lady."

The highwayman then knelt on the ground floor of the cavern and prayed that he might be forgiven as he stroked the golden curls of his little companion, on which his tears glistened like dew.

"Sh', sh', boys," said the sheriff as he slowly backed out of the cavern. "Come on, don't make a noise; we ain't seen him do nothin'. He'll never rob another coach, for she's made a man of him, and he got the best Christmas gift Santa Claus ever had in his big storehouse."

Agent Willard recovered and five years ago came to Chicago and is the owner of a small hay and feed store in Belden avenue.—Chicago Tribune.

Bethlehem Shepherd of To-Day.



Presents for the Poor.

"In your Christmas purchasing do not be tempted to forget those who, because of their poverty, are unable to do any shopping either for themselves or for

tinues throughout the afternoon and well into the night in official and private houses. The official social season is inaugurated on New Year's Day in Washington. It is the grand rallying day of the neighborly proclivities of the people of the entire district. Many men make their first and last visit of the year on this day, and only see certain of their friends on this one day of the year. As they grow older these festival days seem to come closer and closer together. Lists are published in the newspapers of the houses where receptions will be held, with the names of the ladies who will assist in receiving. The assisting lady often attracts more callers than the hostess, and newly arrived families are on the lookout for popular women for their New Year's Day receptions. There is no need to interrupt the grand round of calls for luncheon or dinner; the carriage is hired for the day, and, dressed in his very best, the caller must see all the old friends and make as many new ones as time will permit. Everywhere open house is kept in the lavish Southern fashion. Tables are loaded with viands hot and cold, supplemented with real Southern egg-nog, or a bowl filled from the housekeeper's winter supply of Fish House punch, mixed from a well-guarded formula that is an heirloom in Philadelphia families. The whirl of revelry is intense, but this gala-day comes for Washingtonians but once in a year, and it is celebrated with true Southern warmth and enthusiasm."

His Awful Fate.

Visitor (in dime museum)—Where is the human ostrich who was on exhibition here last week?

Lecturer—The poor fellow ate some of the candy that his little son got off from the Sabbath school Christmas tree and died in horrible agony soon after.—Puck.

Holiday Troubles.

"What do you intend to get your husband for a Christmas gift?"

"I can't make up my mind whether to give him lace curtains, a dinner set, new portieres or a drawing room clock."—Chicago Record.

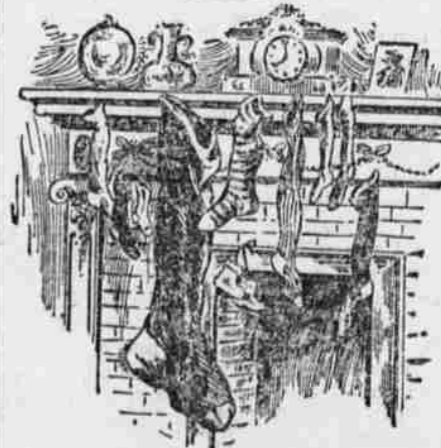
Yuletide Amenities.

Miss Antique—My stocking was so full they couldn't get anything more in it.
Miss Pert—You poor thing! And was that all you got?—American Humorist.

new year in and celebrating the first day of the new year was of as much importance as are Christmas and the Fourth of July to-day. Especially was the day one of hilarious rejoicing in merrie England, Scotland and France, the latter being now, at the close of the nineteenth century, about the only nation still continuing in the joyous customs of happy festivity. In America and England the wassail bowl has been forestalled by the punch bowl and the loving cup; the rich feast complete in even the slightest detail has given way to wafers and tea; the pretty baskets decked in gay ribbons and hung below the knockers, in themselves all the invitation required for a call and interchange of the compliments of the season, have been cast aside to be superseded by a reign of engraved cards; the informal New Year's day hospitality is a thing of the past, and stiff, conventional "at homes" are now the rule. The passing of generations "treading on the skirts of time" have brought about many changes that are to be regretted, even while the customs may have been a trifle barbarous, compared to the state of civilization which the world of to-day has attained.

How jovial and pompous the Old English head of the house appeared in tight knee-breeches and high-heeled shoes, with the white kerchief wound about his neck, sitting on New Year's eve surrounded by all the members of his family, and with the flowing wassail bowl before him. The words of good cheer that passed on with the wassail bowl were the ancient Saxon words, "Wass hael," signifying "To your health."

Puzzle.



Find the stocking that Willie hung up.

Discovered.

"Papa," said little Petie, "does Kriss Kringle bring little boys toys ahead of Christmas?"

"No, my son," replied the father. "Why do you ask?"

"I was a wonderin' what them new toys was I found away back in the loft behind the trunks."

Christmas.

Comes yearly;
Costs dearly;
Broke—nearly.