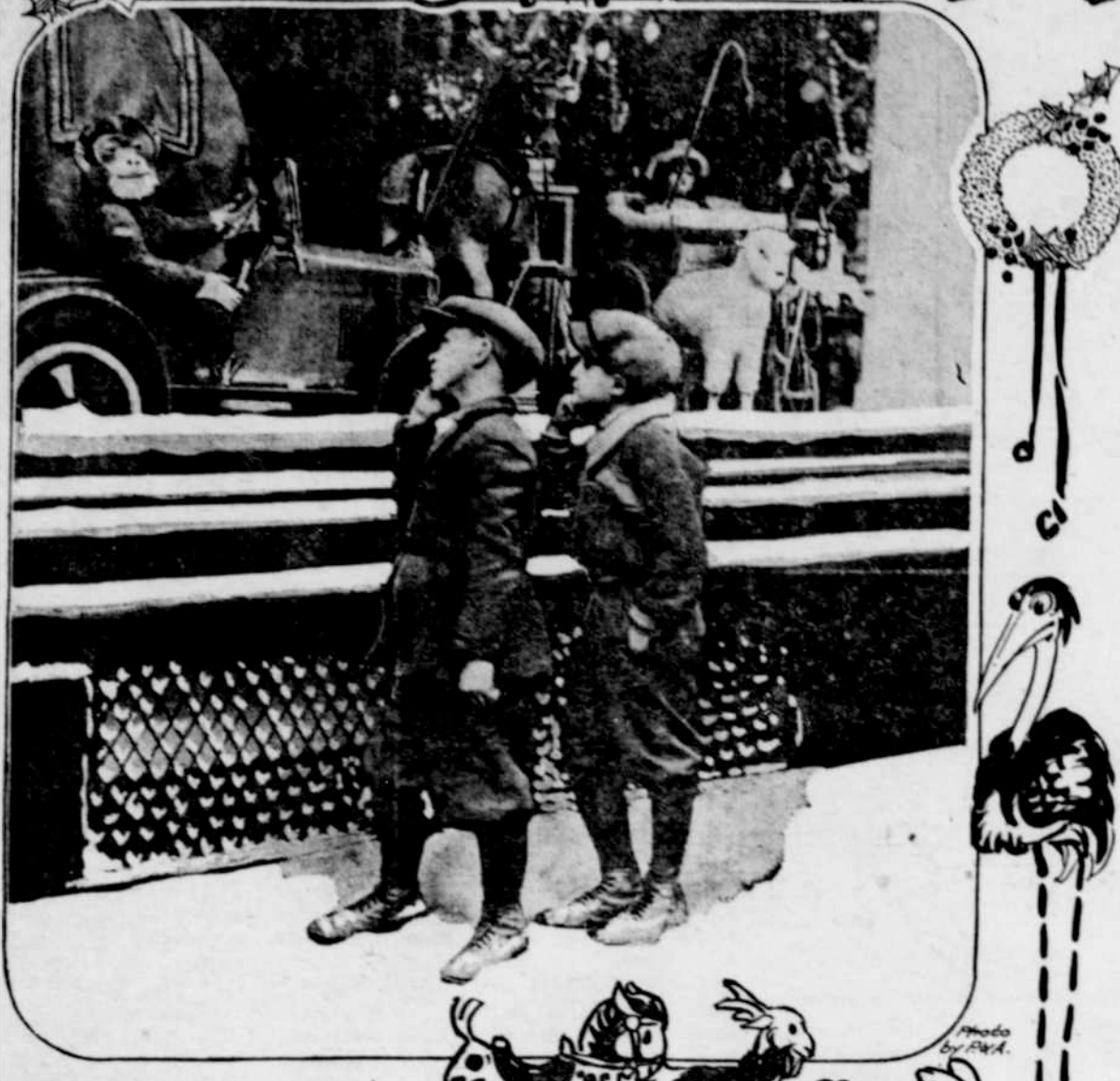


About Gift Giving



WITH the world absorbed just now in the process of making and buying gifts for Christmas, how many of us stop to think what it is all about? So simply and naturally has gift-making slipped into our scheme of things that we scarcely recognize it as a thing in itself.

Gift-making has a history as old as time, and there are many occasions on which we deem it fit and proper, nay, even obligatory, to give and exchange gifts. Nearly every one exchanges gifts at Christmas time, and this year we expect to see the custom observed to its fullest possibilities.

Glancing over the ages, we find that gift-making has always existed in some form or other. Our savage ancestors were great hands at the game. But gift-giving in primitive man did not spring from any thought or idea connected with generosity. His was not the simple desire to please. Being selfish and unutterably superstitious, he feared and distrusted strangers, just as some of us do today. He scorned the weak and cringed before the strong. The conditions of life forced him to these reactions.

Whatever impulses primitive man may have had to share his possessions or to make a gift of something which he really preferred to keep for himself, grew out of fear. From what we know about the nature of our earliest ancestors we cannot believe that he would have parted with anything he wanted unless he was afraid. When the lightning flashed and the thunder roared, an overwhelming fear possessed him. Unable to reason that these were natural elements over which he could not possibly exercise control, he shot at the storm with arrows and shouted at the thunder. When these efforts failed, his fear increased. What had he done to anger the gods? Perhaps a gift would appease this anger. To him the giving of a treasured possession meant real sacrifice. For instance, if he made a blouse and burned some of his hard-earned food, he expected the gods to appreciate his sacrifice and turn off the thunder.

The Egyptians made great gifts to their kings. The Israelites gave a tenth of all their grain, their wine, their cattle to the king. This custom spread everywhere, and even Christians, visiting foreign countries, brought gifts. We are told that Queen Elizabeth received thousands of gifts from her subjects at New Year's.

There remains little doubt that, what other purposes may have induced the making of a gift, there lurked behind it an unconscious desire to win the friendship of the person of power to gain one's own ends—even as the weak man of the primitive tribe made a gift to the tribal

strong man in the desire to gain his friendship and protection. The Bible gives expression to this thought. Says Deuteronomy 16:19: "A gift doth blind the eyes of the wise." Meaning, of course, that it is easy to obtain what one wants if one distributes gifts judiciously.

Among many peoples, the making of a gift became a sort of ceremony. A gift meant much more to primitive man than it does to us. When he brought himself to part with a choice bearskin or a sharp flint spear, he felt that he was parting with something of great value. Thus the exchange of gifts came to be a common way of formally binding two persons together. When the Dasums of North Borneo exchanged weapons they were sworn friends. In central Celebes, even today, the exchange of gifts is recognized as a ceremony for establishing friendship. In Patagonia, no chief is allowed to enter into the territory of another until gifts have been exchanged.

The exchange of gifts at Christmas time possibly grew out of the desire to emulate the amazing unselfishness of Christ. The custom was nurtured in Germany. Here it became the habit to make periodic exchange of gifts among friends, relatives, acquaintances. It became an obligation, and to escape it the man with many friends sometimes took an extended trip at this period.

From Germany, the custom of Christmas gift giving spread over Europe. It crossed the sea and was brought to the struggling colonists who had cut loose from all Old World influences. It has become more and more an institution, as the generations have slipped by, and today we exchange gifts as a matter of course.

It was a custom among the Romans for the priest to put a box on all outgoing ships. The people were required to put something into it. When the ship was ready to sail, the box was sealed and went to sea with it. On the return the box was turned over to the priest who placed it aside until Christmas, at which time mass was said and the box opened. Sometimes the contents were kept by the church; sometimes distributed to the poor. It is related that frequently at the opening of this box those who had not placed anything in it came forward and offered gifts in the form of money or jewelry.

During the early period of Christianity it was customary for poor men and women to sing carols in the streets at Christmas time. They would be given food, clothing and money, not because of the songs they sang, but because it was the custom to do the edges. Wreaths cut from green cardboard, a few red berries painted among the leaves, make unique covers for bare droplights. Use two wreaths, placing one on each side of the light and fasten edges together with paper clips or paste together after inserting light bulb. Paste rose or yellow tissue paper over the cut-out wreath centers or crush tissue paper over the light bulb and snap a rubber band around the neck.

A beautiful star to hang above the Christmas tree is made by enclosing an electric bulb between two stars six or eight inches across, cut from white tissue paper, and sewing them together with an edging of tinsel rope. Either place the tree under a light fixture and use a short drop cord or run an extension cord over a ceiling hook placed above the tree.

Let such a star shine welcome from the big wreath in door or window. On the door extension cord should run to the hinged side and through screw hooks to the point from which it drops to the wreath.—Frances Grinstead.

so. And custom, among superstitious peoples, is sacred. They were afraid that evil would befall them if they did not make gifts to the singers who carried Christ's praise.

From actual records we know that gift making to children goes far back into prehistory. At various museums here and abroad there are on view dolls, animals, and other toys which have been taken out of the long buried tombs of children.

We can easily picture a savage father of long ago bringing a curious shell for his child to play with. We can see a savage mother carefully fashioning a flint or bone toy that her child might have something with which to busy himself. Among these primitive peoples, marriage was not considered binding until a child was born. The birth of the child therefore must have been an occasion of great celebration, and perhaps all the clansmen presented gifts to the newcomer. It would have been a ceremony—to show the child he was welcome and among friends.

Painted clay dolls, some in the form of humans and some in the form of animals, were given to early Egyptian children as playthings. Among the early Romans, the man who adopted a child gave it rich gifts to prove that he was able to take care of it. Gifts have always accompanied christenings. In the Middle Ages the godparents usually presented the child with gold or silver spoons. It is barely possible that the phrase, "born with a silver spoon in his mouth," may have come from this custom.

The custom of presenting children with gifts at Christmas time was most pronounced among the Germans in early life. Kris Kringle is their name for Santa Claus. It is derived from Krist Kindl, which means Christ child. We can understand why the holiday would have been recognized as being particularly a child's festival. Saint Nicholas, or Santa Claus, is regarded as the patron saint of Christmas. The old nursery myth is that he comes down the chimney with a pack on his back to leave gifts for good children.

It is possible that this myth originated with the custom of cleaning the chimney at the beginning of the new year to enable good luck to enter the household. A housewife, busy cleaning the chimney at or about Christmas time, might have whispered to her children, to keep them out of mischief, that if they were good Santa Claus would come down the chimney and bring gifts to them. Impressed, the children hurried to spread the news among their playmates, and so we have the myth today.

None whatever. The telex contains all the things a well-regulated telex is supposed to hold. I overheard Shaw and his secretary discussing their supplies.

Good! Then we'll release Mother Fagin long enough to let her cook some of them.

CHAPTER XIII—Continued

There had been a long silence after his last words, but when she spoke it was as if there had been no interval between his chatter and her response. "Almost any other man would have been 'heroic,'" she went on. "Almost any other man would have been excited and emotional at times, and then would have been exacting and difficult and rebellious over all the mystery, and the fact that I couldn't explain. I've set that pace myself," she confessed. "I haven't always been able to take things quietly and—philosophically. The wonderful thing about you is that you've never been overwhelmed by any situation we've been in together. You've never even seemed to take them very seriously. And yet, when it came to a 'show-down,' as Shaw says, you've been right there, always."

"You're the kind," she said, "that in the French revolution, if you had been a victim of it, would have gone to the guillotine with a smile and a jest, and would have seen in the experience only a new adventure."

At that, he shook his head.

"I don't know," he said slowly, and with the seriousness he had shown her once or twice before. "Death is a rather important thing. I've been thinking about it a good deal lately."

"You have?" In her astonishment, she straightened in her chair. "Why?"

"Well," he hesitated, "I haven't spoken about it much, but—the truth is, I'm taking the European war more seriously than I have seemed to. I think America will swing into the fight in a month or two more; I really don't see how we can keep our neutrality longer. And I've made up my mind to volunteer as soon as we declare war."

"Oh, Laurie!" That was all she said, but it was enough. Again he turned away from her and looked into the fire.

"I want to talk to you about it sometime," he went on. "Not now, of course. I'm going in for the aviation corps. That's my game."

"Yes, it would be," she corroborated, almost inaudibly.

The GIRL in the MIRROR

By ELIZABETH JORDAN

(© by The Century Company.) WNU Service

"I can cook," avowed the old woman sulkily.

"Good work! Then go on your joyous way. But if you feel an impulse to invite into your kitchen any of the gentlemen out in the grounds, or to release the secretary, restrain it. They wouldn't like it in here. They wouldn't like it at all."

A strange grimace twisted the woman's sardonic features. He interpreted it rightly.

"I'm glad you agree with me," he said. "Now, brook trout, early and broiled—chickens, and peas and strawberries and dotted cream."

She looked at him with a return of the stolid expression that was her habitual one.

"We ain't got any of those things," she declared.

"We ain't?" Her guest was pained. "What have we got?"

"We got ham and eggs and lettuce and milk and coffee and squash pie."

locked. Shaw, if he had entered that way, had not been too hurried to attend to this little detail. Laurie had just time to brace his back against it when the four men were upon him.

If he could have taken them on one by one he could have snapped their necks in turn, and he would have done so without compunction. As it was, with four leaping at him simultaneously, he called on all his reserve strength, his skill in boxing, and the strategy of his football days.

His first blow sent the blond secretary to the floor, where he lay motionless. After that it was hard to distinguish where blows fell. What Devon wanted and was striving to reach was the throat of Shaw, but the slippery thing eluded him.

He fought on with hands and feet, even drawing, against these odds, on the savate he had learned in Paris. Blood flowed from his nose, his ear and his lip. Shaw's face was bleeding, too, and soon one of the Italians had joined the neck young secretary in his slumbers on the floor. Then Laurie felt his head agonizingly twisted backward, heard the creak of a rusty bolt, and, in the next instant, was hurled headlong through the suddenly opened door, to the snow-covered veranda.

As he pulled himself up, crouching for a return spring, Shaw, disheveled and breathless on the threshold, jerkily addressed him.

"Try it again if you like, you young devil," he panted, "but remember one thing: the next time you won't get off so easily."

The door slammed, and again the bolt shot into place. Laurie listened. No sound whatever came from the inner hall. The old house was again apparently dead, after its moments of fierce life. He slowly descended the steps, and, bracing himself against the nearest tree, stared at the house, still gasping from the effects of the struggle.

He was out of it, but he had left Doris behind. The fact sickened him. So did the ignominy of his departure. He was not even to be followed. His absence was all the gang desired. His impulse was to force the door and again face the four of them. But he realized that he could accomplish nothing against such odds, and certainly, as a prisoner in the house, trussed up with Shaw's infernal rope, he would be of no use to either Doris or himself. He decided to return to the garage and get his car and the weapon he had left there. Then, if the four still wanted to fight, he would show them something that might take the spirit out of them.

Having arrived at this sane conclusion, he turned away from the silent house, and, hatless and coatless as he was, hurriedly made his way through the heavy snow-drifts toward the public road.

CHAPTER XIV

Mr. Shaw Decides to Talk

At the garage he found Burke faithful to his trust and with an alert eye for more five-dollar bills. The proprietor temporarily lost sight of these, however, in his sudden and vivid interest in the new patron's appearance.

Laurie answered his questions with a word that definitely checked the further development of curiosity. Then, handling over the stove, and warming his icy, soaked feet, he curtly outlined his intentions. He was going to change back into his own clothes, he explained, and he would want his car at five o'clock sharp. This, he intimated, would give Burke a little more than half an hour in which to get his mental processes started again and to have the car ready.

Burke whistled inaudibly. Obviously the joke the lad had played had not passed out to the young man's taste. Burke was sorry for that. His experience had been that with these young "rounders" generosity went hand in hand with success and its attendant exhilaration; and that when depression set in, as it obviously had done in this instance, a sudden paralysis numbed the open palm.

However, even granting that this was so, he had already been largely overpaid for anything he had done or might still be expected to do. He nodded his response to the young man's instructions, and though he was not a subtle person, he succeeded in conveying at the same time a sense of his sympathy with the natural annoyance of a high-spirited practical joker whose joke had plainly miscarried. Ordinarily his attitude would have amused Devon, but Laurie was far from his sense of humor just now. Still whistling softly, Burke departed, to make a final inspection of the car, leaving Laurie the sole occupant of the cramped and railed-in corner that represented the private office.

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