

Best Christmas for a Boy

By DOUGLAS MALLOCH

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ONE boy to another—for I have never gotten over being one, although I am getting as gray as a billy-goat around the cars—I want to give it as my opinion that a Christmas anywhere but in the country is no Christmas at all!

A city Christmas is a make-believe, a hollow mockery, a false alarm, an imitation. I have tried both kinds, and so I know. A city Christmas has all the tin and tinsel, and that is all. By the time you get as old and feel as young as I am, you find most of the plate worn off.

Honestly, boys (and girls), I don't think Santa Claus himself ever feels very much at home except on a rural route! He has a mighty poor job in a big town, with fines instead of chimneys, and everything. And it is hard to see where he gets room to turn a sleigh and eight reindeer around, tiny reindeer though they may be. He'll be pretty certain to bump into a hydrant or tip over on a curb.

And with twenty families all using one blue (and, what is worse, a soft coal due at that) how in the world is the most experienced Santa going to find which is Brown's and which is Smith's, and where the Greens live? Even if he dared rap and ask (which no Santa Claus is ever supposed to do) nobody could tell him. For perhaps the Browns and the Smiths have never "met," and the Greens might live across the hall for a month before anybody thought to inquire their name.

For that is one thing you don't get much of in the city—neighbors. Sometimes when the woman across the road keeps running in just when your mother is canning, or baking, or treating a shirt-bosom kindly but firmly with a flat-iron, your mother may almost wish that they weren't quite so plentiful in the country—but she wouldn't. She would miss them, just the same as you would miss having the same boys to play with year after year.

For in the city you are always getting a fresh lot of playmates—and sometimes they are a mighty fresh lot, too. Of course there are some good kids, also; but it always seems that just when you get to liking some fellow up the street or across the alley, the landlord boosts the rent and his folks have to move, and you never see him again. He may move only from one side of the city to the other, but it might as well be to another state. It is five or ten or twenty miles—miles of houses, no, miles of flats, and streetcar tracks, and railroads, and factories—and you never see him again or any of his folks.

The boys you know this Christmas probably won't be around at all next Christmas, if you live in the city. That is a funny thing about city folks; they are always going somewhere and never getting anywhere. Why, even if the landlord didn't raise the rent October 1 or May 1 or whenever the lease expires, they might move anyway! People who live in flats instead of homes are always looking for something better and getting something worse. They have the most wonderful collection of rent receipts, but not a foot of ground, not a roof or rafter, they can call their own.

Now, I don't know what you think, but I think that every family ought to have a house of its own, a house it lives in year after year. That is, of course, unless the father has some sort of job that makes it necessary for him to move to some other town every other year or so. But it is a great thing to live in a home, not just a house, and that is about the best place, and the only place, to have a Christmas, a real, sure-enough, honest-to-goodness Christmas.

Most of you boys who live on the farm and in the small town have that kind of home, and I wonder if you know how lucky you are? Wouldn't you hate to wake up Christmas morning and look at the ceiling and realize that someone else owned it, and then get up and go out in the front yard and realize that someone else owned that, too—why, you'd get so after awhile that, everything you saw, you would wonder who owned it!

I tell you, boys, it's a great satisfaction to have a back yard and to know it's yours, and that you can invite people into it, or invite people to stay out of it, just as you please. Why, that is what brought the Pilgrim Fathers to America—they wanted a spot they could call their own. I don't say that it was exactly a back yard they wanted, but what they wanted was some place they could play ball and no landlord of a king could come along and tell them to stop because they might break some of the royal windows. You know old King George did come along and try to make them stop—and you know what happened to the royal windows. Zam!

And then there is this matter of snow. You know some people don't think it is much of a Christmas without snow. Now, I know quite a lot about snow because I've been acquainted with it a lot of it. I have tramped through it up in the Hudson Bay country, and I've wallowed around in it in the summertime on top of the Rocky mountains. And I want to tell

you that there is a great difference in snow—that is, there is a great difference between country snow and city snow.

We may not have snow this Christmas, but we'll just suppose we do. Isn't a good, old lively snowstorm great? Perhaps it is one of these lazy snowstorms, with the big, white flakes just floating down like feathers and slowly turning the roads and roofs to white, like a coat of good white paint. Maybe there will be enough of it to make good coasting on the hills and good sleighing on the roads.

And, by the way, do you know there are boys in the big cities who have never seen a sleigh? Because a sleigh is getting to be a scarce article in the cities. You see, as soon as a little snow comes the street-cleaning department gets busy and sweeps it up, before it gets a chance to melt into slush.

In the country the winter wheat needs it, and the ground takes care of it. But in the city it just means stop and slush. So they sweep it up and carry it away and uncover the ugly pavement as soon as they can.

But they let you keep your snow in the country. When a warm wind comes along it will pack fine, and you can have your snow-men, and your snow forts, and your snowball battles. (Only please don't use your artillery on older folks, or girls, or me.)

Or perhaps this snowstorm is one of the blizzard kind, with the wind zipping around the house and piling



Snowballs Through Royal Windows.

the snow up in the corners—why that kind of snow doesn't seem to come down at all, but just goes slanting by until it runs up against something it can't pass.

I remember being on a night train one time; and when we woke up in the morning, and the train was running over the smooth prairies, a little girl from a big city in western Pennsylvania (I won't tell you what city it was but maybe you can guess) exclaimed as she looked out of the window:

"Look, Mamma! The snow out here is white!"

I don't need to say much about the Christmas dinner. But if you have your Christmas dinner in the country, the turkey perhaps is one your folks raised, or that was raised in the neighborhood—anyhow, it is pretty likely to be a native, and not a resident of a cold storage plant some where. Or maybe you'll have a goose, or a brace of chickens. Anyway, you'll know their pedigree, and that they're fresh and good.

And it will be the same way all down the line—vegetables, and pies and everything. And cooked!—cooked to a turn—just long enough—just short enough—just right.

And you will more than likely have one thing that they won't have at the Christmas dinner in the city, because you know the cost of living just now is mighty high, in town especially, for both rich and poor. So you will have one thing that the city boy probably will not have—

Enough!

So I could go on and show you a dozen other ways in which a Christmas in the country puts it all over a Christmas in the city, but I am going to mention just one thing more: the Christmas tree.

Of course they have Christmas trees in the city. In New York trainloads of them come down every season from the Adirondacks, and in Chicago boatloads come from Michigan's upper peninsula. You can buy them for fifty cents or a dollar, and they make very good Christmas trees indeed.

I don't know what you think about this either—but I have always thought that things I did myself and for myself were just twice the fun of things I bought myself or hired myself. And I think that especially about a Christmas tree. If you are lucky enough to be able to go out and pick your own tree, and chop it down, and bring it in—well, that's what I call a real Christmas tree!

Because that is really and truly your Christmas tree. You selected it with your own eye and chopped it down with your own axe and brought it home with your own muscle. The Christmas tree—that is your job:

Bringing in the Tree.

Father gets the turkey.
Mother makes the pie—
Each one has a Christmas job
To do, and so have I.
Sister strings the popcorn
To decorate—but, gee!
I have got the biggest job—
Bringing in the tree!

Turkey is important,
Pie and such are great.
Popcorn strings you have to have
When you decorate.
But I guess a Christmas
Christmas wouldn't be
If you didn't have a boy
Bringing in the tree!

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Think upward, then brace and brush up—and you will get up! But if you think down, look down and act down—you are down and will stay down!

Brace up, work up, and stay up! Nobody watches the failure—the multitude approves only the successes. And success is not achieved by lying awake at night to worry over what can't be helped, but by being wide-awake in the day time to things that can be done.

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