

CHRISTMAS AND AN ICEBOAT.

By GEORGE P. CARD
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It had stopped snowing, but the wind still blew a hurricane. The sun was shining, but the air was so filled with the drift that the outside world was hidden from those who tried to peer into it through frosted windowpanes. Myles Fearing had been trying to penetrate the shimmering mist, but he finally gave up the attempt in disgust.

"How long am I likely to be held up in this infernal place?" he wondered audibly.

"Reckon ye'll have a chance to hang up yer socks in that thar chimney," consoled his host, the proprietor of the comfortable little public house in which he had taken refuge from the storm when the stage which had brought him thus far had succumbed to the inevitable. "There won't be anythin' leavin' here 'fore mornin', anyways, and mebbe not then. Better make up yer mind to stay here overnight. Sandy Claws is the only feller likely to do any travelin' fer some time in these parts."

Fearing did not take kindly to the proposition. His knitted brows did not relax, and he drummed viciously against the frosted windowpane.

"For two cents," he threatened, "I'd cross the lake on foot."

Mine host shifted his quid and looked properly serious. "I wouldn't—not even to spite the meanest life insurance company in Ameriky. Seventeen miles and a half to Oriskany as the crow flies and a good thirty-eight around the lake road—I reckon ye'd better take pot luck with us."

With this wholesome advice he left the room. There seemed to be no help for it, and the weather tricked young man flung his six feet of baffled humanity into a big splint bottom armchair and proceeded to lose himself in a far from agreeable reverie. He really had abundant reason to resent his unexpected captivity. Just across the lake in the snow enveloped village of Oriskany, as he knew perfectly well, a certain young woman for whose good opinion he would have risked anything capable of being risked was trying to convince herself—all against her better judgment—that he was a hero quite superior to ordinary, everyday heroes; that by some clever maneuver possible only to ideal heroes he might circumvent the evident design of fate to prevent him from keeping his engagement and

make his appearance at about the hour fixed in his letter of acceptance of her invitation to spend the Christmas holidays in Oriskany.

He had pictured it all so minutely. She would be at the station to meet him, and together they would walk leisurely to her father's house. That house would be agleam with lights, and holly wreaths would hang in every window. Of course there would be mistletoe suspended from the hall light, and as they passed beneath it—

All off schedule now, postponed indefinitely by the stress of weather. The realization was sickening, but—

"Want to go over this afternoon?" Fearing saw before him an overgrown boy of sixteen, a shock of red hair falling low upon his forehead, his



WOULD HAVE MADE A BIRD ENVOICER.

dark eyes agleam with interest.

"Pop sez yer anxious to git to Oriskany," he continued.

"He hasn't suggested any way to do it, has he?" Fearing returned glumly.

"Kin ye skate?"

"Never had a pair of skates on my feet."

"Too bad. By sundown the ice'll be as clean as a wax floor and twice as slippery. The northeast wind is sweepin' all the snow on t'other side of the lake."

"Then I'll foot it! Seventeen miles isn't much of a tramp," Fearing declared, with a sudden revival of energy.

The red headed youth sniffed disapprovingly. "If ye've got to cross," he said, lowering his voice and moving nearer to Fearing, "I can put ye on to somethin' better—that is, if ye've got the nerve and a little somethin' to make it interestin' to me," he added, with a mysterious pantomime that Fearing understood perfectly.

"I've plenty of both," he declared.

"and am ready to use them to the best advantage. If you doubt it, try me and see."

"Oh, you're all right," the lad admitted, with an appreciative gleam in his eyes. "Now, listen. Right in that shed at the bottom of this here lot there's an iceboat belongin' to a city chap that comes out here every summer. He'll be here after Christmas to sail his boat, and I'm goin' to help him. Now, what's to prevent us and you from takin' a skin over to Oriskany? Just to see if the thing's in good runnin' order, you know," he added, with a suggestive squint of his left eye.

Fearing did not stop to go into the moral consideration of the situation. The prospect of getting to Oriskany was too attractive for that. His eagerness to accept the proposition was so great that he could hardly wait until the youthful originator of the scheme was ready to put it into execution. Toward nightfall the precocious pair made their way through the drifts to the boathouse, and half an hour later the rakish looking craft was ready for business.

As the landlord's son had predicted, the frozen surface of the lake was as free from snow as if it had been swept. The force of the wind had also lessened greatly, but enough remained to make the voyage a daring venture. It was a ticklish business to put on full sail in such a breeze, but Fearing would be satisfied with nothing less, and his reckless companion was only too willing to have it so. Almost before the self appointed crew of two could adjust itself the machine made a leap for the open roadway and before the first half mile was completed was speeding at a rate that would have made a bird envious.

Luckily there was nothing to oppose its progress. The ice was in prime condition and as smooth as crystal. All the intrepid navigators had to do was to keep the craft in position and hang on for dear life. Fearing was sport enough to enjoy its risky business even divested of its ultimate object, and the lad was too excited to remember the financial end of the matter. The seventeen miles and a half were traversed with a speed that must have made a new record in ice yachting had it been noted. Almost too soon the lights of Oriskany admonished them that it was time to lower the canvas and make ready the drag. Five minutes later they were once again on terra firma, the yacht's neck buried in an immense snowdrift that rose like a fortification along the shore.

"That was dead easy," said the lad. "The hardest job's to come. I've got to get this concern back, and—probably I'll have to explain how it all happened."

"I'll keep the secret," Fearing promised laughingly. "and here is something to help pay the damages," he added, handing him a brand new twenty dollar bill.

"Gee!" the other ejaculated. "Ye must 'a' wanted to git to Oriskany mighty bad."

A little later, when Fearing and the girl for whom he had accepted a desperate chance stood under the mistletoe, he did not reproach himself for what he had done.

Christmas Chimes in Many Climes.
Christmas is always a season of good wishes and loving kindness.

In America almost all little children hang up their stockings on Christmas eve, to be filled by kind old Santa Claus. In Germany they make more of Christmas than we do in America. Everywhere the Christmas tree is used.

If a family is too poor to have a whole tree, a single branch only will stand in a conspicuous place, hung with the few simple gifts.

A week before Christmas St. Nicholas visits the children to find out who have been good enough to receive the gifts the Christ Child will bring them on Christmas eve.

It is a very usual thing to see on a German Christmas tree, way up in the very topmost branch, an image or doll representing the Christ Child, while below are sometimes placed other images representing angels with outspread wings.

After the tree is lighted the family gather round it and sing a Christmas hymn.

In England almost every one who can do so has a family party on Christmas eve. Young and old join in the games, many of which belong especially to Christmas time.

From the ceiling of one of the rooms a large bunch of mistletoe is hung. If any little maid is caught standing under it the one who catches her has a right to take a kiss from her rosy lips.

In Holland the little Dutch girl puts her wooden shoe in the chimney place ready for gifts, just as the little American girl hangs up her stocking.

And so in some way all over the Christian world on the eve of the twenty-fifth day of December the birth of our Lord Jesus Christ is celebrated. Everywhere the Christmas chimes are ringing out the message the angels brought to Bethlehem—"Peace on earth, good will to men."

Substantial Merits.
"But," said the impecunious foreign fortune hunter, "my dear Miss Goldlocks, why should you prefer another to me? I am a man of titles."
"So is your preferred rival," smiled the woman.

"He is nothing but a plain American commoner," sneered the nobleman.

"Indeed, he is a man of titles, too," returned the heiress. "And my father has had all his titles examined by a competent trust company. Your titles are but words; his are deeds and to some of the best property in the state."
—Baltimore American.

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