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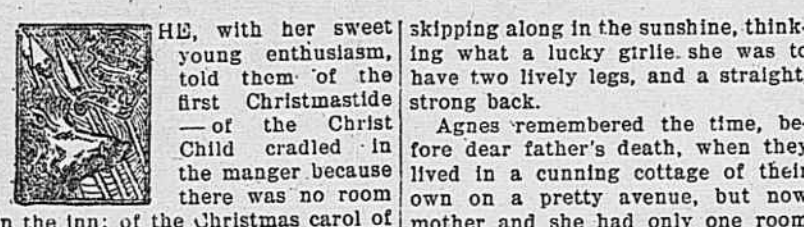
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**THE CHRIST CHILD'S
BIRTHDAY PRESENT.**
By MAY C. RINGWOLT.



HE, with her sweet young enthusiasm, told them of the first Christmas—the Christ Child cradled in the manger because there was no room in the inn; of the Christmas carol of peace and good will sung by the angels to the shepherds watching their flocks by night. Clarice's face was rapt; her eyes adoring. Of all the teachers in the Sunday-school, none was so lovely as her own Miss Maud. She was certain that the Christmas angels had the same shining yellow hair. Did they wear those fascinating gold hairpins, too? One was slipping out from the soft fluff over Miss Maud's left ear. If only she dared tell her! But that morning she had asked the awful privilege of holding Miss Maud's maul—a rich sable with a beautiful bunch of violets fastened to it—and there was no courage left for further intimate speech. Suddenly the spell was broken, and Clarice turned with angry jerk from the object of her worship, and fiercely scowled at an inoffensive little girl seated beside her.

"Excuse me," meekly apologized Agnes, the new scholar.

Clarice drew her light blue silk skirt away from the dingy brown cashmere touching them; held herself very straight; and, with a superb dignity, sniffed the violets on the muff.

"And now, my dears," said Miss Maud, "as you know, Wednesday will be another birthday of the Christ Child, and who wants every one here to give Him a present—just as you would give a present to your own little brother on his birthday at home." She smiled radiantly. "Do you wonder how you can do that when the Christ Child has become a King in Heaven? I'll tell you. He left in His place all the poor little girls and boys in this big world, and told us that in giving to them we give to Him. Not far away is a great hospital for little children who have crippled legs and arms, and poor, crooked backs, sick children who can't run and play, but have to hobble about on crutches or lie in bed all day. Wouldn't you like to make their Christmas so happy that they'd forget their pain?"

Her smile gathered up their eager nods of assent, as a golden thread gathering pearls. "I knew you would. Well, I'm going to tell you a secret." She leaned confidentially near. "The day before Christmas we're to have a dear little service down here, and over there on the platform will be an empty manger, and, as we sing our Christmas carols, we are going to march up to the manger and each put in a gift for some little Christ child at the hospital. Won't we have a jolly time deciding what to bring! Why, it will be almost as exciting as if every girl of you were playing Santa Claus!"

Again Clarice's smiling face was clouded by a scowl, and one rude elbow poked the new scholar's arm.

"Clarice!" exclaimed Miss Maud, severely.

"She's crowding me!" defended a sulky voice.

Miss Maud looked up at the little brown figure shrinking back into a corner. The child's eyes were luminous; her face flushed, her lips parted. "Agnes was so intently listening to me that I'm sure she didn't realize that she was leaning against anyone. I'm surprised at you, Clarice!" A cheek hid its shamed crimson in the soft muff. To have Miss Maud "surprised" at you was ignominy itself! Her tears wet the violets. It was all Agnes' fault. She would never forgive her—never!

And when Sunday-school was over and Agnes, with a timid smile, asked if she might walk up the street with Clarice, that unladylike little girl slipped her arm through that of her chum, Anabel, and, whispering and giggling, stalked by Agnes without a word.

The tears came into Agnes' eyes, for mother would not let her play with the little girls in the new neighborhood into which they had moved, because the children there were rough and boisterous, and used naughty words, and she was very lonely. But she was a brave little soul, and dashing away the tears, she was soon

propped up by a pillow, sat Peggy in a stiff pink calico dress. The curls had all been combed out of Peggy's straggling hair; the roses had long ago faded from her cheeks, and in a sad accident Perry had parted company with the end of her nose.

"You dear!" whispered Agnes. Her lips formed a determined line. How could she have thought of giving Peggy up! What would she do all day without a dollie to play with? What would she do at night without a dollie to sleep on the pillow beside



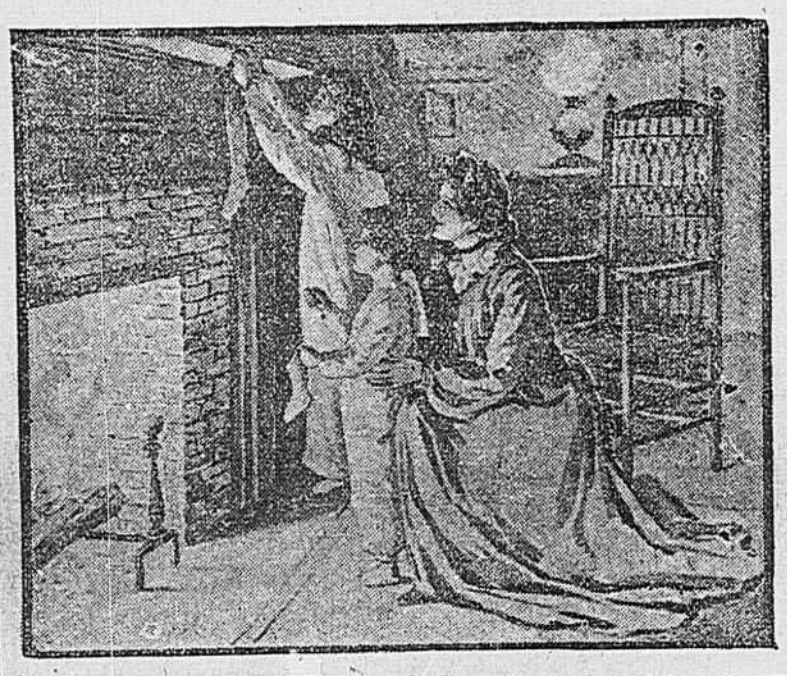
her? But how disappointed her sick little girl at the hospital would be Christmas morning when all the other children had lovely presents, and she found that she had been left out? Agnes stooped over the bed, gathered Peggy in her arms, and pressed her to her aching heart.

It was the day before Christmas, and the children had sung all but their last carol which they were to sing as they marched to the manger and laid down their gifts one by one.

The door softly opened, and a little brown shadow of a girl with a small pink object hugged to her breast slipped timidly in. For a moment Agnes stood dazed, as if she had suddenly entered fairyland, for the bare walls of the room were festooned with heavy ropes of Christmas greens, the shades at the windows were drawn, and all the chandeliers brilliantly lighted, while above the awaiting manger shone a glorious electric star. Then, ashamed of being so late, she hurriedly tiptoed to her place, the vacant seat beside Clarice.

Clarice met her with a cold stare, but the gaze of Agnes' eyes never reached the unkind little girl's face, for it rested in fascinated awe upon a vision of beauty in Clarice's arms. It was a doll such as fairies might dream of. She had dark, clustering curls, and magnificent brown eyes. Her cheeks glowed with color, and

HANGING THE STOCKING.



"We ate every day, though, mother dear, and most generally always we had a fire."

"Yes, dear, because a kind man let us have all that we needed, and trusted mother to pay for it when she got work again. So, you see, Agnes, the money that mother is making now does not really belong to us, but every cent must go to pay our debts."

A small head solemnly nodded.

"It hurts mother very much not to give her darling any Christmas toys nor let her little girl's kind heart have its wish about the dollie for the poor sick little child at the hospital, but Agnes will try to be a good little girl about it, won't she?"

The arms about mother's neck tightened "their hold, but Agnes' mouth twitched, and she had to blink very hard to keep back the tears. If she had no present to lay in the Christmas manger, how would the Christ Child know that she loved Him? "Of course," she argued to herself, "I could explain in my prayers that I had nothing to give."

But had she nothing? Her face suddenly crimsoned, and a great lump choked her little throat. There was Peggy herself!

Without speaking, she got down from mother's lap, and darted across the room to her little bed. There,

there was the cunningest dimple in her round chin. She was dressed in claret velvet trimmed in white silk, and wore a claret velvet poke bonnet with white silk strings and an exquisite white plume gracefully touching the brown curls on the right side. And best of all, she had a necklace of gold beads, and gold bead bracelets dangling over her hands.

"Oh," murmured Agnes, "won't your little hospital girl be pleased?"

"My little hospital girl!" scornfully whispered back Clarice. "You don't suppose I'd give my best doll away! Here's my present"—she held out a box of jack-straws—"Lady Lucille and I simply stopped in." She airily tossed her head. "We're on our way to a Christmas Eve party."

"Form in line, my dears," interrupted Miss Maud, briskly. "Yes, our class comes last, but you must sing all the time we're marching."

The children's voices caroled joyously as the procession pressed forward, but one little singer was mute. She was the last in the line, a little brown shadow of a girl with a small pink object hugged to her breast. Miss Maud stood by the manger, now heaped with all sorts of playthings, and nodded and smiled as each member of her class approached. Puzzled, she watched Agnes pause, look at the manger with frightened eyes, and hesitate. Then she saw the small pink object lifted to the child's lips, and heard the sound of a smacking kiss of farewell before trembling hands laid a doll with straggly hair, faded cheeks and a broken nose among the new toys.

"Why, my dear," cried Miss Maud, putting her arms about Agnes, "what is the matter?"

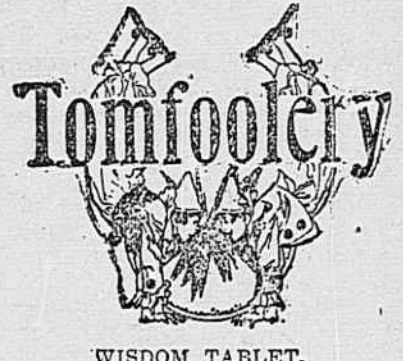
A great sob shook the tiny figure. "Tell me all about it," comforted Miss Maud.

And Agnes brokenly confided the whole story. But as she explained how mother's money belonged to somebody else, and how she had nothing to give the Christ Child except her only doll, neither of them noticed a little listener who drew nearer and nearer.

"No, no," cried Agnes, "I wouldn't take her back. I want the little hospital girl to have her—she'll 'preciate Peggy's crippled nose, won't she?" Agnes forced a smile through her tears. "Only," she faltered, "it will be so—so lonesome without any doll—"

Something tugged at Miss Maud's skirts. She turned, and with a start of surprise, looked down into Clarice's eager face.

"I've lots more at home, you know," she whispered. And, laying Lady Lucille in Agnes' astonished arms, Clarice ran after her chum, Anabel.—The Interior.



WISDOM TABLET.
Altho a mule
Be sweet and kind,
Just walk in front,
And not behind.
—Birmingham Age-Herald.

NOT OLD FASHIONED.
"I suppose she fairly gushed over the ring?"
"Well, yes. She said it was a nifty piece of ice."—Washington Herald.

SMOKE JOKE.
The smoke nuisance is still in our midst.—Atlanta Journal.
Another cigarette fiend who inhales.—Chicago Record-Herald.

THE WAY SHE DOES.
"She keeps her house in apple-ple order."
"Yes, I notice the atmosphere there is rather crusty."—Baltimore American.

EXPECTED TO TALK.
Nurse (announcing the expected)—"Professor, it's a little boy."
Professor (absent-mindedly)—"Well, ask him what he wants."—Boston Transcript.

CRUEL DAD.
"What's the matter, daughter?"
"Ferdie and I have parted forever!"
"Good! In that case, I s'pose he won't be around for at least two nights."—Houston Chronicle.

JUST SO.
"So you think the public demands the bolterous fun?"
"Not exactly. Grlsterous fun is the thing for a musical comedy."—Louisville Courier-Journal.

DISCORDANT.
She (at the piano)—"I presume you are a true lover of music, are you not?"
He—"Yes, I am; but pray don't stop playing on my account."—Judge.

TRAMP AND SCHOOLMARM.
"There ain't nothin' bad about me, missus," said the itinerant at the back door.
"No?" replied the lady with the eyeglasses. "How about your grammar?"—Yonkers Statesman.

LIMITED CREDULITY.
Salesman—"Sorry, we're quite out of game, but I can recommend the sausages."
Mr. Van Sharpshooter—"H'm, yes. But my wife would not believe I shot 'em."—Ally Sloper's.

TRIUMPH OF HUMAN NATURE.
"Them seventeen mothers in the village Mothers' Club agreed to decide by ballot which had the handsomest baby."
"Well, who won it?"
"Each kid got one vote."—Judge.

LITERATURE.
"I see you have here Gibbon's 'Decline and Fall' and Hallam's 'Middle Ages.'"
"Yes," responded Mr. Nuritch, "I like them fat volumes. It don't take so many of 'em to fill up a shelf."—Houston Chronicle.

TIMES CHANGE.
"He writes my daughter a long letter full of poetry every day. He must be a sap-head."
"Poeg, your reasoning is twenty years behind the age. Poetry is the safest kind of filler these days, and a letter every day indicates much wealth, with white paper as high as it is."—Kansas City Journal.

FOOLISH FRIENDSHIP.
"Those cartoons of me that my enemies are circulating are positively hideous," remarked the candidate for office.
"Do you think so?" rejoined his wife. "You ought to take a look at the pictures of you that your friends are putting on their campaign banners."—Washington Star.

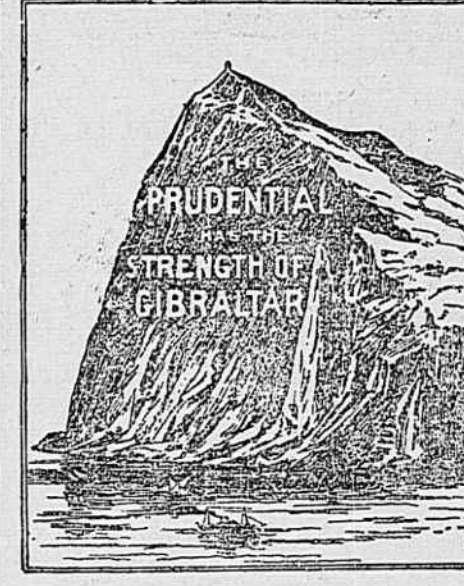
ON THE SAME TERMS.
Diner (who has run up a heavy bill)—"You are manager here, eh? Well, six months ago I dined here, and unfortunately, being unable to pay my bill—er—you kicked me downstairs!"
The Manager—"Very sorry, indeed, sir, but business you know—er—I had to—er—"
Diner—"Oh, that's all right, old chap—but might I trouble you again?"—London Weekly Telegram.

SEASONABLE.
"Bishop Greer, of New York," said a missionary, "has an apt way of fitting a story into an address."
"I once heard him speaking on the divorce evil in a very chilly and badly heated hall."
"After a remark or two about this defect, he said he was reminded of a little Yonkers girl."
"The child, one unseasonably cold morning returned from church quite blue."
"And what was the text, dear?" her mother asked her.
"Many are cold, but few are frozen," was the reply.—Washington Star.

Salvaging the Gladiator.
The Gladiator salvage has been a somewhat long and tedious operation, due mainly to the troublesome tides and unpropitious weather. However, the ship is "up" at the moment of writing, and should before long now be seen in Portsmouth harbor.
No absolute decision about refitting her seems to have been arrived at. She is a type of vessel now quite obsolete, as cruisers go; but for that very reason likely to be useful in a variety of ways. Obsolete ships can be risked where better ones cannot be.—Engineer.

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THE GIRL'S SECRET.
"The girls have a secret," said Joe Sherman, "and I can't think what it is."
"How do you know?" asked the boys, in a chorus.
"Well, I will tell you. Just now, as I passed along the hall, I heard peals of laughter coming from Alice's room, and I heard voices saying, 'Won't the boys be surprised. They don't even know we have a secret. Don't talk so loud or they might hear.'"
As Joe finished speaking the boys looked at each other in great wonder.
"Well, we need not worry our heads over it," said fun-loving Jack Prescott. "Let's go out and build a fort."
"While the boys are having a good time I will tell you about them."
Joseph Sherman and his brothers, Stuart, Albert and Laurence, and their parents, were spending the Christmas holidays at their grandmothers.
John, Alice, Edith and Bert Prescott, with their parents and their cousins, Mildred, Ellen, Florence, Gertrude, James, Walter and Edward, with their parents completed the party.
It was Christmas night. The day's fun was over and the boys were sitting before the library fire talking of the day's events, when the door opened and Mrs. Prescott put her head in the door and said: "The girls have a little surprise waiting for you in the parlor."
Mrs. Prescott led the way into the large parlor. All the furniture had been removed, and in one end of the room was a raised curtain platform covered by three rows of chairs.
When all were seated Mrs. Prescott tapped a small bell and the curtain rose. The play had begun and it proved to be a fine one. The boys long remembered the treat and greatly enjoyed it.
This was the girls' surprise.—New Haven Register.

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THE ANGEL AND THE SHEPHERDS.



Albert Edelheit.
And the angel said unto them, Fear not; for, behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy.