

MARS AND SANTA CLAUS MEET HERE

First Christmas of the War Finds America No Longer the Lavish Spender of Other Years—Signs of Great Changes Seen on All Sides

"But is old, old, good old Christmas gone? Nothing but the hair of his good, gray, old head and beard left? Well, I will take that, seeing I cannot have more of him."

It is a changed Santa Claus that will visit New York on this, the first Christmas that has found America buckled down to the grim task of playing a part in the great world conflict—a war-rationed Santy who is trying to do his bit.

The old twinkling eyes, rosy cheeks, cheery smile, and jolly paunch—symbols of merriment and hospitality, of kindness and generosity—have lost some of their pristine glory. When hard-fisted Necessity in the guise of the Higher-Cost-of-Living, has been busy depleting the pocketbook for these many months past, when Charity is making her appeals for the starving and homeless in many quarters of the globe, when Patriotism is crying for funds with which to fight the enemy, the gift-pack must perforce shrink, the stuffed turkey be forsworn, the punch-bowl stay dry.

But if the old spirit of Merry Christmas has been tempered, if it has been shorn of some of its jollity, some of its splendidly careless generosity, because there is no longer "peace on earth," there has come a community kindness, a sobered realization of the ties that bind us to those outside our circle of kinship and friendship, a bestowal of hospitality and generosity upon the stranger and the poor such as we have never before seen. And so, after all, those gaudy colored angels perched upon their Christmas-card clouds can still trumpet forth with all their old fervor "good-will toward men."

For a long while now the newspapers, like unseasonable ghosts of old Marley, have been taking us on purse-opening flights. Never was Scrooge taken so far from his own hearth or shown so many and such piteous scenes.

In Belgium, France, Serbia, Poland, wherever the invading Hun has trampled with his iron-shod heel of war, we have seen the widowed and the orphaned, the homeless and the starving, the dying and the dead.

In this country war has meant the disjuncting of industry. Many have yet been unable to readjust themselves to the new conditions. And so, in the midst of our prosperity, there is poverty, hunger, sickness.

Then there were the two huge Liberty Loan "drives," (the dollars have now jumped up into the billions.) Uncle Sam's need was great and urgent. He left the money markets where he used to negotiate his financial transactions and made a man-to-man, a woman-to-woman, appeal. Street corners, theatres, churches rang with it: "Stand behind the boys in the trenches—convert your dollars into bullets." And now Uncle Sam has broadened his appeal; with his Thrift Stamp campaign he is asking the children to empty their penny banks into his war till. And we don't know how long the war is going to last and how

many more times Uncle Sam is going to ask the men, women, and children to back the fight for humanity with their dollars and pennies.

And we have been told that man power is the crucial factor in the great conflict; that unless men are released from the industries of normal times, the dollars and pennies cannot be converted into bullets, into guns, into rations, into blankets, and into ships to take all these things oversea. We have been told that we must keep our wants down to the necessities of life; that to buy a luxury is to fail in our faithfulness to the men on the battle line; that to wear a last year's overcoat or suit or dress is to wear a badge of patriotism. And now, in the Yuletide season, we have a stern reminder of our depleted man power in the appearance of women conductors on the street cars, of women postmen, of a few women even in the brigades of snow shovelers.

Nor should the higher cost of living and the cruel scarcity of certain necessities be overlooked. Everything costs more, and prices are steadily going upward; no one is surprised when the

So is it any wonder that Santy's old twinkling eyes, rosy cheeks, cheery smile, and jolly paunch have lost some of their pristine glory? Is it any wonder that New York's first war Christmas will be different from any Christmas that it has celebrated in many a long year?

During the last week one need only walk along the streets to discover one striking evidence of the difference. Those bushy rows of Christmas trees that in former years transformed the gutterside in front of so many stores, their sweet odor like a magic incense, carrying the oldster back across the years, are this year thin and wan. There was a shortage of man power in the forests, a shortage of flatcars. The same blight has touched the supply of holly and laurel. And though it is expected by the dealers that purchasers will be fewer, prices will none the less be higher.

It will not be a green Christmas within doors. And so we will be deprived of the third reason given by Leigh Hunt for loving Christmas above all other holidays: "Because of the hollies and other evergreens which people conspire to bring into cities and houses on this day,

Christmas—far from it. There are many who believe that, whatever sacrifices it may cost, the war cloud should not be allowed to cast its shadow on the chiefest joy of an all too fleeting childhood; that children should not be robbed of their faith in the omnipotence of old Santa Claus.

One of the department stores, like many others, has had during the Christmas season a Santa Claus. But this particular store discovered a genius. He is an old man with genial gray eyes, a kindly, hooked nose, and a long white beard that is his own. In the regulation suit of red cotton flannel and cotton fur, he has sat since Dec. 3, from 9 A. M. to 6 P. M., upon a slightly raised dais, and the children step up, one by one, and tell him their wants. Under this long siege his patience, his kindness, has not faltered. Not until the whistle blows does he slip from his rôle. One cannot help wondering what the real Santa Claus will put in this old man's stocking as his reward.

That a toyless Christmas should not be, one need only to have seen that unending line of children that have been climbing



"O Lord, please don't let Santa Claus be drafted!"

salesman gives one back less change than he did the day previous for the same purchase. And, regardless of price, the supply of some necessities has failed. The sugar bowl is empty or supplied with jealously weighed-out dribbles. Coal is difficult to obtain, either by those whose unit of measurement is the scuttle or the fatter-pursed whose usual unit is the bin. Many who have been brought up to regard an unfailing supply not only of necessities but of luxuries as being as much a part of the natural order of things as the regular recurrence of day and night, have suddenly learned a shivering lesson as to what actual want means. Rich and poor are now brothers in watching the mercury in the thermometer.

But over and above all is the memory of khaki-clad absentees—sons, husbands, fathers, brothers, sweethearts—in cantonments, on the seas, "somewhere in France," holding the line of trenches that the Hun is now threatening with his massed troops, some perhaps about to pay the splendid price of patriotism.

making a kind of Summer in Winter and reminding us that 'the poetry of earth is never dead.'

The shop windows have been another evidence of the difference. The dolls and the Noah's Arks and the lead soldiers and the woolly dogs and all those other things that affection and generosity give in such quantities at this time of the year to the children so that they can populate their bright-colored little world of make-believe—all these usefully useless things have been segregated in sadly curtailed window space. Many shop windows have not featured gifts at all; and those that have, have put the "useful gift" in the ascendent.

The shop windows are a reflection of the condition that is to be found within. The toy departments—in former years the throbbing heart of holiday shopping—are reduced in size, the shelves are not laden with their old gladsome supply of playthings, and the aisles do not pulse to bursting with currents of anxious purchasers.

It is not, however, to be a toyless

up on that dais to Santy's knee, that will be climbing to that same shrine of hope tomorrow; to see their blind and absolute faith that there is in the world an impersonal spirit of generosity from whom it is only necessary to ask to receive. And it should be added that the children who were here telling their wants were from the poorer quarters of the city, from homes where poverty pinches, where childhood early learns the rule of necessity. Eager eyed, their faces filled with awe and reverence, bodies wriggling with embarrassment, they stood in great Santa Claus's presence.

When this department store Santy asked one little girl what she wanted, she piped up in blank amazement: "Why, didn't you get my letter?"

Another stated as her heart's desire: "I want a dolly—one with a head on it."

There was one little girl, perhaps 4 years old, who was filled with the true Christmas spirit, for after enumerating her own wants she whispered: "And you know I've got a grandmother at home, and I think she would like something, too."

During an hour's watch an observer discovered only one youthful disbeliever. When Santy asked the child at his knee what he wanted, the infidel—it was a boy—gibed from the skirts of the crowd: "Aw, ask him for his goat."

Most of the children were accompanied by their parents, whose eyes for some reason or other became moist as they watched this little ceremony; so it is likely that all the true believers will be rewarded on Christmas morning with the dolls and the sleds and the "tin kitchens" and the "story books" and

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the "soldier-boy caps" that their faith deserves.

But even the children who have no parents to act as distributing agents for Santa Claus, or whose parents, because of hard times, are prevented from playing the part, will not go unvisited unless there is some miscarriage in well-laid plans. Never before has there been such an effort to bring a little Yuletide cheer to the needy. Money that in other years has been spent on gifts for relatives, friends, even to the acquaintance degree, is this year being turned into charitable channels. Some is being done personally for the neighboring poor. Many have got Christmas visiting lists from hospitals and other nerve centres of poverty. And much is being done through organization and community effort.

The children of the rich and of those who are far from rich are giving to this work. They have been asked: "Shall this be a getting or a giving Christmas?" The answer that they have given

will mean happiness to many, and perhaps not least of all to themselves. This may be the first time that many of them have learned that old truth—"The gift is to the giver, and comes back most to him."

"War Santa Claus"—the new name of the old "Santa Claus Association," the organization that gets from the Post Office all letters addressed to the Saint of Generosity, and after investigation as to their worthiness, turns them over to willing impersonators—is doing a bigger business than ever. It has received and put on the road to fulfillment, thousands and thousands of Christmas pleas. Many of these are from the children of alien families. The grim necessity of war, striking through the Espionage act, has suddenly thrown the moneymaking heads of many of these families out of work. Their condition is desperate. But we have no "Hymn of Hate." And on this day of "good-will toward men" these needy children of the enemy alien will not find their pleas unanswerd.

As a counterpart to this, there is the

mammoth "Christmas Carnival" for the soldiers and sailors, their wives and children, which opened its doors in Grand Central Palace on Dec 22 and will keep them open until the 29th. It has been organized by the National League for Woman's Service, affiliated with the Jewish Board for Welfare Work, the War Camp Community Service, the Y. M. C. A., the New York Diocesan Council of the National Catholic Council of America, the Y. M. H. A., and the Patriotic Service League.

Admission to everything at the Carnival will be free to all children of soldiers and sailors, as well as to the adult who accompanies them. There will be a huge Christmas tree, presented by the Governor of the State of Maine, the biggest he could get, from which gifts will be distributed to the children of the men in khaki and blue. The amusements include a merry-go-round, Punch and Judy show, ferris wheel, Mother Goose Street, a giant slide presided over by the Old Lady Who Lived in a Shoe; a one-ring

circus with the traditional white horse, trained ponies, the lady who jumps through the hoops, and real clowns.

It is impossible to detail all the places where there will be trees and gift giving and merry making for the children of the needy. There will be many celebrations, both big and little, where a foster Santa Claus will distribute happiness in the shape of toys and candy and books and fruit. The hospital wards will have their usual Yuletide greenery, but this year the fruitage will be more plentiful. There will be blue-coated, brass-buttoned Santas, with Police Commissioner Woods as Santa-in-Chief. The contents of their combined packs have cost about \$35,000, and will be distributed to 34,731 children. And these are only a few of the items in the list of places where generosity will open its pack.

And so, after all, though its punchbowl stay dry, New York on this its first war Christmas has filled and will drain a real "cup o' kindness" to—"Good-will toward men."

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