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The Canadian Post.

LINDSAY, FRIDAY, DEC. 21, 1894.

CATCHING SANTA CLAUS.

A Christmas Story.

On Christmas eve, twenty-two years ago, three boys set off at eleven o'clock in the evening to play St. Nick in Bagdad; not Bagdad on the Tigris, the once stately seat of the Caliphs, but a school district in Maine that had somehow got the name.

Twenty-two years ago! that was before Christmas had come to be made the occasion of so many decorated trees, candy-bags and cards, and so much expensive gift-making as at present. Country children often hung their stockings in the chimney corner, and marvellous stories were told to them of how old St. Nicks, or Santa Claus, came around at midnight, riding over the roofs of the farm houses, driving four reindeer with wide branching horns, or four shaggy ponies with jingling bells, and leaving presents for children.

That was about as far as Christmas had progressed in the rural portions of northeast New England at that time, although we had begun to hear of Christmas-trees in the cities.

We had been meditating and preparing that trip to Bagdad for a week or more, and we set off secretly with a horse and pung.

In the pung was a bushel basket containing not less than twenty old socks and stockings, many of them much darned, but all clean, and all stuffed with candies, rolls of lozenges, maple sugar and raisins.

There was another basket in which were ten or a dozen badly worn old boots, and in some of these were pigs' tails or ears, a brimstone roll, carrots, turnips, red ears of corn, fragments of old brass, caricatures on paper variously inscribed in painful rhyme, old hats, a ball of stout twine and such rubbish.

These and many more offerings in the name of St. Nicholas were not all intended, as may be guessed, to be of a complimentary nature.

The pung moved very quietly, for the bells had been removed from the shafts and the snow was soft. We drove by a roundabout route for about five miles, until we entered a tract of hemlock woods, on the farther border of which stood a small schoolhouse.

Not far from the schoolhouse, on the side of our approach, a lumber road diverged from the highway. It was used for drawing hemlock logs to a neighboring sawmill. Here we turned off, and after proceeding ten or twelve rods into the woods, hitched our horse and carefully blanketed him, for the night was frosty and sharp. Then we took our baskets on our shoulders, walked back to the road, and after listening a moment and giving a careful glance up and down, made for the Bagdad schoolhouse.

So muffled up were we that it would not have been easy by starlight to make out what or who we were; but the larger boy was addressed as "Add," another as Willis; I was the third.

Each of us wore two greatcoats, fur caps pulled down over our ears, and knit comforters to keep us warm on our night ride. Add had also decorated himself with a long white beard,—quite a primitive affair, only the tail of a white horse,—which hung down in front of his coat. This was his idea of St. Nick. At that time we have never seen the character personated.

The fact was that there were old scores to be settled between us and the Bagdad boys.

A deep valley and wooded mountain separated the two school districts, and although the distance across was not more than two miles to travel from one schoolhouse to the other, the wagon road between them was nearly five miles. We used that in the winter only. During the rest of the year we crossed on foot by a path over the mountain.

We knew all the boys in Bagdad very well; they outnumbered us, and were unfriendly; but the girls were pleasant acquaintances. We had hung May-baskets to a number of them the previous spring, and had been hotly chased over the mountain by a strong party of the boys, who threatened unpleasant proceedings if they caught us.

Our well-grounded belief that it would be better not to be caught led to the caution in our movements above noted.

Nevertheless, two days previously, Add had visited the Bagdad school one afternoon for an hour for motives of his own; but he took care to enter after school had been called to order, and to take leave before the boys had been dismissed.

Not one country schoolhouse in a dozen, in that region, was locked at night. We entered without difficulty. A faint sense of warmth still lingered about the stove, and opening the door, we raked forward a few bright coals and warmed our fingers.

Add then lighted the lantern which we had brought, and we proceeded to decorate Bagdad. The seats were benches, with long, broad desks behind the backs, and shelves underneath for the books. Add had observed during his call where all the older boys and girls sat. Beneath the shelves of their respective seats plump stockings of confectionary were hung to many of the girls, with befitting notes attached. Add was a good hand at such efforts. I still remember some of them.

"Tried to get down your chimney, and couldn't, Amy Eastman. Fire was too hot. Had to come to the school house. Never should keep a fire Christmas night.—St. Nick."

"Please burn out your chimney, Myra Edes. All full of soot. Couldn't get down at all."

"Pray do build a bigger chimney at yourhouse, Minnie Wilkins. I'm getting too stout to crawl down such a narrow one.—Your affectionate St. Nick.

The old boots were for the boys, and the notes were not intended to please.

"Here's a pig's tail for you, Rufus Eastman. That is all you will get from me this year, for they say you were saucy at the schoolmistress last summer. Try and behave yourself better next year.—St. Nick."

"Quit off tobacco, Tim Jackson. Take a bite off this turnip once in a while; it will sweeten your breath."

The roll of brimstone was for a somewhat profane youth named America Robbins. It was wrapped in a piece of paper on which was written:

"Better skip those hard words, Merrick. I've been harking to you for some time. Remember there's a land where the candy is all hard and yellow, Merrick. Here's a stick of it for you. Take a sniff at it now and then."

Portions of this advice were not wholly bad, but the spirit in which it was offered was certainly not to be commended.

If we had limited our attentions that night to the Bagdad schoolhouse, we might have escaped undetected; but there were three girls, sisters, named Thomas,—Myrtle, Edith and Leola,—very attractive the boys thought them, and we had heard about a quarter of a mile from the schoolhouse in a large, low, one-storey house, flanked by barns and several outbuildings.

Add and Willis conceived the bold scheme of hanging three of the best filled stockings down the chimney of this house. The arrangement of sheds and roofs was such as to invite a boy to climb to the top. The chimney did not rise much above the ridge-pole, and it would be easy to let down the stockings into the fire-place of the sitting-room, where they would be discovered on kindling a fire the following morning.

We accordingly started for the Thomas place. It was now about two o'clock in the morning. No one was astir. The house was dark. We climbed on the roof of a shed, where Willis and I stopped and passed up the stockings and lines to Add, who had mounted to the roof of the house.

He was just lowering the first stocking when we heard sleigh bells, and saw a team coming along the road from the direction of the schoolhouse. In the sleigh, as we learned afterward, were Tim Jackson and Roscoe Parmenter, on their way home from a young folks' party a few miles distant.

Willis and I lay low on the ell roof, and easily escaped observation. Add sheltered himself behind the big chimney, and was not seen till after they had passed, when one of them happened to look back, and espied St. Nick standing beside the chimney!

If they had hailed or called out, we might perhaps have escaped; but they said nothing, and we supposed that they had seen nothing. In fact, they did not know what to think of the circumstance at first; but as they drove on they mistrusted that some mischief was on foot.

At the next two houses, where the Eastmans and Robbins families lived on opposite sides of the road, they stopped, and waking the people, announced that there were suspicious boys about the Thomas place.

Rufus, Luke and Charley Eastman, with Ben and Merrick Robbins, at once turned out, and as Add was making fast the last of the strings to a brick on the chimney-top, the whole party suddenly appeared up the road, and shouted at the top of their voices. We were caught. The road was the only avenue of escape, for the fields were covered with a foot and a half of snow.

"Run for the pung!" whispered Willis; and we dropped off the ell roof into a drift of snow in front of it and ran. Add did not follow us, but darted

REV. R. TROTTER, PASTOR BAPTIST CHURCH.

into the woodhouse, and hastily took refuge on the well piled tiers of stove-wood.

The pursuing party saw us as we emerged upon the road, and chased us. Then Merrick Robbins called out, "Here aint all of them!" and with some of the others turned back to search the Thomas premises, while Rufus Eastman and three others continued to run after us.

They were making good time, too, but Willis and I lost none of our lead. We reached the schoolhouse, and without stopping to get the baskets, dashed around a bend into the woods.

In the shadows of the hemlock-trees we passed out of sight of our pursuers, and turning in at the lumber road, had tip-toed into the school-room, and peeped out at the window.

Generally Add was a good strategist, but his wits had been slightly "rattled" that night. He had failed to latch the porch door, and just at the wrong moment it swung partly open. As Rufus and the other boys were passing they noticed that it was ajar.

"How came that door open?" one of them said. "I'll bet those scamps have been in the schoolhouse!"

They stopped, then approached the door.

So the perils of the night were not ended. Add stepped quickly on one of the benches, reaching a little scuttle in the ceiling of the room, pushed it open and raised himself by main strength through the hole. He knew the boys would come in and strike a light.

In fact, he had barely time to draw himself up when they entered, noisily, and discovered the baskets. Excitement reigned again.

They lighted matches at the stove and examined the baskets, and then looked in the woodshed and in the dark corners of the room.

"We've scared 'em off," said Rufus, "but they will be back after their baskets before morning. We must lay a plan to catch 'em. Luke, you run back and get Merrick and the others. We'll stay here and watch.

Add heard every word. He was trapped and he knew it.

Meantime, Willis and I returned the team, and drove slowly out of the lumber road to the highway. After waiting a while, Willis went on foot along the road to the bend near the schoolhouse, and while watching there, saw Merrick and four or five others coming, at a run, along the road. Thinking that another pursuit was to be made, he ran to the pung and we drove off as fast as we could.

What had become of Add we had little idea, but we surmised that he might have escaped by what was called the "north road," leading around from Bagdad to our district.

But he was not home when we arrived, nor did he appear later in the morning. Willis and I were obliged to explain his absence as best we could, and some little anxiety began to be felt concerning him.

Add told us all about it afterward. He was a prisoner in the dark little loft. His jailers kindled a fire in the stove and kept watch from the window, expecting the owners of the baskets to come back and be caught. They amused themselves—and Add—telling what they would do with the miscreants.

By the daylight they were all hungry, and leaving one of their number to keep the fire and sweep the room they went home to breakfast.

One of the boys was to bring the solitary watcher something to eat at school time—for at that time, Christmas was not a school holiday with us.

Add now considered if he would not come down from the loft, overpower the guard and escape, but he was afraid he would be recognized and abandoned the idea.

Shortly before nine o'clock the scholars assembled. When the girls began to find the stockings of confectionery under their desks, and the boys to read the advice given them in the old boots, there was a hubbub, but Add heard enough to repay him for being where he was.

The girls openly praised "St. Nick," whom some of them declared they knew to be Add. The Thomas girls told what they had found in their fire-place, and there were lively comments all around, till the teacher entered and school began.

Add scarcely dared move all this time. He lay on two boards which were placed across the scantlings to which the laths and plaster of the ceiling were affixed. It became very warm up there, for there was a hot fire in the stove below. The heat made the boy drowsy in spite of himself; it was dark and he had been astir all night. He

(Continued on page six.)

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Men's Frieze Ulsters were $8.50,	now $4 90
Men's Worsted Overcoats, were $9.50	now $4 50
Men's Nap Overcoats, were $7.50,	now $3 50
Boys' Frieze Ulsters, were $7,	now $4 00
Boys' Cape Overcoats, were $5,	now $3 90
Boys' Tweed Overcoats, were $4.50,	now $2 75
Boys' Tweed Cape Overcoats, were $2.90,	now $1 75

SUITS.

Men's Auburn Mills Worsted Suits, were $9.50,	now $5 90
Men's Auburn Mills All Wool Suits, were $8.00,	now $5 00
Men's Yorkshire Tweed Suits, were $7.50,	now $4 75
Men's Canadian Tweed Suits, were $6.50,	now $3 90
Boys' Auburn Mills Suits, were $7,	now $4 25
Boys' Blue Serge Suits, were $6,	now $3 75
Boys' Scotch Tweed Suits, were $9,	now $5 50
Boys' Canadian Tweed Suits, were $3.50,	now $1 95

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25 Wombat Fur Coats, were $19.50,	now $14 50
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Men's Linen Handkerchiefs, hem-stitched,	for 15c
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50 doz. Pongee Silk Handkerchiefs, hem stitched,	35c
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Gough's World-Beater All Wool Socks, Ribbed Top,	10c
10 doz. Men's All Wool Cardigan Jackets, worth $1.25,	50c

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