

Novel Ways of Distributing Gifts.

If Santa Claus and all the Christmas trees should go on strike this year and refuse to have anything to do with presents, there are any number of other ways to distribute them, jolly and original ways too, that are not much trouble or expense.

How delighted the family will be on Christmas morning, especially the children in the family, to see the big living-room table apparently snow-bound. The whole surface is covered with a layer of white cotton batting sprinkled with artificial snow, and rising out of the snow are just as many sparkling snow-covered mounds as there are members of the family. On each snowy hill a tiny white-clad Eskimo sits or slides, and each hill is likewise marked by a gay red-lettered sign bearing the name of the owner.

Lifting the imaginary blanket of snow—in reality a blanket of sheet wadding be-sprinkled with artificial snow—each person discovers a cache of gifts.

If there is a dog in the household you can plan a fine surprise for the children. Christmas morning he may come trotting in wearing a wee red jacket and a collar of tiny jingling bells. He makes the rounds, and each person is entitled to one bell, but must pick out the one tagged with his or her name. The other side of the tag mentions the place where that person's gifts are concealed. One label may state, "The lowest shelf of the china closet," another will say, "Under the hall table," and so on.

A very simple way which makes the presents last a long time is to put them all beforehand into a big clothes basket, decked with ground pine or other Christmas greenery. When it is time to have the presents the basket is brought in to occupy the centre of the room, and the folks all sit in a circle around it. One at a time, in turn, draws a package, looks at the name, and hands it to the proper owner, all watching while it is opened.

This makes the opening of the parcels a long-drawn-out sweetness, and everyone shares in everyone else's joy.

The kiddies will love a Christmas ship, its decks loaded with golden packets. If there is a toy ship in the playroom or among the gifts of the day, it is not difficult to arrange it on a table, trim it with a bit of holly, and heap its decks with the Christmas presents tied up in gilt and silver paper to seem more treasure-like. A small boy in his sailor suit may be chosen to help unload it, or a real sailor uncle or cousin among the grown-ups.

Almost every family has a toy express cart, and this can be easily made effective as the centre of the occasion. To each corner of the cart fasten upright a tiny evergreen tree, or merely a branch decked with a few shining ornaments or colored balls. Spread the centre of the cart with a yard or so of scarlet paper or cloth to hang over the edges. On top of it in the cart, sheltered by the four little corner trees, pile the presents.

Quite a pretty way to have the presents on Christmas Eve is to arrange in a burning row, on the mantel, a candle for each person, corresponding to age or size. Thus, Baby may have one of those very wee ones, the older children may have graduated sizes—Father may have a very tall one, Grandma, who is portly, may have one of those plump bedroom candles, and so on. Each candle has on it a ribbon bow of distinguishing color, and all the presents that can be found about the room, tied with that particular color, belong to the owner of the candle.

Some time ask each member of the family to do his or her own packages up in a distinctive way. Maybe Aunt Mary will tie hers all in green; Cousin Jane may use yellow raffia to tie hers; Mother may choose gray paper and orange ribbon; some joking brother could use newspapers.

A very simple and happy plan is to assign each person a chair with a green wreath hung on the back, from which a gay red holiday balloon sways cheerily in air. On the seat of the chair arrange the gifts that are coming to its assignee.

She Knew What She Wanted Anyway.

One man said to another in the first weeks of December, "What are you going to give your wife for a Christmas present?"

"I don't know yet," said the other. "She put it away in a drawer before I had a chance to see it."



Father Christmas.

Away with melancholy!
This day is for delight;
When mistletoe and holly,
In wreaths and garlands bright,
Are hung above the ingle,
And joyous voices mingle
To welcome Father Christmas,
Who comes clad all in white.

Green spray and crimson berry,
A crown for him shall be;
Gay catch and carol merry
Shall fill his heart with glee;
Shall match his sleigh-bell's jingle,
And warm his ears a-tingle,
A greeting for Father Christmas,
The Christmas fairy he.

Within his sleigh he carries
The presents high up-piled;
Not long with us he tarries,
By leaf and song beguiled;
God speed, down dale and dingle;
May there not be a single
Forgotten one this Christmas,
But gifts for every child.

A Prayer.

I pray that while I live here
in this world,
Though I should poorer grow,
alone and sad,
I still may have one candle
burning bright
In my best window on God's
holy night;
A holly spray to make my
room seem glad—
And in my heart the blindfold
hope to rise
Singing dream carols of the
Christmas skies.

Took Her at Her Word.

"What was his present, dear?" asked a chorus of female voices on Christmas Day. "Was it a pearl brooch or a bracelet, or was it a diamond tiara?"

The fair fiancee's eyes, which lately had glittered with glowing anticipations, grew moist.

"It wasn't—anything!" she replied.

"Not anything?" cried her friends.

"Oh, the brute! How did it happen?"

"Well, you see," explained the bitterly disappointed one, the tears now bursting through their barriers, "he-he asked me w-what I wanted, and I told him I'd I-love him just as much if he didn't g-get me anything—and s-so h-he d-didn't!"

A Christmas Carol.

The Shepherds had an Angel,
The Wise Men had a star,
But what have I, little child,
To guide me home from far,
Where glad stars sing together
And singing angels are?

Those Shepherds through the lonely
night
Sat watching by their sheep,
Until they saw the heavenly host
Who neither tire nor sleep,
All singing "Glory, glory,"
In festival they keep.

The Wise Men left their country
To journey morn by morn,
With gold and frankincense and
myrrh,
Because the Lord was born:
God sent a star to guide them
And sent a dream to warn.

My life is like their journey,
Their star is like God's book;
I must be like those good Wise Men
With heavenward heart and look:
But shall I give no gifts to God?
What precious gifts they took!
—Christina G. Rossetti.

"Peace on Earth."

We cannot hear with the angels
The song that the angels sang,
As over the hills of Judah,
Their glorious message rang
Of a Christ that was born in a manger,
A Saviour meek and mild,
Who left his home in glory,
And became a little child.

Our ears cannot catch the music
Nor the words of that sweet refrain,
That came from celestial choirs,
A sweet and solemn strain,
Of "Glory to God in the Highest,
On earth peace, to men good-will,"
That floated to earth from Heaven
That night in the midnight still.

We cannot go with the wise men
And follow the blessed gleam
Of the silver star that beckoned
To the Hope of a nation's dream;
Not ours to give to Him treasures
Of frankincense, myrrh and gold,
Not ours to gaze on the graces
Of the Christ-Child manifold.

But hark! the air is pulsing
With the vibrant angel song
In our hearts we catch the message
And the glad notes prolong,
As they ring down the long-past ages
"Peace on earth, good will to men,"
And the Star leads ever onward
To the Babe at Bethlehem.

The Lad's Gift to His Lord.

Two shepherds and a shepherd lad
Came running from afar
To greet the little new-born One
Whose herald was a star.

But empty were their toil-worn hands,
And on the stable floor
The Wise Men knelt with precious gifts
The Saviour to adore.

"Oh, take my cloak," one shepherd cried,
"I'll keep the Babe from cold."
"And take my staff," the other said,
"I'll guide Him o'er the wold."

The shepherd lad looked sadly down;
No gift at all had he,
But only on his breast a lamb
He cherished tenderly.
So young it was, so dear it was—
The dearest of the flock—
For days he had been guarding it,
Close wrapped within his smock.

He took the little, clinging thing
And laid it by the Child,
And all the place with glory shone—
For lo! Lord Jesus smiled.



HERE WE ARE AGAIN!

Christmas Prayer for 1920.

Greatest Babe of every age,
Teacher, Prophet, Monarch, Sage;
Send a vision now, we pray,
For rampant sin beclouds our way.

While we celebrate Thy birth,
Blind confusion sways the earth;
So we kneel and humbly pray,
In compassion guide our way.

Most gracious God, Lord on high,
Spread Thy light and come Thou nigh;
Help us tide our fiery day,
Lift us from the miry clay.

Lift us up and out of self,
Cure us of our love of self;
Still the din and fearsome strife,
Teach us of that higher life.

Great Jehovah, only King,
Throne secure, Thy praise we sing;
Hearts illuminate again,
Let good will forever reign.

Christmas at Jerusalem.

"I have spent not a few romantic and picturesque Christmas Days," said a well-known clergyman to the writer, "but none that remains so vividly in my memory as the one I passed a few years ago at Bethlehem."

"It was a cold but very beautiful morning on which I joined the thousands of pilgrims who streamed out of the Jaffa Gate on the way to Bethlehem. And a motley, picturesque crowd it was!"

"A two hours' walk brought me to the quaint, old world little town, in its setting of olive-groves and fig-trees, nestling among the Judaean hills, and looking so old and hoary that one might well believe it is unchanged since Christ first opened his eyes on it."

"But that day the narrow streets—so narrow that one could almost shake hands across any of them, were already full of life and color. Passing through the market-place, where is the world-famous Church of the Nativity, I followed the stream of people until I found myself one of the crowd in the Field of the Shepherds—the very field in which, so tradition says, the shepherds were watching their flocks that memorable night more than nineteen centuries ago."

"In the field were priests engaged in blessing the pilgrims, and after receiving my benediction I hurried back to Bethlehem in time to witness the procession of priests and people to the Church of the Nativity."

"At the head of the procession walked the Patriarch of Jerusalem, a stately, impressive figure in rich—even gorgeous—vestments, with a bodyguard of almost equally splendid priests bearing aloft towering candles and magnificent banners; while behind came a most picturesque medley of priests and people."

"One by one these hundreds of worshippers filed through the low, narrow doorway leading into the church, until the building was full almost to suffocation."

"Here services are held all through Christmas Day and night until dawn breaks, the Patriarch himself celebrating mass at midnight."

"From the church and its dignified and solemn service I found my way into the famous 'Grotto of the Nativity.'"

"It is but a tiny room, this 'Grotto of the Chamber,' as it is called, and it contains but a small altar, said to occupy the very ground on which the Wise Men from the East prostrated themselves before the infant Jesus."

A Christmas Hymn.

'Tis Christmas time, the crowded
street, the busy mart,
All witness to the tidings sweet, and
while we start
The Yule-log blazing on the hearth,
with measure meet,
While hearts o'erflow with genial
mirth, we haste to greet
The Christmas time.

'Tis Christmas time, O God above,
our hearts unite
In bonds of sympathy and love this
holy night,
And may the message angels brought
inspire the song
That swells to tell; may every thought
to thee belong.
This Christmas time.

O Christmas time, O holy night when
Christ was born,
That saw the breaking of the light
in perfect morn,
Shine, with thy rare effulgence on
and light our way,
Till we at last behold the dawn of
perfect day,
In Christ's own time.

PREPARING FOR THE DAY

Only a short time yet remains to prepare our homes and ourselves to receive the Great Gift that comes to us on Christmas Day.

And to make ready, let us first read again the story of His life; how He came to earth, how He lived here and how He left. The story is one of the simplest ever written; of one who was a poor man, who never had any money to give to any one, who never bought gifts of any kind. What He gave was Himself, and of that He gave freely and gladly. It is His birth that we are to celebrate on Thursday. We are to give thanks that He came to us, and for that great and lasting Gift we give to others. Everything that we give on Christmas Day is in memory of Him.

Do we think of this enough? Do we tell our children as much about this most precious of all Gifts as we do about Santa Claus?

The whole story of Christ's coming to earth, as told in the four gospels, is summed up by the late Dr. George Hodges in his beautiful book, "When the King Came," in these words: "This tells how once the King of Glory came from heaven to visit us here on earth and live among us; how He was born in Bethlehem and brought to Nazareth; how He went about telling people of the heavenly kingdom and doing good, ministering to the sick and the poor; how He was misunderstood and disliked and hated, till at last they took Him to Jerusalem and nailed Him to a cross, so that He died; and how, after that, He came to life again and went back into heaven, promising to return."

And in memory of the little child who was born in a stable at Bethlehem on a Christmas Day, centuries ago, we are to keep Christmas again this year. Christmas always will be kept as long as the world endures, but the way of keeping it rests with each one of us. Let us make our gifts, but with each one let us give something of ourselves. Let us tie them up with love, and dispatch them with thoughtfulness; let us make no gifts that cannot take with them the spirit of Christ; and, with Tiny Tim, let us say with hearts that mean it, "GOD BLESS US, EVERY ONE."

Soil for Growth.

At Christmas time Elinor got several little candy animals, which she had been saving because they were so cute. But one day the toy rabbit was missed.

"What did you do with Bunny?" "Oh, he got too dirty to play with, so I ate him," replied Elinor.

"It was always said of him, that he knew how to keep Christmas well if any man alive possessed the knowledge. May that be truly said of us, and all of us!"—Dickens.

Then Shall Come Peace.

Christmas is here
With its good cheer;
Peace and good will
Is its message so clear
O'er all the earth,
To herald Christ's birth;
May love instill
All its precepts of worth.

Where there is blight
Of Sin's dark night,
May this good news
Enter with its blest light;
Then shall come peace,
Then sorrow cease,
And holy truths
Give from error release.