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Legend of the Origin of Christmas Stockings

Why Stockings are Hung Up, and Why They Call the Jolly Old Saint "Santa Claus."

A thoughtful young miss in town has asked The Advance as to why Santa Claus requires the hanging up of stockings at Christmas time. Most youngsters are quite content to hang up the stockings and leave the rest to Santa Claus, but it is a fair question and the answer may be of interest. As a matter of fact good old Santa Claus does not absolutely require the hanging-up of stockings. Indeed, he has been known to leave his gifts alongside the stocking when for any reason the use of the stocking did not seem practical. The use of Christmas stockings is more a method adopted by the people than by Saint Nicholas. And the reason for it is as follows:—

Some centuries ago there lived in Europe a very kind and wealthy man who was so good in his life and so generous in his ways that they called him Saint Nicholas. He was very fond of helping poor people and he particularly loved children and wished to please them by gifts. At the same time he did not want to be thanked for any of his kindness. It made him feel embarrassed when anyone caught him doing good and told him how much his kindness was appreciated. He found just the joy of giving to be reward enough, and his chief fun was in hearing people wonder how the gifts came to be where they were and who the kind giver might be.

One Christmas Eve St. Nicholas desired to give a purse of gold to an old man and his little daughter, who were suffering poverty and hardship in brave way, without complaint and with cheerfulness and appreciation for the few rare little joys that did come their way. To avoid being seen, St. Nicholas climbed to the roof of the little cottage where the old man and the little girl were living. He dropped the purse of gold down the chimney and then he fled, chuckling at the trick. As he thought of the surprise and the joy of the old man and the little girl at what to them would be a simply wonderful gift, old St. Nicholas laughed until his stout old sides were sore. Now it happened that the little girl had hung up one of her stockings by the fire to dry, and the purse of gold, instead of landing on the hearth as Saint Nicholas expected, accidentally dropped right down into the stocking. Bright and early on Christmas morning the little girl was up and on taking down her stocking to put it on she found the purse of gold. What a wonderful Christmas that was for the little girl and the old man!

Of course, the story of the strange happening was soon known all over the continent, the good news travelling faster than bad news is supposed to travel. People began to tell their children to hang up their stocking by the chimney on Christmas Eve and perhaps there would a gift in it in the morning. Of course, the youngsters tried it. What boy or girl would refuse to take a chance like that? And old Saint Nicholas hearing what the people were telling their children, chuckled over the matter, and saw to it that the children did not lose faith in the custom. After a year or two Saint Nicholas had to have hundreds of helpers to carry on the good work and when he died, these helpers and their sons and daughters right down to the present day have been seeing to the filling of the stockings. This is the legend that explains the use of Christmas stockings and if anyone knows of a better story to explain the matter, they need to be wished "A Very Merry Christmas!"

It was this same Saint Nicholas that was responsible indirectly for the use of the name Santa Claus. The story goes that as the belief in Saint Nicholas spread from one country to another and another, his name was spoken with affection by many children of different countries and nations. Some of these children pronounced "Saint Nicholas" as if it were spelled "Sant Nicholas," and this pronunciation spread and eventually became generally used as "Sant Nick-la-us," and then "Santa Claus," just like that!

CHRISTMAS STOCKINGS AND CHRISTMAS TREES

Stockings for Santa Claus to fill were more in vogue, and Christmas trees less so, fifty years ago. The latter were reserved chiefly for large gatherings, such as Sunday school teas, and they were considered very wonderful indeed, though there was a certain charm about the Christmas stockings which could not be duplicated even by a tree.

The stockings held very little of value, but the element of mystery played its part, and the youngsters enjoyed the excitement of waking in the night or early morning to pinch the toe of a well-filled sock and guess what it contained. There was one thing almost certainly to be found in the toe—it fitted so nicely—and that was a cornucopia of bright-coloured paper filled with tiny candies. There were nuts and fruits and presents as well. A 25-cent doll, a horse and cart, or a Noah's ark, met the requirements of the average child.

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