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Who is Santa Claus?

By ROY ROLFE GILSON.

THERE is a sweet time when youth returns to us,—spring, when even old boughs awake and old hearts blossom anew. There is another season not roseate, but white, when we are children,—when in the coldness there is a sudden warmth once more, when the air is musical though the birds have vanished, and Innocence, whom we have mourned so long, comes back again in the lighting of the fir tree.

In this blessed season, Love is no longer the little May-day archer with his quiver full of sighs. Wily huntsman of human hearts, he knows where he shall find us now, in the kindness of the year,—not under greenwood boughs but under roof trees, by our blazing fires,—and there he stalks us, whole families at a time, descends stealthily to the sacred hearthstone in the dead of night, when the house is barred and only the chimney is open to the sky, and all are sleeping. He comes; but lo! no naughty little boy: a man, full grown!—a repentant and reputable Cupid, this (he has altered his very name), a leading citizen, a deacon in the church; in short, a family Love, a benevolent grandfather Love, bearded and mantled against the cold, and with a mighty quiver at his back stuffed full of toys. Such are the darts he carries now, and thus men say, Love, the true parent of us all, visits in his kindly winter the children of his ardent spring.

It is indisputable that from Love those presents come which children find in their Christmas stockings, and hanging on their lighted trees. To call him Santa Claus is but to give him his Christian name. Beware! call him Saint Nicholas, if you choose, but remember that he is Old Nick still. Next spring he will be the pagan god again, half-drunken with the scent of flowers, and at his old, old havoc under the lilac tree. He is a sad and perennial apostate, this fellow Love, and not by any manner of missionary zeal to be converted till



the frost reddens his tender skin. Thus annually he renounces pleasure and becomes a Christian—until next year. Thus also men, his children, are of their father pagans from birth

as long as life is warm; but at the first shiver of their approaching winter they call on heaven to send down its everlasting cheer.

Love's underfathers partake of his conversion. His autumnal saintliness descends upon all thoughtful and repentant paternal souls, never more surely than in those firelit hours when they gather their children about their hearths; and never more deeply do they feel this spell than on that holy eve with its memories of Bethlehem.

"But you never saw Santa Claus!" cries Unbelief.

No, nor ever saw God, yet we believe in Him; nor ever saw angels, though on Sinai and in Gethsemane, on the heights of life as well as in its depths, a glory blinds us and we hear a rushing as of wings.

What men observe they must account for. Long ago, finding Love haunting their winter hearths, but a love different, an older, kinder, more paternal spirit than that fierce young huntsman of the May, they straightway traced him up the chimney,—traced him to his skyey source, just as of old they had traced God from His seen earth to His unseen heaven. And now, in this lesser quest, they found him at last whom they were seeking,—ruddy like their household fires, rotund and jolly as their Christmas cheer,—and they called him Santa Claus, which to this very day means Hearth Love, Winter Love, Christmas Love, Father and Mother Love: Love that loves children,—that loves to delight them, loves to surprise them, loves to steal softly in the night to watch them sleeping, even as of old shepherds, they say, sought Him who was cradled in a manger, under a star.

Thus Santa Claus comes, year after year, to his little children; and will come always, till the last stocking has been hung.

A Merry Christmas and a
Happy New Year to all.

A Christmas Glee

By Edmund Vance Cooke

Bind the boughs of jolly holly

In a girdle 'round the Earth;

Love is wisdom, hate is folly;

Christmas brings another birth.

Deck the world from pole to pole

And garland it and wreath it;

Mistletoe above the whole,

So kiss the world beneath it,

Raise a festal Christmas-tree

With the stars for candles;

Love the Santa Claus shall be

And bless each gift he handles.

Mother Earth is beaming now;

Not a joy has missed her,

Mistletoe is on her brow

And Santa Claus has kissed her.