

AN INTERESTING PAGE FOR THE BOYS AND GIRLS.



This story begins with a club. It was a club that had a handle, that is to say a name; and a handle, that is to say, a president. It was a club of girls. It was the Acme Club, so called because no girl could belong to it who did not own a pair of Acme skates, and who did not know how to use them, too. And it had five members.

The funny thing about these five members was that the first letters of the first names of four of them spelled Acme, and that the first name of the fifth member, who was the president, began with C, which stands for club, so that whenever anyone of the five girls said: "Acme Club," she may be said to have called out the names of all its members. Thus: There were Amy Anderson and Callie Fisher and Maria Tuttle and Emily Hunt, A. C. M. E.—Acme; and the first name of the president was Catherine—she spelled it with a C, Amy, Callie, Maria, Emily—A. C. M. E.—they stood for Acme, and C for Catherine—that stood for Club—and there you had it—Acme Club.

"But what shall we do?" asked Callie Fisher one day. "When we get more members?"

"I move," said Maria Tuttle, "that our next new member must be a girl whose first name begins with L, and the next with U, and the next with B, so as to finish out the word club—C, L, U, B—club."

"But there aren't any girls' names that begin with U," said Callie. "Yes there are," replied Maria; "there is Ursula, and there is Undine, and there is Ulrica, and—"

"Well, that's enough," said Callie, "and if we have to wait till some girl comes along with one of these names I guess I'll be a good while before we get any new members."

All this took place at one of the meetings of the club, but what else took place at that meeting I must not tell, for it is a secret. Did you ever know five girls to get together yet in a club, or anywhere else for that matter, that they didn't have secrets?

But one thing which took place at this meeting I must tell you, for it is the thing on which my story turns. In fact, it was the one thing for which this meeting had been called—a special meeting, on important business—so the notice ran. The business proved to be the production by the president of the following letter:

"Jenkinson, Pa., Dec. 15, 1883.
"Dear Catherine—That was a pretty letter you wrote me from school, the other day for a composition, telling me about the Acme Club, only I want to know all about the secrets. Instead of sending a Christmas present this year to you I am going to send one to the club, and here it is inclosed—a post-office order for ten dollars. You can give it to the postoffice, and get it cashed, and then the club can put it to vote what to do with the money. You can divide it among yourselves and buy dolls with it, or you can buy a lot of land on the shores of the beautiful pond you wrote me about, where you go skating, and build an Acme Club house there, with a good large closet to lock up your secrets in, and five nails on the wall to hang up five pairs of silver skates as bright as Hans Brinker's, if your money holds out as far as that. At any rate, here is the money, from yours truly,
UNCLE OLIVER."

Whereat there was a great clapping of hands, and the Acme Club went off into a chorus of resolutions.

"I move," spoke up Emily Hunt, "that we spend it for candy."

"No," said Callie Fisher, "let's hire a horse and sleigh and have a sleigh-ride Christmas day."

"I'll tell you what would be better than that," shouted Maria Tuttle, who was good in arithmetic; "let's buy two ninety-nine cent dolls apiece all round."

"Girls," said the president, with dignity, "I've a plan that's best of all."

"What is it?" exclaimed the other four members all at once.

"Let's give a Christmas tree."

"To whom?" exclaimed the united membership in concert. "To ourselves?"

"No," said the president, "not to ourselves, but to some other girls or boys. Let's each pick out some girl or boy, or perhaps two, who wouldn't be likely to have a Christmas tree of their own, and give them a nice tree with lots of presents."

"Society get many presents for children with ten dollars," objected Maria Tuttle, the girl of the arithmetic turn of mind.

"Well, then," replied the president, "five children instead of ten, each of us to invite one. I know whom I'd invite."

"Who?" exclaimed the chorus of voices.

"Billy Bradley,"

"Oh, yes!" shouted the chorus, "we'd all want to invite Billy Bradley."

Billy Bradley was a boy whom almost everybody knew, and whom everybody that knew him loved. Whether it was his bright, open face or his gentle voice, or his quiet, pleasant ways or his habit of always doing what he could to make other people happy, or his loyalty and love and devotion to his mother, I do not know; certainly it was not the house he lived in, for he clothes he wore, or the money he had to spend for he was a boy who had had to leave school and go to work to help take care of his widowed mother and himself.

The two lived in a pair of rooms all alone by themselves in the third story of a house over a store in a building near the market. The rooms were connected by folding doors. One was Mrs. Bradley's bedroom, the other was the kitchen, eating-room and sitting-room combined, and Billy slept in a little dark room opening out of the kitchen, hardly larger than a closet, where it was handy for him to get up and build the fire in the stove for his mother cold winter mornings and put the kettle on to boil while she was dressing.

The sad thing about Billy Bradley was that he was sick. He hadn't been at Sunday school for several weeks. And when Catherine said that she would like to invite him to the Christmas tree she had proposed, Emily Hunt said that his father said—her father was Dr. Hunt—that he didn't think that Billy Bradley was going to get well.

"Perhaps he'd be too sick to come," said Callie Fisher.

"No," said Emily, "my father told him out to ride yesterday. But he says he's afraid he isn't going to live very long. I guess he could come, farther'd bring him."

"Who else is there you'd invite?" asked Amy Anderson. "I'd invite Bridget Milligan, who brings our milk every night and morning."

"And I'd invite Jimmy—what's his name?—that brings papa's Advertiser," said Emily Hunt.

"And I," said Callie Fisher, "would invite Sarah Ames. Her mother comes to help us iron twice a week and she's lame. I don't believe she ever saw a Christmas tree."

"And I," said Maria Tuttle, "will invite Fannie Sackett. Her mother's just died, and I do not see how they can have any Christmas tree at her house this year."

"That makes just the five," said the president; "Billy Bradley, Bridget Milligan, Jimmy the newsboy, Sarah Ames and Fannie Sackett."

I cannot take time in this story to tell you all that was said and done about this plan, but the end of it was that the Acme Club voted unanimously to give the Christmas tree as proposed to the guests named, and a committee was appointed to carry out the plan.

First it was decided to have a committee of one. Then some of the girls thought that would not be quite fair. Besides everyone of them wanted to be on the committee. Finally it was voted to have a committee of three, and then, to save hard feeling, the other member and the president were added as honorary members. And the week before Christmas the Acme Club was fully organized into a committee of five on the Christmas tree.

There were lots of details to be settled after the plan was once decided upon. Where should the Christmas tree

be given? And on what day? And who should buy the presents? And who should send out the invitations?

These details required over so many special meetings of the club, so that it was the Friday before Christmas before all could be agreed upon. Christmas came Wednesday that year, and Tuesday afternoon was set apart for the tree, so that only three days remained for final preparations, and one of these days was Sunday.

It was agreed that the party should be held at Amy Anderson's, because her house was most convenient, and that Maria Tuttle, who was the oldest, and Callie Fisher and Callie Fisher's mother should buy the presents, and that the president should write the invitations, and that Emily Hunt should deliver them.

When Saturday came and with it a special meeting of the club, again acting as a committee of arrangements, Emily Hunt had a bad piece of news for them. It was that Billy Bradley was not so well, and that his mother had said that she was afraid that he wouldn't be able to come, and Dr. Hunt, Emily's father, had said that it wouldn't do for him to come at all.

"He isn't near so well the past few days," said the doctor to his little girl, "and it would be too much for him. He is too weak to go."

"Then why couldn't we have the Christmas tree at his house?" asked the president. "We might just as well go there as to Amy's, that is if his mother is willing, and if Emily's father thinks that it would do. I'm so sorry Billy's so sick."

So it was agreed that Emily and Amy should go together to Mrs. Bradley's, and ask her if she would be willing for them to have the Christmas tree in her apartment, so that Billy could enjoy it.

They found Billy sick indeed. He was lying in bed propped up with pillows. Both Amy and Emily were shocked to see the change which a few weeks had made. His cheeks were

sunken, and except for a bright spot on each of them they were very pale. His thin white hands lay outstretched on the bed by his side, but his eyes were bright, and his face lighted up with his old smile and his voice, though feeble, had the old pleasant tone to it as Mrs. Bradley brought the girls in from the kitchen to see him.

"The old plan for the Christmas tree with great interest," said Emily Hunt.

"Yes, mother," he said, "I think we could have it here just as well as not, and I don't think it would tire me to have it here at all. You could have the folding doors shut till it was all ready, and then you could open the doors and I could sit still in bed and see the tree and all the presents, without having to get up."

The head of Billy's bed stood against the wall opposite the folding doors, and when he was propped up by his pillows he could look over the top of the footboard, and if the doors were open see what was going on in the other room.

So it was decided to have the Acme Club Christmas tree at Billy Bradley's, and Tuesday afternoon at 4 was fixed for the tree.

It was a beautiful winter day. The sun rose bright and clear. The air was crisp. And though there was no skating for the Acme Club that day, there was good sleighing, and the girls all rode around to Mrs. Bradley's in the pung from the provision store, where the tree had been bought early in the morning.

It was a pretty tree, not very tall, but thick, and bushy, with branches enough to hold a hundred dollars' worth of presents if there had been so much money to spend.

The girls had a busy time all the morning setting up the tree, and dividing the presents, and doing them up and marking them, and putting them on the tree. And by noon it was all ready, and they went away, to come back again at 4. The folding doors had been shut all the morning, so that Billy would not be disturbed by the noise, and as the girls went out, peeping in through the door that led into the hall, they saw that he was fast asleep.

It seemed as if 4 o'clock would never come. But come at last it did in its proper place, and when it came it found Mrs. Bradley's kitchen full of nine as happy boys and girls as ever you saw. In fact, it had been pretty full for some time before 4.

Bridget Milligan was the first of the party to arrive, and she came a few minutes after 3, before Mrs. Bradley had got her room quite ready. Mrs. Bradley had scrubbed up her floor until it shone like marble, and had blacked her stove, and everything looked as nice as a pin. The Christmas tree stood in the middle of the room covered with a big white sheet, so that nobody should see what was on it until the proper time came.

Little Bridget sat quietly down on a chair in the corner to wait, but it was slow waiting.

The club came next, and then Jimmy the newsboy, and then Sarah Ames,

and Fannie Sackett last of all, and if Jimmy had not been a very brave boy and himself in a room so full of girls, Everybody wondered what there was on a table in the corner, covered up with a cloth like the tree. But Mrs. Bradley said that that was a secret from the mothers of some of the girls.

Well, 4 o'clock came, and when the clock had fairly struck, and all was ready, the folding doors were rolled back, and there was Billy Bradley, half lying, half sitting, in his bed, poor, pale sick boy that he was, as full of eager and happy expectation as any of them. Then the window blinds were shut, and the shades drawn down so as to make the room all the darker, and the tree all the brighter; with a pull came the white sheet off the tree; one by one the little candles were lighted and then the fun began.

The president of the club acted as master of ceremonies. The tree looked beautiful.

"Aren't you surprised," said Callie Fisher to Amy Anderson, in a whisper, "that we could buy so many things with only ten dollars?"

There were long packages and square packages and some things not done up in packages at all; and for ornaments, there were wonderful butterflies cut out of colored paper and little Japanese lanterns, and round glass balls of many colors and sizes, and a pitcher of lemonade. And you ought to have seen the Acme Club and their guests sit around that cake and table and make what with those eatables. There was just room enough for the nine to stand around the table, and just enough on the table to go around the nine.

It was astonishing—the way the good things disappeared. The party stripped the table quicker than the president had stripped the tree. Poor sick Billy couldn't eat much of the cake and fruit, but he had a plate carried to him with a sample of every good thing on it for him to look at.

It was now about 6 o'clock and the president said that it was time to be breaking up and going home.

"Billy looks tired," she said in a whisper, to two or three of the girls. "We have been here now more than two hours, and we must not stay too long."

Billy did indeed look tired. The excitement had been a good deal for him to bear. His eyes sparkled with new lustre, and the red spots on his cheeks were larger and redder than before. His mother bent over him and kissed him, and a tear dropped down from her eye upon his forehead. "Don't wipe it away, mother," he said, "let it stay."

"Mother," he said again in a moment, "before the girls go I want them all to come in here and sing me a Christmas hymn—one of the Christmas hymns

we sing at Sunday School; "Once in Royal David's City," or "It Came Upon a Midnight Clear"; and then I want them all to kneel down, and I want the president of the club, or you, or Jimmy to read out of my new prayer book the "Prayer for a Sick Boy," and then we will all say the Lord's Prayer together; perhaps, this is the last Christmas tree I shall ever see. Here's a hymn that will do," he added in a moment, when he had had time to turn over a few of the pages of his new hymnal—"the twenty-sixth"; and he read:

"Calms on the listening ear of night,
Come heaven's melodious strains."

By this time the little company had silently and unconsciously moved from the tree toward the folding doors, and were standing there with quiet faces and sympathizing hearts looking at their sick companion on the bed.

They seemed all to be feeling as they had not felt before how ill poor Billy was, and how true it might be that he would never see a Christmas tree again.

"Come, Callie," he said, "you start the hymn, you know how to sing."

So after a moment's hesitation, and with a little of a timid and trembling voice, Callie struck up the hymn to the tune of "O Mother Dear, Jerusalem," the others one by one joined in, and the sweet voices of the nine children presently filled the room with melody.

Billy tried to sing too, but the first verse was quite enough for him, and turning his face toward his mother, he closed his eyes and lay quiet, and still with a pleasant smile upon his cheek, listening to the words he loved so well.

Then all knelt down, and Jimmy the newsboy, taking the new prayer book, read from it with a faltering voice the prayer for a sick child:

"Almighty God and Merciful Father, to whom alone belong the issues of life and death, look down, from heaven, we humbly beseech thee, upon the sick boy for whom our prayers are desired. Deliver him, O Lord, in thy good appointed time from his bodily pain, and visit him with thy salvation, that if it should be thy good pleasure to prolong his days, he may live to thee, and be an instrument of thy glory by serving thee faithfully, and doing good in his generation; or else receive him into those heavenly habitations where the souls of those who sleep in the Lord Jesus enjoy perpetual rest and felicity. Grant this, O Lord, for the love of thy Son, our Saviour Jesus Christ. Amen."

And all who were present heard Billy join feebly but distinctly in the "Amen." Then Jimmy turned back the cherished illusions of a lifetime, for the average tariff reformer is usually wedded to the idea that a protectionist country imports few or no manufactures and exports a great many.

"Although Britain's output is smaller than that of America, we have to import far more raw material. But the most striking fact is that while we have absolutely open ports, and America has the Dingley tariff, our imports of manufactures are not larger than those of America, when freight and insurance are added to the latter."

"The United States has yet a long distance to travel before she is so keen a competitor of Great Britain as Germany. Indeed, America as a competitor is a great disappointment. In the past, she does not so much compete with us as perform the kindly office of fairy godmother. She is almost as ready as ever to supply us with the cream of her natural resources at ridiculously low prices. But for her materials we should be in an extremely unhappy plight. Oil, cotton, copper, zinc, skins, leather—these and other things too numerous to mention go largely to make up the American export figures. Should these exports ever cease or become dear, as some of them have already promised to do, these Great Britain will realize fully how much she owes to America."

"And a time must come when America will cease either to play havoc with her resources or to have a great surplus of them to export. A stupendous American population will, indeed, find it necessary to import the very articles now so freely rendered. In that day America will be a competitor, for she will pay for her goods in the only possible way—by exporting manufactures."

MOSLEM TABLE MANNERS.

The rules set down by old Moslem precept as to how to behave religiously and appropriately at meals are interesting, though whether they are devoutly complied with in times of festivity is doubtful. Here are some examples: Wash your hands and mouth before eating. When eating never put leg upon the other, nor put your elbows upon the table, as this hinders good digestion. Never be a slave of your restraint, and never touch any meal if you are not hungry. Be ever content with what you find before you, and never give yourself great pains in preparing choice dishes. Be always, if possible, at the table in company with friends, as the prophet never partook of his meals alone. Always begin and end your meal with thanksgiving to Allah. Always eat with your right hand, and swallow, before and after food, a little water. Show good upbringing and is pleasing to Allah ever to put into the mouth only small morsels and never to make any observations upon the defective qualities of dishes. Never cut bread with a knife, but, as the prophet said, break it. Never choose the fruit offered, but take any an hasard. Never wipe your fingers with bread. Avoid bowing on a hot dish, but wait until it gets cold. Eat dates, apricots and other similar fruit one by one, remembering in eating them thus the unity of Allah. Avoid at the table drinking much water. Your meal finished, use attentively the toothpick, gather up the crumbs and wash again your hands and mouth. Lastly, render thanks to Allah.

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Where Is It.

"The average woman puts everything she can scrape together on her back."

"Yes, and when you see her in one of those evening gowns you wonder where it all is."

BRITISH EXPERT'S VIEWS ON AMERICAN TRADE.

SAYS THE UNITED STATES IS A DISAPPOINTMENT—MUST TRAVEL LONG WAY YET.

"America as a trade competitor of England is a great disappointment." Such is the opinion of L. G. Chiozza Money, who is a member of Parliament for Paddington, and recognized as the greatest trade statistician and financial figure expert in Britain.

Commenting on the official trade returns for the first nine months of the year, issued by the Department of Commerce and Labor at Washington, Mr. Chiozza Money finds them "not as up to date as the British, owing to protection."

"The figures show," he adds, "that America's imports are only about 25 per cent less than her exports. We are getting within measurable reach of a time when America will have an excess of imports, for America will not forever consent to pay British shipowners to carry her goods, and her investments abroad are increasing, even while she is repaying her old-time indebtedness to British capitalists."

"Many people, no doubt, will be surprised to learn how largely America draws food and crude materials from abroad. These account for 55 per cent of her imports this year. This is partly due to the fact that, large as her area is, America does not produce every raw product known to man, and it is also due to her enormous population, and her enormous demand for raw materials. American forests have been ruthlessly depleted to make a few people rich quickly. Now the United States has to import lumber largely from Canada. This year America imported lumber valued at \$25,000,000, and paid duty on it. This proves, as I have already argued that the McKinley tariff is an insane one."

In addition much wood pulp was imported from Germany, Norway and Canada. America, if she had properly managed her forests, instead of allowing private interests to destroy them, would not now be importing wood from "played-out" Europe.

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