

Jimmy received his first, and as he unfolded and opened the box containing a railway-line, engine, and signal-box complete, his eyes grew wide with amazement and delight.

As Santa Claus gathered up his empty sack, Jimmy stepped forward and gravely held out his hand, saying earnestly: "Thank you very much, Mr. Santa. They're just 'xactly what I wanted, and like the nice man brought for his little boy."

A faint twitching of the long white beard betrayed Santa Claus' amusement, but he only replied quietly: "I'm glad you've got the things you wanted, Jimmy."

He turned to leave the room, and Jimmy, struck by a new thought, called eagerly:

"I say, Mr. Santa Claus, can you give little boys everything they want?"

"Well, almost," said Santa Claus warily.

"Then please send my nice man to the party. I did want him to come!"

Promising to do his best, the venerable figure withdrew, and a few minutes later the door opened to admit Jimmy's new friend.

The boy welcomed him warmly, but with his advent it seemed as if Auntie Leslie's gaiety and fun had departed. The dignified, almost frigid attitude with which the girl met Stanton only made that young man the more determined to win her goodwill. But it was not until the close of the evening that he found himself for one brief moment alone with her.

Seeing him waiting in the hall below, she had hurried down in advance of the children, holding in her hand a round, neat parcel. With an uncompromising air, she held it out to him.

"I—I must thank you for your kindness to my little nephew, Mr. Stanton," she began nervously, "but I have not been in the habit of accepting gifts at the hands of strangers, and I am afraid that I cannot do so in this instance.

Stanton drew back decidedly.

"Oh, but you surely don't consider Jimmy a stranger?" he expostulated. "It was he who purchased the muff for you. I—I merely insisted on the shopman showing proper respect and attention to the order of so small a customer."

The girl smiled in spite of herself.

"But—indeed I could not accept this," she said again earnestly, but not quite so positively.

"I think," he responded gravely, "if you had seen Jimmy's delight at the thought of the pleasure his gift would be to you you could never be so cruel as to refuse it. Won't you, for Jimmy's sake lay aside the scruples, which, of course, I quite understand, and let him have the joy of seeing you use his Christmas gift?"

She shook her head, but waveringly; and he saw his advantage, and hastily followed it up.

"Please don't refuse," he urged, adding artfully: "I cannot think you would be unkind enough to spoil one of the happiest Christmas days I have had for years."

She looked at him a moment doubtfully, and something she saw in the pleading, dark eyes brought a sudden color to her proud, young face.

With an unsteady little laugh, she held out her hand.

"I fear I must lay aside my scruples, and accept Jimmy's gift, and—your kindnesses."

"Thank you. I am glad."

With a sudden, boyish laugh, Stanton seized the parcel, tore off the covering, and, as Jimmy's small feet came pattering down the stairs, he thrust the muff into the girl's outstretched hands.

Leslie Wardrop but proved once again how easy is the descent from the lofty plane of independence when the first downward step has been taken, for before the New Year had grown old she had so far overcome her scruples as to accept an ermine stole, to keep her muff company, from Jimmy's "nice man," without even

the excuse this time of a small contribution from her young nephew.

But perhaps the fact that she had previously accepted a ring from the donor, in return for the promise to marry him at no very distant date, rendered further scruples unnecessary. — *Sunday Companion.*



CHRISTMAS IN MANY LANDS

Celebrated at Midnight

CHRISTMAS is still celebrated in the good old style in Russia. Previous to Christmas Day, there are active preparations for the event in every village. The peasants slaughter their best oxen and fattest pigs, then light bonfires and roast the meat to be eaten cold on Christmas Eve and Christmas Day. On the day before Christmas a strict fast is observed, not so much from reasons of piety, as from a desire to be in a fit condition to gourmandise to an unlimited extent on the morrow.

The first star which makes its appearance on Christmas Eve is believed to be the identical one which guided the Wise Men of the East to Bethlehem, and whoever sees it first is looked upon as a man living under a lucky star. The table is then laid for the feast, and a bundle of hay and straw placed in the centre. This is supposed to be symbolical of the manger in which Christ was born. Before the meal begins, each partaker draws a blade of straw from the bundle, and he who draws the longest blade is believed to be sure of the longest life. After this, the feast begins, and the peasants eat and drink all through the night and the next day in a manner which gives strangers a lasting impression of their capacity for gluttony.

At each house they receive some charitable gift, and, in return, throw quantities of oats over the donors. This is popularly believed to ensure the acquisition of riches by the man who is thus pelted with oats. The Christmas festivities are continued for several days, as long, in fact, as the resources of the peasants last, and then they return to their usual serf-like existence to save up their money for next Christmas.

The Rev. Dr. D. G. Howie, the well-known Palestine missionary, thus describes a Christmas celebration at midnight in a mountain village in Syria.

"From different directions, men, women and children, bearing their flickering hand-lanterns, wound their way through the muddy, slushy, crooked and dark lanes, under the falling sleet, and over a thin layer of snow already on the ground. Men and boys entered by a huge door in the middle of the south wall, and occupied the body of the church; women and girls entered by another south door, and stationed themselves in the western division of the immense building, which is screened from the other divisions by wooden lattice-work. All stood erect, motionless, in the cold, comfortable, and very dimly-lighted and too airy building.

"A few had umbrellas, but waterproofs were unknown, and consequently many of them must have stood in partly wet clothes. The question did occur to me at the time as to whether many British people could be drawn out of their beds, out of their homes, at that hour of night, in that kind of weather, fasting, to attend Christmas service amid such dismal, comfortable surroundings."—*Sel.*

An Arctic Christmas

Christmas Day spent in darkness, and a Christmas dinner without turkey and plum pudding! How could anybody possibly make merry under such circumstances? Yet one of the Polar expeditions which wintered in the Arctic regions a few years ago managed to enjoy the Christmas festival, though it was spent in so desolate a spot and in the depth of the long Polar night. The Christmas dinner consisted of "nake-gratin (a baked dish of fish, flour, eggs,