

## An Encounter With Santa Claus.

Strange Ride of Simeon Hardack, a Bachelor Who Didn't Believe in Christmas.

By CHARLES BATTELL LOOMIS

It wasn't that Simeon Hardack didn't believe in Santa Claus. I doubt if he had ever heard of him.

In his boyhood he had lived among very practical people who thought dry stories a waste of time, if they are not downright comical, and Santa Claus or no Santa Claus, on Christmas Day Simeon had been out to work just as hard as on any other day of the year.

You may ask whether Mr. Hardack did not have eyes. Could he not see the show windows in the toy stores, where there was always sure to be some representation of the cheerful saint?

But if you stop to think you will realize that Mr. Hardack had no eyes for toy shops, and when he saw a crowd around a window he said, "Senseless idlers," and hurried on his way.

No, Simeon Hardack, bachelor of 40, knew nothing of Santa Claus, and goes without saying that he did not care for children either.

He knew that all people had to be by being children. For his part, he had got through the painful necessity as soon as possible, and at last was just as dull and commonplace as he was ten, or twenty, or thirty years later.

Behold Mr. Hardack preparing for sleep on Christmas Eve. He lived in an old house downtown that was beset with old-fashioned fireplaces. But in his room in the old house, it being given up to lodgers.

Mr. Hardack had worked late at his office and he intended to go back to work next morning because, this being a workaday world, the only thing to do was to work and amass money, for the night cometh when no man may work—unless he be a burglar.

Mr. Hardack had a well developed sense of burglars. He had never seen one, and you may wonder how he had imagination enough to conceive of what he had not seen; but he had then read the accounts of their doings, had known men who had suffered losses due to their depredations, and he was firmly convinced that there were burglars, and so sure at his open fireplace he could form a especially a little room in the den that he was always meaning to read it up.

But to do so would cost money, and Simeon was no spendthrift. Why, he did not even utilize the fireplace as a good spot for a hearth fire. A good fire would keep him cozy and warm by wearing his overcoat until he had finished reading his evening paper? And then to bed with the overcoat taking the place of a blanket.

You do not know much of the habits of misers, you have not thought of it. Mr. Hardack must have stores of gold laid away in unexpected places in his room. It was not all gold, for some of it was silver, and some was in bills; at there were at least four places in the room that held treasure. He provided himself with warm and cheerful old age if he had been looking for any such foolish luxury.

And so this Christmas Eve Simeon Hardack read his paper, shivering at his greatcoat, and then putting at his tallow candles he undressed the dark and cold bed.

He had hardly covered himself with his coat before the moon came out and shivered his room and made him fish that it could be minted, which was really quite an exercise of imagination on his part. He rather liked the moonlight because he got it or nothing, but he often wished that rays were just a bit stronger so that he might save candles.

How many people whom Santa Claus sits really believe in him? I am afraid that they are so few in number that the saint would feel depressed if he were old.

But happily for him he seldom comes to speaking contact with his beneficiaries, and so he has come along year after year with his packs of good things and has fondly supposed that his coming is looked for by the whole earth.

I don't suppose he could have picked out a less likely place to visit than the room of Simeon Hardack. But no thought of anything save the bringing of happiness to all within the house came to Santa Claus; and he stopped his sleigh on the sloping roof, allowing it to rest on the southern slant, while the eight little fellows stamped and nudged on the northern incline, that is the usual practice on slanting roofs, as otherwise in his absence the sleigh might run away with the sleigh.

There is no doubt but that Santa Claus has a marvelous property of accommodating himself to small chimneys, in his way would be barred in countless instances; but the house in which Simeon lived had an ample chimney, and Santa stepped into it he said to his sleigh, quite as if they understood very word—and maybe they did:

"This reminds me of old times, my little fellows. There are crowds of children living here, and the old folks came from the country, and I dare say I'll find a tree already pretty well loaded with gifts. Well, I'll give them some things they can't get in modern stores, for all my things are made by hand and wanted to last."

The reindeer ate little mouthfuls of snow and butted each other playfully, and with a happy smile on his red face, Santa descended.

He stepped out upon the hearth and saw by the moonlight that the children must be in another room, for there was no one here but a man sound asleep.

No, not sound asleep, for as the somewhat heavy saint alighted on the hearth Simeon stirred and then sat up.

Simeon Hardack was a miser, but he was not a coward, and when he saw the fantastically dressed man on his hearth, he reached for the pistol that he always kept under his pillow and pointed it directly at the corpulent body of the good old fellow.

"Sleaze one step," said Simeon, "and I'll blow your head off."

But Santa Claus was no coward, either, and, not knowing the meaning of malice or uncharitableness, he simply smiled and said:

"It is one of the machine-made toys. Do not make them because they are really dangerous. Do you intend to give to your son?"

"Don't pretend to be out of your head, for that won't save you. Just drop that bag of plunder and come with me. I'll introduce you to a police officer in double quick time."

It is a well known fact that Santa Claus, among his other gifts, has hypnotic power, and now that the tone of Mr. Hardack showed that he was not joking, but actually meant to do bodily harm to the saint, old Santa did as he was bid, knowing that the power of the man would cease as soon as he willed it. He dropped the bag and two dolls fell face downward on the hearth as if they did not care to see the discomfiture of their kindly creator.

"You've been robbing toy shops. Where do you expect to dispose of the goods?" said Simeon in most insulting tones.

Santa Claus laughed as only he can laugh.

"Is it robbery to take from one's own warehouse? These are my toys, made by my good wife and me, and I hope to make many children happy with them. What have you done this Christmas to make your fellow men happy?"

"Come, now, no cant," said Simeon, still leveling the pistol at the breast of the old saint.

But Santa Claus gazed full in his eye and Simeon felt a strange compulsion on him to do as the other willed.

Santa Claus stood on the hearthstone and smiled at Simeon, the miser, and that hard man slowly let fall his arm, and at last laid the pistol on the bed.

Still gazing intently at him, Santa said suggestively:

"Where is the money that you are going to shower right and left among your fellow men?"

And Simeon said: "Some of it is behind the wall paper over there."

"Good," said Santa Claus, "this is the night you will need it. Go and get it."

Simeon walked over to the wall, and taking down a cheap lithograph from a nail he pressed on the wall paper and it broke and let his hand into a cavity, from which he drew a handful of silver and gold and a roll of bills.

"You have done well," said Santa Claus. "All these years you have been saving up this money that you might go with me to-night to add to the Christmas happiness of those whom I visit. I have no money and there are many among those I visit who need money more than toys. Is it not lucky that I found you?"

"Very lucky," said Simeon, under the hypnotic influence.

Santa Claus looked at him searchingly and he said:

"I suppose you know that I have three other hiding places for my money."

"I did not know it," said Santa Claus, rubbing his red cheeks delightedly, "but it pleases me. Only keep a little for yourself."

"Yes, I will keep enough, but I must give the other away. When shall we start?"

"As soon as you have collected it."

Simeon took down two other wretched chromos, and from behind them he took out hundreds of dollars.

"Good," said Santa Claus. "Now we must be going. It is a cold night. You will need to dress warmly."

When Simeon was dressing Santa Claus looked out of the window at the snow-covered roofs of the houses, glistening in the light of the Christmas moon.

## Christmas With the Kaiser

To see the Kaiser at Christmas, writes Wolf von Schierbrand, in Lippincott's (December), is to see a man who has shed all the pretensions of a demigod; one who has stepped down from his pedestal to become a good plain burgher, overflowing with the milk of human-kindness. "Every Christmas Eve, when early dusk gathers in a northern clime, wrapped in an ample cape mantle, wholly unattended and not easily recognisable, it is his custom to stroll through his park around the Neues Palais, where the boughs are laden with feathery snow, and then through Potsdam. His pockets are full of gold and silver pieces, and like another Santa Claus he distributes his bounty to the children and humbler folk he meets. He is surrounded—the men at the sentry-boxes, the park laborers and the white-haired gardeners in Sans-Souci; the crippled veteran and the sturdy beggar—each and every one receives his dole. Often he pays at Christmas debts of courtesy incurred during the year. To Baron van Lyncker, his marshall of the household, he sent a magnificent present (worth about 10,000 dols.), a chest of solid silver plate, in recognition of the extra and rather vexatious labors that official had had to perform during the year 1906, the year when the Crown Prince attained his majority. To Dr. von Leuthold, his body physician, he handed a fine gold repeater, set in precious stones and bearing the motto "Suaviter in modo, fortiter in re." This had reference to a past difference in opinion between the doctor and his imperial patient. In the royal household the Christmas festivities are conducted on an elaborate scale, and yet, we are told, in the same spirit which makes the day dear to the heart of all the German people."



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### CHRISTMAS IN NORWAY.

In the far-off land of Norway, Where the winter lingers late, And long for the singing birds and flowers The little children wait.

When at last the summer ripens, And the harvest is gathered in, Till their busy little hands have gleaned A generous sheaf of grain.

Through all the land the children In the golden fields remain, Till their busy little hands have gleaned A generous sheaf of grain.

All the stalks by the reapers forgotten They glean to the very least, And the birds flock north, south, east and west, For the children's offering.

And then through the frost-looked country There happens a wonderful thing: The birds flock north, south, east and west, For the children's offering.

Of a sudden, the day before Christmas, The twittering crowds arrive, And the birds flock north, south, east and west, For the children's offering.

They perch upon roof and gable, On porch and fence and tree, They flutter about the windows, And peep in curiously.

And meet the eyes of the children, Who eagerly looked out, With cheeks that bloom like roses red, And greet them with welcoming shout.

On the joyous Christmas morning, In front of every door, A tall pole, crowned with clustering grain, Is set the birds before.

And which are the happiest, truly It would be hard to tell; The birds who share in the Christmas cheer, Or the children who love them well.

How sweet that they should remember, With faith so full and sure, That the children's bounty awaited them The whole wide country o'er!

When this pretty story was told to me, By one who had helped to rear The rustling grain for the merry birds In Norway, many a year.

I thought that our little children Would like to know it, too. It seems to me so beautiful, So blessed a thing to do.

To take God's innocent creatures see In every child a friend, And on our faithful kindness So fearlessly depend.

Celia Thaxter.

### Glass Telegraph Poles.

At Grossalmerode, a town near Cassel, Germany, a factory has recently been established for the manufacture of glass telegraph and telephone poles.

The glass poles of which the poles are made is strengthened by interlacing and intertwining with strong wire threads.

One of the principal advantages of these poles, it is said, would be their use in tropical countries, where wooden poles are soon destroyed by the ravages of insects and where climatical influences are ruinous to wood.

The Imperial Post Department, which has control of the telegraph and telephone lines in Germany, has ordered the use of these glass poles on one of its tracts.—London Daily Graphic.

Instruction on the construction and operation of the turbine engine has been added to the course of the Stuyvesant High School, in New York City.

A turbine engine has been installed and is shown in operation beside an engine of the reciprocating type. The turbine is doing duty in generating electricity, as well as serving for demonstration purposes.

### THE KNEELING DEER.

A traveller through Canadian woods Was hurrying benighted: 'Twas nearly midnight, and the moon His lonely path lighted.

When suddenly a shadow passed, Along the footpath gliding; He paused and, with a low-bung bow Beheld an Indian hiding.

"Hush!" And he held his finger up, While through the umbrage stealing: "'Tis Christmas Eve! No watch to-night To see the wild deer kneeling."

The air was still; yet overhead The pines were softly singing; While glowed the moon, upon the snow Their silent shadows flinging.

Ah! we may say the legend old Was but an idle notion: A Cornish peasant's fancy wild, Transplanted o'er the ocean.

Yet on the first bright Christmas-eve, Around the lowly manger, The soft-eyed brute with angels gazed Upon the heavenly stranger.

We cannot know how far and deep Their mystic instinct reacheth: Nor what mute sense of Right and Love These poor dumb children teacheth.

But Love that can redeem and save, For evil, good returning, Can hold all creatures to its heart, The humblest never sparing.

Honor the voice that dares to speak, The cruel jest unheeding, For those who cannot speak themselves, A word of friendly pleading.

The trained elephant of India commences its career of usefulness at the age of twelve, and toils until about its eightieth year.

In proportion to its weight, a bird's wing is twenty times stronger than the average man's arm.

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