

"Young Folks Circle"

Where Uncle West Presides

MOTTO:

"The will is free;
Strong is the soul and wise and beautiful;
The seeds of God-like power are in us still;
God's are we, bards, saints, heroes, if
we will!"

—Matthew A nold.

HELP EACH OTHER

My dear Nephews and Nieces:—I would like to speak to you this week about brotherly and sisterly helpfulness. Once upon a time there was a girl who did lots of missionary work while sitting in a company of jolly youngsters before the cottage fire at night. Such stories as Sissie could tell, always ready to "help a fellow get his lessons," to give an opinion, and perhaps helping a stitch or two on the latest costume for dolly. When mother was sick once, it was Sissie who went around and heard all the prayers and tucked everybody in bed. When the boys were grown up and away from home, they often testified to the fact that the memory of Sissie's kind counsels of her sweet loving ways kept them many a time out of harm. And at last when they were husbands and fathers, their wives and children were happier and better just because of the lasting influence of the dear old days when Sissie made fireside fun so delightful and instructive; and the sisters, when they go out into the world and stand alone, are often saved from harm because of some kind and loyal brother who had been a true companion and who had faith that his sister would grow into a true and beautiful woman. It is not the things you do, it is the things that you have left undone that gives you a heart ache at the setting of the sun. So boys and girls do not put off or forget the little kindly actions to each other and to the dear father and mother, and write often to your own Uncle West. May your Christmas be a joyful one, and may every blessing come to you and yours.

Your own,

UNCLE WEST.

A BOY SCOUT REPUBLIC

Can boys manage their own affairs like men? The attempt is to be made by Boy Scouts on an estate at Wadhurst, in Sussex. The estate, which has been presented to the Scouts, contains a large house, farmstead, and buildings, and 100 acres of land, with accommodation for 200 boys.

They are to have a sort of republic, the affairs of the colony being managed by officers elected from among themselves. The boys will be divided into patrols of eight, each under its own leader, and each patrol will work a farm of five acres, ready stocked. The colony will have its own market, to which produce will be taken each day, and each patrol will keep its own accounts.

The boys will also be taught horsemanship, forestry, farm carpentry, baking, blacksmithing, and leather work. As to general conduct, the rules will be those ordinarily in force for the Boy Scouts. It will be interesting to see how the scheme works with a sense of serious personal responsibility borne by each boy.

THE INJUSTICE OF A GREAT NATION

The United States of America declare in their laws that all men are free and equal in their land. The statement is a mockery. Dr. Booker Washington, the most famous negro in the world, a native of America, when travelling by train, has either to ride in "the negro car" or hire a special carriage at great cost. The reason is that a law has been passed for the Southern States saying that a negro shall not travel in a white man's carriage. Dirty old carriages are kept for the black men, and Dr. Washington, one of the most cultured scholars in the land, whom President Roosevelt was proud to have as his guest at the White House, must ride in this way. To escape this insult he has just had to pay \$500 to travel in a special saloon carriage across Texas. Yet America is called the land of the free!

WHY WE PUT HOLLY IN OUR HOMES

The custom of decorating the inside of our houses at Christmas with holly,

mistletoe, and other evergreens is very ancient, and can be traced back to the old heathen festivals that took place at the same time of the year as we celebrate Christmas. At these festivals the temples used to be decorated with evergreens, and as one of the Scripture lessons usually read on Christmas Eve contained the passage from Isaiah, chapter 60, verse 13, "The glory of Lebanon shall come unto thee, the fir-tree, the pine-tree, and the box together; to beautify the place of My sanctuary," the practice of decorating the churches grew up. This, however, was much opposed at first, owing to the pagan custom, but gradually it got a firm hold, and at last even dwelling-houses were decorated.

WHY CHRISTMAS PRESENTS ARE CALLED BOXES

We always call a present given at Christmas a Christmas-box, whether it is really a box or not. In olden times alms-boxes were placed in the churches on Christmas Day to receive gifts of money for the benefit of the poor, and these gifts were distributed on the following day, which thus came to be called Boxing Day. Later, the watchmen, apprentices, and others used to go round from house to house collecting for their own benefit, and to receive the money-gifts they had little earthenware boxes. Ever since those times Christmas presents have been known as Christmas-boxes.

WHY THE WAITS PLAY IN THE NIGHT

It has long been a common custom for the waits and carol-singers to make their visits and give their musical performances in the middle of the night. The practice began with the carol-singers who sang their Christmas songs in the night in imitation of the heavenly choir who appeared to the shepherds at night and sang "Glory to God in the Highest." The waits were originally watchmen, and the word wait means a watchman, coming from a word that stood for "being awake." These watchmen, as they came round, used to sound the hours upon a pipe, and this they had to do to show that they were awake. Attached to the king's court were bands of these waits, or watchmen, who carried various instruments, and later many of the mayors of large cities kept their bands of waits. In course of time these waits became town musicians, and they found Christmas a good time to exercise their profession so as to reap a rich harvest. They followed the custom of the old watchmen and the carol-singers by playing in the night for a week or two before Christmas Day.

WHY WE HAVE PLUM PUDDING

Plum pudding and mince pies have only been made in their present form during the last two or three hundred years. It was in ancient times the practice for people to give one another at Christmas-time little cakes roughly shaped in the human form, and these represented the infant Jesus and His mother. These became more elaborate as time went on, and developed into a great Christmas pie made up of all kinds of things—chicken, eggs, spices, raisins, currants, sugar, candied peel, and so on. The pies were made in the supposed shape of the manger in which Jesus was laid. The various ingredients, coming, as many did, from the East, were said to represent the gifts of the Wise Men to Jesus. Later the pies were made in the more convenient round shape, and developed into our plum pudding and mince pies.

WHY CHILDREN HAVE CHRISTMAS TREES

The Christmas-tree was very little known in England before the coming of Prince Albert, the husband of Queen Victoria, who introduced the custom from Germany. It is supposed to have been derived from a custom of the ancient Egyptians, who used to deck their houses at this period of the year with branches of date-palm, their symbol of life triumphing over death. In Germany, far more than here, the trees are gaily illuminated with lighted candles, a practice that grew out of the custom of keeping a large candle alight at Christmas-time in the

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churches, to show that Jesus, the Light of the World, had come.

—Children's Magazine.

TALES FROM OLD FRENCH SCHOOL BOOKS

THE SEXTON AND THE LETTER

A man in a village, having received a letter from a distant friend, wanted to send a reply, but, unfortunately, he could not write. So he asked a neighbour what he should do.

"Go to the old sexton," said the neighbour. "He can write, and he often prepares letters for those who cannot use a pen."

The villager went to the sexton, explained his difficulty, and asked the old man to write a letter for him.

"I am sorry," said the sexton, "but my legs are too bad."

"Your legs!" replied the villager in astonishment; "but you do not write with your feet!"

"No," said the sexton; "but my writing is so bad that nobody but myself can read it, and so I always have to go with the letter to read it to those for whom it is intended. Now that my legs are so bad, it is impossible for me to travel, and so I cannot write your letter for you."

THE KING AND THE BOASTER

A certain count, who spent much time at court, boasted that he never sought favors of the king, and even if they were offered to him he should refuse them. The king, hearing of this, decided to put him to the test, to see if his boasting were genuine.

Taking the count aside one day in the palace, the king asked in a mysterious way if he knew Spanish.

"No, sire," replied the count eagerly; "but I will learn it at once if that will please your Majesty."

"Certainly," said the king, "I should advise you to learn it; and I may say that I think you will be very glad one day that you did learn it. I cannot say any more just now."

"Ah," thought the count, "the king wants to send me as ambassador to Spain. I will learn Spanish at once." And he set about it immediately, studying hard by night and day, until, at the end of three months, he was able to go to the king and say that he knew Spanish very well.

"Good!" replied the king. "Now you will be able to get pleasure from reading 'Don Quixote' in the original language!"

ÆSOP AND THE TRAVELLER

Æsop, the famous story-teller, was one day travelling along a road, when he was stopped by a man, who asked how long it would take to walk to a distant mill.

"You have only to walk," said Æsop, "and you will come there."

"I know that," answered the man; "but how long will it take me?"

Æsop appeared to be offended, and simply repeated the words he had just used.

"This man is an idiot," said the traveller. "I shall get nothing out of him." And he continued his way.

But a few minutes afterwards he heard someone calling him, and looking round, saw Æsop following.

"What do you want?" asked the traveller.

"I want to tell you that you will reach the mill in an hour and a half," replied the other.

"But why did you not tell me that at first?"

"Because," answered Æsop, "I wanted to see exactly how fast you walked."

THE MISER AND HIS PORTRAIT

A very rich man, who was also a great miser, wished to have his portrait painted, so he went to an artist, who agreed to paint it for a certain sum. The portrait was done and proved to be an excellent likeness; but the rich man grudged the money that he had agreed to pay, and, in order to get a reduction in the price, he pretended that the portrait was not at all like him.

The artist, however, would not sell for less than the sum originally agreed upon, and the miser told him that he could keep the portrait.

Thereupon the artist had the picture elaborately framed, and placed over the outside of his front door, with this inscription: "I am here because I do not pay my debts."

The rich man soon became the laughing-stock of the city, and at last he was compelled to go to the artist, and pay for the portrait in order to have it removed from its conspicuous position.

THE JUDGE AND THE WORKMAN

A workman having gone to the top of a church spire to repair the weather-cock, had the misfortune to fall to the ground. But he was not much hurt, for his fall was broken by a man passing below, who, sad to say, was killed on the spot.

The parents of this man hailed the workman before the judge, and insisted that he should be executed for killing their son. The judge wished to be just, and yet to satisfy all parties.

"You," he said to the workman, "must go and stand exactly where the unfortunate son of these parents was standing when you fell on him; and one of you," he said to the others, "may go to the top of the spire, and jump or fall upon the prisoner. In this way you will get your request, and will be the executioner."

Of course, this decision made the parents see the injustice of their demand, and the innocent cause of the trouble escaped.

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