robe around it. The robe fell to the ground, and there was revealed to the amazed bystanders a girl of about nine years with big dark eyes that looked calmly and yet appealingly at the staring group. The next moment Dave had set a yellow-haired boy of about five years down beside the girl.

"There you air!" said Dave, the stage-driver, "Got 'commodations for this lady an' gent, M'am Hickey?"
"Well, I'll make 'commodations for 'cm, ii I have to turn you out o' your bed to do it." said Ma'am Hickey as

bed to do it," said Ma'am Hickey, as she dropped to her knees before the little boy and took him in her arms, saying as she did so;
"Why, bless your heart an' soul, little

declare if it don't feel sweet to git a child into my arms once more An' whose boy are you, anyhow?"
Papa's," replied the boy, shyly, with
a slight quivering of his lips and an
attempt to release himself from Ma'am

Hickey's embrace. "An' where is papa, honey?"
"Here."

"Ma'am Hickey looked around toward the men as if expecting some of them to come forward and claim the child; but they too were looking child; but they too were looking around inquiringly as the crowd grew around inquiringly as the crowd grew in numbers, attracted by the news of the arrival of the stage. Noting the boy's quivering lips and half fright-ened look in the presence of all those strangers, his sister stepped toward him and patted his head gently with ber mittened hand, saying as she did so; There, there; don't you cry ddy. Sister will take care of you don't you cry.

Freddy. Sister will." yes, she will."
"Where did you little [folks come from?" asked Ma'am Hickey, rising to her feet with the little boy in her

... From Iowa, ma'am."

"Irom Iowa, ma am.
"Ioway!" exclaimed Ma'am Hickey.
"You don't ever mean to tell me that you have come all the way from Ioway to this place all by your lone selves

The girl nodded her head and said:
"Yes, we did. We had a letter to
the conductors on the trains stelling them where we were going, and we got along all right; didn't we, Freddy?" The little boy nodded his head sol-emnly, [too much awed by his strange

surroundings to speak.
"Well, if that don't beat anything ever heard of!" exclaimed Ma'am lickey. "If I'd been your ma you

Hickey. "If I'd been wouldn't have done it!"

The little girl kept looking into the faces of the men who crowded about

tuem, and said:
"I don't see my papa anywhere. He said that he would be here when the stage got here with us; but I don't see him at all."

"What is your papa's name, deary?"
"Richard Miller."

"Richard Miller,"
The men looked at each other blankly. Some of them opened and closed their mouths without uttering a sound. Big "Missouri Dan", uttered an exclamation under his breath. Ma'am Hickey held up one finger warmingly. Then she stooped and kissed the little girl on the brow, and said gently.

and said gently:
"You came right into the house with

of affairs! To think of them poor little tots trailin' 'way out here from back in Ioway only to find their daddy a day in Ioway only to find they down things turns his grave! Cur'us how things turns

What's to be done ?" asked a long, lank, red whiskered man called "Cap."
"Shore enough," drawled out an elderly man who had been chewing the end of his long gray mustache reflect-

"I move that we go over to my shack an' talk the matter over," said Big Dan; and, without waiting for his motion to be voted upon, he started toward his cabin, a small log affair a short distance around the rocky road. The men around the post-office followed Big Dan, and, when they were in his Big Dan, and, when they were in his cabin, seated on benches or nail kegs or sprawling on buffalo robes in front of the fire in the hig over freedom. the fire in the big open fireplace, one

of the men said:
"What does all this mean, anyhow? You know that I've just come down from Mount Baldy, an' all this is Greek

"Well, it's just this a-way," replied Dan. "Three days ago a man come into camp on foot from over towards Roarin' Fork. He was that sick when he got Fork. He was that sick when he got here he could hardly speak, an' 'bout all we got out o' him was that his name was Miller. Pneumonia had set in mighty hard, an' in less than two hours after he got here he couldn't speak at all, an' he didn't live twelve hours. We laid him under that little clump o' all, an' he didn't live twelve hours. We laid him under that little clump opines down near the bend in the Singin' River not ten hours ago; an' now here in comes the stage with that boy an gal, ev'dently the prop'ty o' this same Miller, who ain't here to meet'em, an' who won't ever meet 'em in this world. It goes without sayin' that they jain't got no ma. If they had, she'd never let'em come trailin' off out here all by theirselves. It's mighty tough on 'em.'

theirselves. It's mighty tough on 'em.'
"That's right," agreed the man
called Cap. "I'm old an' tough as called Cap. "I'm old an' tough as ever they make 'em, but I ain't forgot my own childhood so fur as not to 'preciate just how them pore little young uns will feel when they reelize the

sitocation. I feel fer 'em.'
"So do I," said a stalw said a stalwart fellow of about thirty five years. "I've got a couple o' little folks o' my own back East, an' that boy reminds me a sight

o' my own little chap."

The men were still discussing the atrange and sad occurrence, and the

that an aunt of hers was to come on from California an' be with 'em this inter, an' their pa wrote that he would likely go on to California in the spring pore man! He's gone on now to country that's forder away than that!

She wiped her eyes on the back of

hand before adding:
"It jest about broke my heart to near them two pore little things talkin about Christmas, an' wonderin' what their pa would have for 'em, while i was undressin' 'em for bed. An' I made up my mind that they shouldn't know a thing about what has happened until after Christmas; an', what's more, some o' you men kin jest stretch your long legs hoofin' it over to Crystal 'em some toys an' things to make good my promise to 'em that if they hung up their stockin's Christmas eve they'd find 'em full next morin'. Now you boys remember that mum is the world in regard to their pa. Leave it to me to pacify 'em in regard to his not comin' for 'em. They're the cunnin'est little things I ever saw, an' it's jest too terrible that this trouble

has had to befall 'em!"
When good Ma'am Hickey had gone back to the hotel, Big Dan slapped his great rough palms together and said: I tell you what, boys! Let's give them two little unfortinits a jolly good Christmas! I'm fairly sp'ilin' for some

Christmas! I'm farry spill in los one thin' to do, an' I'll hoof it over to Crystal City an' git a lot o' Christmas gincracks for 'em."

"I'll keep you company," said Joe Burke, the man who had two little ones of his own back East. "Travelin' on snow-shoes over the mountain passes at this time o' the year is ruther danger-ous, an' it's not best to start out on a Then I guess I

about what would please the youngsters than you would, Dan." "I ain't ever took occasion to mention it before, but I happen to know a little about what children like, my own self, seein' as I have had two o' my own," replied Big Dan. "They both died the same week. It happened nearly forty years ago, but those two nearly forty years ago, but those two little wayfarers stragglin' into camp this way brings it all back to me.' No one in the camp had ever heard Big Dan speak so solemnly, and there

was silence in the room when he added: " I reckon I know enough about chil-

dren to know that a big dool with these takes the fancy of a little gal, an' that a boy alius likes somethin' that'll make a racket. But I'll be glad o' your comp'ny, Joe."

Ma'am Hickey appeared again be-

fore the conference came to an end.

"They're cuddled up in bed in each other's arms, cheek and cheek, the pore little dears, she said. I pacified 'em in regard to their pa without tellin' any actual fib, an' they went to sleep content. The little boy's tongue went like a trip hammer when he finally got it unloosened, and he jabbered away mough. But most he talked about was Christmas. He's set his heart on a steam-engine that will go 'choo, choo, choo, 'an' if you boys can find such a thing in Crystal City, you buy it an ieten it along with you, an' I'll foot the bill. The little girl is doll-crazy, like most little girls, so you must get her "You came right into the house with me, little folks. I'll get you a real nice hot supper, an' then I think you'd best go right to bed after your long ride."

When the cabin door had closed behind them, Big Dan said to the miners around him:

"Weil, if this ain't what I call a state of affairs! To think of them poor little

"The tree?" said one of the men, inquiringly.

"Yes, sir; the tree! Of course them little folks must have a tree. They say they want one, an' why shouldn't they have it, with the finest Christmas trees in the world right at hand here in the

mountains?"

"Where you goin' to have the tree,
I'd like to know?" said a burly miner.

"In the hall over the post-office."

"Well, if you ain't plannin' a reg'lar

jamboree!"
"Course I am!" replid Ma'am
Hickey, "Got any objections?"
"Bt the keep 'em to yourself if you
have," said Big Dan. "For what
Ma'am Hickey an' them two little

youngsters says—goes."
"That settles it," said Ma'am Hickey, with a laugh.
Crystal City was a long distance from Singing River, and the mountain trails were hard and dangerous to travel at that time of the year. The stage would that time of the year. The stage would not make another trip until after Christmas, and it might be a month before it returned after it left the camp.

Big Dan and Joe Burke set off at derivers the control of the control

daybreak the morning after the arrival of the two little wayfarers. The men had "chipped in" for the purchase of "gineracks" for the tree, and they had been so generaus that Big Dan said just before he started for Crystal

City: We'll have to have the biggest pine we kin git for the tree. You chaps have it all set up in the hall by the time we git back."

"You sure you got that list o' things I wrote down for you?" asked Ma'am Hickey. "Men ain't got any kind of a mem'ry when it comes to shoppin'."

Hickey. "Men ain a growth street of the list right here in this pocket," replied Dan, patting his pocket," replied Dan, patting his pocket. "If we have good luck said:

"Why, papa!" "An' that's jest who it was! The chil-

may tree at Singing River is so much more interesting than any account I could give of it, that I think it best to let her tell about it in her own way :

"You see Big Dan an' Joe Burke got back all right the middle of the afteroon the day before Christmas. They ooked like a pair o' pack peddlers, an' hey were about fagged out, for they had a hard time of it pullin' up ver the mountain trails in a snow-form. Joe said he didn't think he ould have dragged himself another tile for love nor money. He had two dg turkeys on his back besides a great of other things. "Well, the men in the camp had

heen busy, too. They had cut a big pine an' set it up in the hall over the post-office, an' the way they had c'rated the hall with evergreen was beautiful. You could't see an inch of the ugly bare logs nor of the bare rafters. They set to an' scrubbed the loor an' washed the winders, an' strung up a lot o' red, white, and blue strung up a lot o' red, white, and blue buntin' I happened to have in the house, an' I tell you the little old hall did look scrumptious. I kep' the children in the kitchen with me, where I was makin' pies an' cakes an' doughnuts most o' the time. I give 'em dough to myss with an' let' om versue. dough to muss with, an' let 'em scrape cake-dish an' tried to keep interested all the time, so they wouldn't ask about their pa.

"When Big Dan an' Joe got back the other men had a great time riggin' up the tree. We was afeerd they wouldn't ne tree. we was aftered they wouldn't be able to buy Christmas-tree candles a Crystal City; but, my land! they not about ten dozen of 'em, an' no end'tinsel an' shiny balls, an' things to hang on the tree, an' a lot o' little flags to stick on among the evergreen dec'rations. We had no end o' common taller candles on hand, an' the men were perfectly reckless with 'em. I reckon they put as many as two hun dred of 'em up around the room. An' what did they do but go an' rig Big Dan up a Santy Claus! They wrapped ban up a Santy Claus! They wrapped him up in a big bearskin one o' the boys had, an' put about a quarto' flour on his long, bushy whiskers to whiten head, and he did look for all the world like Santy his own self. Yes; an' he had a string o' sleigh-bells they

got at the stage office stable; an' them boys ackshully cut a hole in the roof so Santa Claus could come down through it! La, if you want things carried through regardless, you let a lot o' Rocky Mountain boys take in hand. They won't stop at nothin,' I reckoned they'd h'isted off the bull roof, if it had been off the hull roof if it had been necessary to make the appearance of Santy sary to make the appearance of Santy true to life, Such fun as the boys had over it all! An' of all the capers they cut up! Seemed like they was all boys once more! Me an' Ann Dickey an' Mary Ann Morris were the only women in the camp ap' we had on. Mind you, there was nt a child in camp ast them two pore little orphans, an' ail that fuss was on their account. If you think rough miner boys can't the kindest of hearts, you just remember that. Every man seemed to be trying to outdo the others in doin' somethin' for them little folks.

seen them children when the time come for 'em to go up to the hall an' see their tree! Little Freddy he give a yell o' joy that most split our ears, an' he jest to go up to the hall an' see their tree! Little Freddy he give a yell o' joy that most split our ears, an' he jest the children when the hall an' see their tree! Little Freddy he give a yell o' joy that most split our ears, an' he jest the children when the time come indea so universal, an appeal so irresisting ble, as the cradle of infancy. From a purely human point of view, the Nativity is one of the great master strokes which make Christianity, as a human system, an indea so universal, an appeal so irresisting ble, as the cradle of infancy. From a purely human point of view, the Nativity is one of the great master strokes which make Christianity, as a human system, "Well, I jest wisht you could have sister kep' sayin,' 'How lovely it is! Oh, isn't it beautiful?' Then Freddy he screeches out: "Oh, there's my choo-choo engine! Goody! An' how little Elsie's eyes did shine when she saw no less than three dolls on the tree for herself! There saw no less than three dons on the tree for herself! There was enough stuff on that tree for a hull Sunday school, for the men had been that reckless in sendin' to Crystal City for things.

sendin' to Crystal City for things.

"Then I wisht you could have seen those children when Big Dan come in all rigged up as Santy Claus! That was the cap-sheaf o' the hull proceedin's! First we heard his bells outside, an' him callin out, 'Whoa, there!' like as if he was talkin' to his reindeers. Then he clim up the ladder the boys had set outside, an presently down he come outside, an presently down he come through the hole in the roof. I jest thought little Feed's eyes would pop out o' his head when that part o' the show come off! An' what fun there was snow come on: All when around givin' the when old Santy went around givin' the boys all sorts of ridiculous presents! He give old Tim Thorpe a tiny chiny He give old Tim Thorpe a tiny chiny doll, an' big Jack Ross a jumpin-jack, an Ben Anderson a set o' little pewber dishes; an' he fetched me a great big old pipe, when they knowed I hated the very sight o' one. I tell you, it was

"Well, the things had all been distributed, an' the children were loaded down with presents, an' me an' the two other women were about to go down stairs to take up the supper, when the door of the hall opened, and a strange man stepped in. When he saw the children he give a kind of a little outers, an' the next minute he was down on his kneen before 'em, with an arm around each child, an' he was kissin' first one an' then the other. We all jest stared at each other when little Elsie clapped her hands together aud said: "Well, the things had all been dis-

pocket," replied Dan, patting his broad chest. "If we have good luck we'll be back by noon day after to-morrow, and that night is Christmas eve, so row, and that he child night is Christmas eve, so row, and that he child night is Christmas eve, so row, and that he child night is Christmas eve, so row, and that he child night is Christmas eve, so row, and that night is Christmas eve, so row, and that he child night is Christmas eve, so row, and that night is Christmas eve, so row as a cousin of the hall this cousin dren's pa. It seemed that the could not refrain from shedding dren's pa. It seemed that this cousin dren's pa. It

the wind was roarin' an' howlin' is the canon an' up an' down the Singin' River, an' the sleet was dashin' ag'in' the window lights; but that jest made it seem more cheery an' comfortable in the cabin, with a rearin' fire o' pine knots in the big fireplace at one end o the cabin, an' the tea kettle singing on my big shinin' stove on the other end. Mr. Miller he sat between the two children, an' he'd hug an' kiss 'em between times. We made him stay two between times. We made him stay two whole weeks in Singin' River to rest up git real well, an' then a hull passe he boys went with him to get the hildren home. The boys rigged up sled, an' tuk turns drawin' Elsie an' Freddy over the trails an' away up over Red Bird Mountain. I recken it was a ride they won't ever forgit; an, none of us that were there will ever in this world forgit that Christmas on the Singin' River."—J. L. Harbour in St.

#### THE ORIGIN OF THE CRIB.

It is fitting that we should owe the most beautiful of Christmas devotions to Saint Francis of Assisi, the brown robed medicant whose passage the hills and valleys of Umbria has left a golden memory in the heart of the world for seven hundred years. He was the apostle of simplicity, this gentle saint who could speak so wisely to his little brothers, the birds, who could learn such wonderful lessons from his little friends, the fishes. He found God everywhere and saw His likeness in everything. He sanctified the common-place, seeing the symbol of the Creator in the least of His works, blessing the beasts; praising God in the flowers, loving every created thing.

Is it any wonder that such a man should have been seized at once with the idea of the human beauty of the Incarnation? Is it any wonder that he on his long, bushy whiskers to whiten should have seen in the Nativity, not 'em, an' they put a big fur cap on his the coming of the King, not the unspeakable mystery of the Redemption but the birth of a Babe in Bethlehem Saint Francis may not have originated the devotion of the Crib-it is one of those beautiful heart growths by which Christianity has nourished the soul from the beginning but he at least posularized it in Italy. Christmas was his spiritual holiday. It was the feast of love, and Saint Francis is the world's great preacher of the love of God. His brothers asked him one day if it right to eat meat on Christmas when the feast fell on Friday. " Assuredly," answered Francis, he of all saints the closest to the Passion, he of the Stigmata—" assuredly. I would even wish that princes and great ones of the earth women in the camp, an' we had our strewed the country and the highways hands full gittin' up the Christmas supper we intended havin' after the tree. birds and the beasts of the field should be sho have their share in so great a feast."

And he began to consider how he should bring the Christmas tide near to

the hearts and vivid to the imagination of the peasant folk of his country. It was only a genius, one whose mind was as quick as his heart in the service of his Master, who could have hit upon an idea so universal, an appeal so irresisti

once so bold and so beautifut, so awith and so winning?
Saint Francis saw the possibilities of increased devotion to his dear Master that would follow the emphasizing, the humanizing, of this idea. He determined to have a great Christmas festa, of which the renown should spread through the length and breadth of Italy.

He was in Rome—it was already close He was in Rome-it was already close to the end of the year 1223-and going to the end of the year 1223—and going to the Holy Father, he craved leave to go to Grecio to celebrate the birth of the Saviour with his brethren, to gather together the populace from all the neighboring hill towns and to make the underlying mercy and love of the Incarnation so patent to all that no heart in Italy should be able to resist it. With the Pontiff's blessing and Godspeed, he started forth, the joy of with the Pontiff's blessing and God-speed, he started forth, the joy of Christmas already singing in his heart. It was the vigil of the feast before he arrived in Grecio. He had conveyed minute instructions to his good friend, Gjoyanni Velita, and he found every Giovanni Velita, and he found every thing in readiness in accordance with his pious plans. An altar had been builded in the open air. A skilful craft-man among the brown-robed brothers had fashioned a crib, and grouped around it the ox, the ass, everything as the evangelists had described it

tradition had pictured it in the stable of Bethlehem. The shrine was in the heart of a wood and at midnight the Friars Minor led thence a strange company of mountaineers and peasants, awed and silent, who lighted they way awed and silent, who ingited they way through the black aisles of the forest with flickering torches. As they pro-ceeded they broke the mysterious sil-ence with song, repeating over and over again the haunting verses of the

notel part of the building with her apron over her head.

"What's that you say, Dave?" she called out loudly and heartily.

"I say I've fetched you a kind of a queer cargo. You jut come out an' see if I hain't."

He jumped down irom his high driver's seat and flung open the stage door as Ma'am Hickey ama over to the edge of the roadway. Reaching into the coach, Dave picked up what appeared to be a round builden on the back seat, and set it out in the snow with a buffalo and they are orphans until after too be a round builden of the robe around it. The robe fell to the cried by turns, kind o' hystericky like, over the children.

"We did have the best time at the supper! A storm had come up, an' the wind was roarin' an' howlin' in the canon an' up an' down the Singin' Riv. canon an' up an' down the Singin' Riv. for very eastey of devotion. "His voice taltered as if he had tasted a delicious honey," says one who writes of him, "or hend a hidden melody the notes of which he wished to catch. The Cavaliere Giovanni Velita, a trust worthy man who had abandoned the career of arms the better to serve Jesus Christ, affirmed on oath that he saw a child seemingly asleep over whom our suit bent, covering him with kisses and as it were awakening The straw which the apparition

touched is credited with afterwards working several miraculous cures. chapel was built on the site of this first Italian crib after the death of St. Francis.—Teresa Beatrice O'Hare in Rosary Magazine.

One of the good things one learns by absence from friends is seeing the folly of being huffed and affronted by trifles. Lord Edward Fitzgerald.

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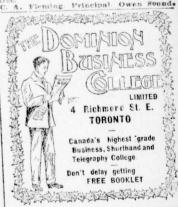
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rmer, an' t supper. ched you esed to a y-looking oor of the