

STREET NEWS

CHRISTMAS WITH THE NEWSBOYS

By J. A. EDGERTON

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WERE you ever a newsboy? Well, don't get offended. Hundreds of other good people have been, among them governors, congressmen, merchants, lawyers, bankers and even ministers. General Phil Sheridan was once a newsboy and was proud of the fact. It is not related that he "shot craps" and slept in alleyways, but he probably did. He would not have been a full-fledged newsboy otherwise, not in New York, at any rate, and that was where he sold "papes." Some people who got their start yelling "Uxtry!" do not want the fact mentioned now that they have become judges and things like that, but others just as high up in the world are not so particular. Abe Lincoln never concealed the fact that he split rails and clerked in a store. Nor is it related that Garfield was ever ashamed of having driven mules on a towpath. Mark Twain never made any bones of telling that he had been a printer's devil and cub pilot. It is not related that Bobbie Burns ever denied having been a plowman, that Aesop ever tried to crawl out of having been a slave or that the Man of Nazareth ever sought to refuse the story that he was born in a manger. If so, why should anybody blush at having sold papers? Especially so when experience proves that there are few better schools for developing keenness, independence and manliness. Look at the next little chap from whom you buy a paper, for he may be president some day.

New York has over 2,000 newsies. They are of all nationalities, sizes and



THE EVENT OF THE YEAR IS THE CHRISTMAS DINNER.

degrees of dirtiness. Some of them have no nationality or size to speak of, but they are all dirty. That is one of the sacred privileges of boyhood. Some of the deeper shades of dirt have faded off the hands and faces of the lads in the Newsboys' home situated near Newspaper row in New York. The gamins who lodge there are required to wash occasionally and to take a bath once a week. Somehow the little chaps rather like the novel experience. Maybe it is the shower bath that reconciles them. And then they have a chance to douse each other and do athletic stunts. The average boy has no objection to water as such provided he can get his whole body in it. He will even run off and take the chance of a licking to go swimming. It is the application of water to his hands and face that galls his proud spirit.

There are various newsboys' homes in the larger cities of the country, but it is believed that the New York institution is the parent one. It has been in existence something over half a century. It has reclaimed numberless waifs, returned runaway lads to their parents, besides furnishing a home for regiments of boys that had no other shelter. Meals, and of a good, substantial sort at that, may be had for 5 cents, while beds range all the way from 5 to 15 cents. The fifteen

cent cots are in a room to themselves that the boys call "the Waldorf." It is a proud day when an urban graduate into this exclusive bunch.

The newsboys' lodging house has an odd savings bank into which the occupants can drop their pennies. It consists of a number of numbered and locked boxes with slits in the top, and here the lads deposit their small earnings, and if the amount grows sufficiently large it is taken out and placed in some nearby savings bank. There have been a few accounts that grew to a thousand dollars or more, but these were not from regular newsboys, but from those who had graduated into driving paper wagons or some similar occupation. The urchins, for the most part, draw out their earnings to spend them on the galleries at the Bowery theaters, at Coney Island or at "crap shooting." There are about 180 boys in the home at one time. Only those are lodged that have no homes of their own.

One of the things that make the place attractive to the lads is the gymnasium. Here are all the usual athletic paraphernalia, bars, clubs and the like. The sport that is liked best by the gamins, however, is boxing. Those who don the gloves have to carry out the game according to rules, as the idea of a "square deal" in sport is quite well developed among these small Americans. It would be imagined that they have enough fighting on the streets without resorting to prize fights, but their life is such a struggle that it develops that side of their nature to the full.

The event of the year at the home, however, is the Christmas dinner. The boys themselves assist in preparing this feast. In leisure hours they pare potatoes, turnips, onions and what not, help get the other vegetables ready and generally make themselves useful. They regard it as their affair and therefore take a pride in performing what otherwise would be irksome tasks. They enter into these duties with the same spirit that they would display at a game of craps or a fight.

There are about 600 urchins fed in the home each Christmas, and it is safe to say that no feast in the land is more enjoyed. Table etiquette may not be highly developed, knives, forks and spoons may not be used in just the proper ways, fingers being more frequently employed, and it is barely possible that the boys "swipe" what they cannot eat, but at any rate they are enthusiastic. They may reach for everything in sight, eat the pie first, grab joints of turkey in both hands, throw bones at the small diners across the room and use their well-developed tungs in a manner that starts the bolts in the steel framework of the building, but all these little idiosyncrasies only indicate that they are having the time of their lives. It is related that on one occasion a large and succulent pie was placed before each gamin and that in about two minutes most of those pies had disappeared. When a "cop" present made a strenuous talk about pastry, the pies were pulled out from under tattered coats, where they had been stowed for future emergencies. The hard life of the street does not tend to

bring out a very fine sense of "meum et tunc" and the divine right of property. In fact, it must be admitted that many of the boys will steal on occasion, but considering the life they lead, who can wonder? There is no objection to the lads filling their not too clean pockets with the remains of the feast, however, and they religiously avail themselves of this privilege. It is a point of etiquette for an indigent guest to carry away what he cannot devour, and these little chaps are the Indians of the street.

But how do they enjoy that Christmas dinner? No epicure ever got more delight out of an educated but satiated appetite than do the New York gamins out of their turkey, potatoes swimming in gravy, cranberry sauce and mince pies.

Long before the hour for the spread they gather about the doors, lighting for pipes, like a hungry bunch of English sparrows over a worm. How they scramble, leap and swarm up the stairways, slide for their places and get busy filling the smoking stoves with their pipes. Other folks who witness the spectacle laugh with their mouths and weep with their eyes to see it. It is doubtful if any other scene in life contains so much of both the grotesque and pathetic.

Outside of the spread at the home, many of the papers often arrange feasts for the urchins who sell "papes." Mr. Randolph Guggenheimer fills a large collection of empty newsboy stomachs on Washington's birthday.



BOXING IN THE GYMNASIUM.

THE Christmas Backlog

By Frank H. Sweet



"POMP"

OMP! O-o, Pomp, Pomp-ey!" The call went through the quarters, through the shadowy live oaks beyond, under whose moss-draped branches the ground was dim even at midday, and on into the cypress swamp to a black pool over which a black boy was crouching. As the call came to him, mellowed by distance, he raised his head a little and chuckled, then resumed his work, which was the driving of a large plug into the end of an immense log submerged in the water.

"O-o-o, Pomp! Massa gwine scorch you if you ain't hurry quick!" came the voice more sharply. "He say you gettin' triflin' an' no count."

The stone was poised for an instant, then descended with two or three deliberate taps which completed the work. Pomp examined the end of the log critically. The plug was driven in level with the rest of the wood, so that to an average observer there was no sign that it had been tampered with. Even Pomp seemed satisfied, for he chuckled again and started back in a leisurely way toward the quarters.

As he passed among the cabins on his way to the big house he met a

rou're a trusty enough fellow in other ways, you're a past master at shirking when it comes to work. And through all these six weeks you have made that backlog bear the burden of your misdeeds. Even a lazy boy ought to cut a log in half a day."

"It's—it's in de cypress swamp now, massa."

"Well, I sent Tom straight to the swamp after you," looking at him keenly. "How did you miss him?"

"Reckon we both come t'other way 'bout massa, an' didn't see neither of us," Pomp answered frankly. "But I 'low I better hurry right back an' find dat Tom. He's such a scare body he won't boller you in de swamp all night an' get lost an' mebbe break his voice. I go right now."

"No, I think you'd better stay here, Pomp," Colonel Belknap said blandly. "Now that I've caught you I shall keep you. I'm going to lock you into the harness room and keep you there until the last buckle is cleaned and polished. Once you get out of my sight I can't expect to see you again until every string on your banjo is broken and the last possum in the woods caught."

Pomp showed his teeth; then his face sobered. "Don't you believe dat, massa," he said earnestly. "Mebbe I'st be leaved an' quick heeled, but I ain't no runabout dat don't ear' for his own massa, de best in de world." Just soon dat backlog burns out I's gwine be ready for work, an' you ain't need no more."

"Well, I hope you will, Pomp," mused slowly. "Last Christmas the backlog



TWICE POMP CAME BACK WITH HIS ARMS FULL.

down or more stalwart young fellows. They grinned at sight of Pomp. "So Tom done foun' you!" one of them jeered. "You better run 'long faster 'n dat, for massa ben 'quire for you a plumb hour."

"Dat show my 'portance," said Pomp composedly. "But you mistake 'bout Tom findin' me. He down there yet an' shoutin' hissef' 'ho-se. I come roun' 'bout way, so be ain't see me. Exercise good for Tom, an' he ain't dar' come back till he find me. An', oh, say, Mose! De backlog's ready. De top jes' touch out de water. Dat show it soak plumb smack all de way 'trow. Dat log burn two whole weeks shore."

"Huh! Huh!" scoffed several of the hands. "Who ever hear backlog burn over one week?"

"Plenty people gwine hear it dis year," declared Pomp. "You know we hab holiday jes' long 's de backlog burn."

Colonel Belknap was on his veranda smoking when Pomp approached him, cap in hand.

"Hello, you black rascal!" he said explosively. "So you're here at last. Why didn't you come when Tom first called you?"

"Call me?" innocently. "I declar I ain't seen Tom dis day. Where he call me at?"

"Everywhere. I imagine," yelled. "I've been hearing his voice yelling your name for the last hour, and loud enough to be heard two miles off. Where have you been?"

"Workin' at de backlog, massa. You know you to!"

"Yes, told you six weeks ago that you might set the backlog because, though

seventh day. Even the greenest, most cross grained log of black oak wouldn't be apt to burn that long behind a good fire. It struck me the log might have been soaking in water for some time. Do you think your log will burn a week, Pomp?"

"Why-er-yes, massa, I spects it will," Pomp confessed, "an'-an' mebbe a little more. But you said las' year dat you liked it 't'ed it much as we all."

"So I did, Pomp, and I hope the log will burn its full week, and I shall not ask any of you to do a hand turn of work except the necessary chores until it burns out. But I hope on the Monday after the holidays you will be ready to strike that railroad work heartily. What do the boys think of it?"

"'Bout you hirin' us out to dig on de new railroad bed, massa? Well, I reckon dey favors it a heap. Massa Ben Cudder, on de rubber plantation, gwine hire out 500 han's to de railroad boss."

"So I hear. But that will take every man, woman and child on his plantation who is strong enough to lift a shovel. I don't quite like that. I shall only hire out the able-bodied men

for whom I have no work on the plantation just now, and some of them need go against his will. I think we can muster about 300. Pomp, and I want you all to feel it will be partly for your own interest. Half the money I receive from the railroad will be used in rebuilding the cabins at the quarters. I hope you will be able to make your log burn out its full week and that you will be ready for the contract work the following Monday. This contract means a"— He stopped abruptly and turned away, apparently forgetful of his threat to lock Pomp in the harness room.

But Pomp had no intention of benefiting by the omission. As he went chuckling toward the room his thoughts were on the absurdity of the log burning out in one week. "If he'd done said 'bout two Mondays ahead he'd come closer," he muttered gleefully. "Jes' a week ain't make no difference 'bout de railroad work, an' ob co'se dem cabins is plenty good for we all to sleep in."

Five evenings later most of the negroes were gathered at the big house, picking their banjos, singing, laughing and gorging themselves on the good things that were spread out lavishly for them. Many were in the living room, in which was the huge fireplace, with its backlog, not yet a quarter burned. From time to time the negroes looked at it wonderingly and made comments and spoke the name of Pomp with added respect.

Colonel Belknap, too, glanced frequently at the log, but in his glances were trouble and apprehension. It was an open Christmas, and the great blaze in the fireplace made it necessary to throw wide the doors and windows. Among the negroes who lingered about the open doorway was a slim, furtive eyed fellow, a visitor from the Cudder plantation.

"You shorely did fin' a good backlog when you hunted dat chunk," he said to Pomp. "I reckon it gwine las' 'bout two more weeks."

"I reckon," Pomp acquiesced innocently. He did not like the fellow. "An' you all ain't gwine work on de railroad till it burns out?"

"Dat's right," Pomp said, and he could not forbear adding, "You Cudder boys gwine start in dis nex' Monday, I hear."

The fellow scowled. "Dat's nat'ral," he retorted. "We all ain't scared to work, an' sides, it's you Belknap boys dat's gwine to do de diggin'." I hear your massa in tight place, an' if he ain't raise money soon somethin' gwine be sold. I 'low dat 'bout fifty ob you black boys be sold down de river, an' co'se it gwine be de fust ones. He, Pomp an' Mose. He, he!"

"Look heah, you story teller," heza Pomp botly, but the fellow sniggered. "It's all de trufe," he declared. "I hear Massa Cudder say so hissef'. If your fin' massa ain't got dis railroad work, somethin' gwine be sold up sure. An' co'se he ain't got de work, for de railroad boss say he take nobody else's start in on Monday, an' your big ol' massa ain't able to start you in till dat log burn out. He, he! You do mighty good job for Massa Cudder, Pomp, when you fin' dat log. You gib him all de railroad work. Your massa!"

His sentence was suddenly cut short, for Pomp had him by the shoulders and sent him spinning down the steps. "Dat Cudder done sent him here to say roun'," muttered Pomp. "Dey's bofe dat mean. I seed it in de feller's eyes."

Pomp went straight to Colonel Belknap, who was standing by a window, looking gloomily out at the darkness. "You like for we all to start on de railroad work Monday, massa?" he asked in a low voice.

"Can't do it, Pomp," a little drearily. "The boys won't consent till the log burns out, and that is good for another week at least."

"I d'know 'bout dat, massa," Pomp whispered confidentially. "You see, logs like dat fuss an' fuss till dey's warm an' dry all de way 'trough, den dey's flare up quick like powder. I spects dat log gwine burn out 'fore Monday."

That night, after the whole house was asleep, Pomp raised a window and stepped into the living room softly. An hour was spent at the fireplace, where the great log smoldered dully. Twice Pomp went to the window and came back with his arms full. Then he stole out, closing the window noiselessly behind him. An hour later there was such a roaring and crackling in the great fireplace as to waken several of the house servants and bring them and Colonel Belknap into the room. The fireplace was a lurid mass of roaring flames.

"Well, well!" Colonel Belknap ejaculated at length, with a long breath. "Pomp was right about its starting up like powder. But why?"

Monday morning 300 stalwart negroes filed away from the Belknap plantation toward the new railroad where work was to begin. But it was not until the work was completed and all the gloom gone from Colonel Belknap's face that one day he caught Pomp by himself and collared him. "Now, you young rascal," he said, "tell me about that backlog."

"Well, den," Pomp said desperately, as he found he could not escape, "I jes' had a holler in de log full ob water, wid twenty holes all roun' for de water to seep 'trough an' keep 'tings damp. Co'se de fire couldn't burn good."

"But about its starting up?"

Again Pomp tried to squirm away, but in vain. "I-I jes' slipped in de window dat night an' took de plugs out an' jammed de log tight wid fat pitch wood," he stammered. "Co'se de log had to burn den. Dat was all."

Colonel Belknap released him. "No, not quite all, Pomp," he said thoughtfully. "The burning out of the log meant deliverance from ruin. You are a graceless scamp, Pomp, but next Christmas, if all goes well, you shall make the backlog burn for two weeks."

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