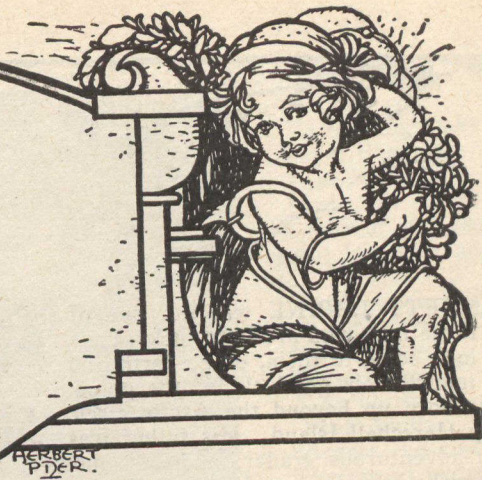




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Our Santa Claus Civilization

By AUGUSTUS BRIDLE

THE world is ruled by simple beliefs. Credulity is the charm of mankind. Even the "man from Missouri" once believed in Santa Claus. Civilization would go to pieces in a week if all men required to be shown before they could believe. Old Euclid, who is about as mystical a character as Santa Claus, took the first step away from mere faith and imagination when he invented his system of geometry, which believes nothing that can't be labelled Q. E. D.

The man from Missouri was probably forecasted by old Euclid. But in modern times Q. E. D. has been changed to C. O. D., which is far less intellectual and is by some considered a phase of cynicism.

Santa Claus has nothing to do with either Q. E. D. or C. O. D. He is immortalized in all the benevolences and master credulities of mankind. He will never die so long as the world lasts. Older than Christianity, he might easily survive it, if Christianity had not struck its roots into the legendary soil of Santa Nikolaus, which by abbreviation becomes Santa Claus.

The Christian world, always more or less civilized, owes its character to the benevolence embodied in the superbly impossible character of the old saint of the true north. When you come to think of it, the fine credulity of mankind is responsible for the conceptions of both Jesus Christ and Santa Claus. Without absolute faith, "believing where we cannot prove," neither of these great characters could ever have been incorporated into civilization, which without Christ and Santa Claus would become worse than a farce, because it would not even be funny. The bringing of gifts to the babe of Bethlehem was the direct connection between the old pagan notion of benevolence embodied in Santa Claus, and the new era of Christianity, which, without benevolence, would be a curse to mankind.

Doctrines have made martyrs and bigots and persecutors and St. Bartholomew massacres, because in the name of Christianity and without the primal benevolence symbolized in Santa Claus and the life of Christ men could commit crimes against mankind with the apparent endorsement of the church. Those who take a rational, yet benevolent view of Christianity have made of Christ, not the Son of God, but a sublime teacher, such as Buddha, Brahmin and Confucius.

The same people have not refused for the sake of their children to perpetuate a belief in the miracle of Santa Claus. And the same quality of child mind that demands a marvelous Santa Claus makes necessary also a miraculous Jesus Christ. It is no mere invention of legendists that the world has reared such a vast, cheerful monument of imagination to these profound characters. It is a necessity of the human race. There is no more power of imagination required to believe that Santa Claus drives his reindeers with incredible loads of gifts clear over the world in a single night, down every chimney, and stopping only at the steam radiators, than to believe that Jesus Christ was born without an earthly father, lived a God life among men and after his crucifixion rose from the dead and ascended into heaven. Once the world was full of people who, while they had learned to discredit an actual Santa Claus, still believed in a real, miraculous Jesus Christ. Now, with the march of materialism and positive knowledge, many people are inclined to take a rational view of the life of Christ for the sake of what is called truth.

We say "truth" when we probably mean facts, which are sometimes less than the truth, because

they make no appeal to the imagination. The world is still governed by its simple beliefs. Facts change. Beliefs remain. The big fact of yesterday becomes the little fact of to-day and a mere fiction to-morrow. The fact of steam power, once regarded as a miracle, became a commonplace when the world was first thrilled by the spectacle of electric power. Yet the locomotive is as tremendous a mystery as it was in the days of George Stephenson. The trolley car, propelled by an invisible power that may travel hundreds of miles from its generative source, was once looked upon with Indian awe. It is now used as a very uncomfortable and exasperating vehicle. The air-ship is still in the making and requires considerable of the credulity of mankind. Yet the air-ship is only a simple return to a device of nature, which in the wing of the bird is still much of a miracle. And neither the air-ship nor the trolley nor the steam locomotive is in imagination half so wonderful as the reindeers of Santa Claus pulling the sledges of good cheer down around the world of clouds in a single night.

THE lad in the picture on this page is having a word with Santa Claus. He has an idea that if it is so possible to hear a voice which may be miles away, it should be possible to have old Santa on the other end. And it probably is. There is no real, legitimate limit to the imagination. There is no fixed definition for belief. The survival of

Santa Claus in our civilization is a proof that in spite of positive knowledge and a sometimes wearisome accumulation of details, we are governed in our great primitive impulses by the simplest beliefs. We are not all of us, nor any of us always from Missouri. We are still living in a world of legend which we love to trick out for ourselves in shapes, phantoms and colours to suit ourselves. And if it were not so, the world would be having an awful time with itself in the Christmas season of 1913.

The real value of Christmas to most people is that they are able to live again in a world of magic such as made all our legends before the world became so positively wise. Inventions and discoveries which were intended to make the world happier have not always succeeded. The human mind has very often failed to interpret its own inventions. Christmas and the child imagination are the great interpreters. By the light of Christmas and the jingle of the sleigh-bells of magical old Santa Claus we are able to forget that the world is based upon either Q. E. D. or C. O. D., and to remember that the life of everything worth while is simple magic, based upon simple belief. Men are all children.



"Hello! Give me Santa Claus. I want a——"

[Photograph by Edgar T. Smith, Sackville, N.B.]