

UNCLE SAM'S CHRISTMAS BARGAIN SALE

BY WALDON FAWCETT

IT IS doubtless news to many readers that the United States government conducts a Christmas bargain sale, but such is the case. Of course Uncle Sam's holiday "flyer" in the mails of trade is not officially designated by any such fanciful title, but the event amounts to that all the same. In official parlance this federal contribution to the Yuletide shopping activity is termed "The Sale of Articles Accumulated in the Division of Dead Letters," and it takes place each year during the Christmas holidays, by order of the postmaster general.

This year the sale opened on Monday, December 14, and continued all week. It is an auction sale and just about the liveliest sort of an auction sale that could possibly be imagined. Each day the proffering and bidding begins at ten o'clock in the morning and continues with very brief interruptions until dark. Then at seven o'clock in the evening the auctioneer resumes his oratorical efforts, and the sale progresses until, say 11 o'clock, when an adjournment is taken until the following day.

Although this unique sale takes place at the national capital, the purchasers are by no means limited to persons residing or visiting at the seat of government. The postoffice department issues thousands of catalogues—this year's catalogue is a book of 235 pages—of its novel sacrifice sale, and these are mailed to all parts of the United States upon request. So many out-of-town residents desire to bid for the articles put up for sale that there has of late years developed a distinct field of activity in Washington for "brokers" who act on behalf of absent clients in bidding on designated articles as per the instructions sent them.

No person who has not attended one of these quaint sales can have an adequate conception of the number and bewildering variety of the articles which are annually lost in the mails with no clue to the owners. For, be it explained, only a fraction of the total number of articles that go astray in the mails ultimately find their way to this picturesque clearance sale. The major portion of the wafers of the mails that are consigned to the Dead Letter office because of lack of address or any other cause ultimately find their way to their rightful owners, thanks to the exceptional discernment of the "blind readers" and other tracers of lost letters in this branch of the postal institution. It is only the letters and parcels that are absolutely baffling in their lack of means of identification, that have a chance of finding their way into the stock of the Christmas bargain sale.

Even at that there is a further sifting of these unidentified postal victims for after the experts of the Dead Letter office are forced to abandon hope of tracing the origin or intended destination of a strayed parcel, the wafers are held at the postoffice department for a year in the hope that the owner may on his own initiative apply to the department for his missing property and thus enable its restoration. When, finally, there seems to be no hope of reading the riddle by this means, either, the unclaimed parcel is consigned to the great annual auction sale.

It is a woeful commentary on the proportion of our citizens who evidently do not know how to take the first step to trace articles lost in the mails that this annual postal sale contains thousands upon thousands of articles. There are upward of 1,000 different "lots." In a few instances a "lot" consists of a single article, but as a rule, each item comprises from six to twelve separate articles, which are thus grouped because of similarity of character or for some other reason. Many of the unclaimed articles are of such small value, individually, that the thought might suggest itself that the losers had not considered it worth while to trace them, but on the other hand there are hundreds of really valuable articles including numbers of diamond rings, gold and silver watches and other pieces of jewelry.

To some readers the question may naturally present itself of why this sale is held each year just at Christmas time. The reason advanced by the prosaic postoffice department is that it is the natural time for a clearance sale since it is the season when the work of the calendar year is being brought to a close and obviously it is desirable to clear out the capacious store rooms at the postal headquarters

and make room for the year's accumulation of unclaimed parcels.

However, there are several circumstances which make the holiday season an especially appropriate time for this governmental bargain sale. In the first place a surprising proportion of the articles contained in the sale are such as the average person prefers to give as Christmas gifts—gloves, Christmas cards, handkerchiefs, dolls, toys, books and jewelry. Indeed, it is from the wreckage of the holiday postal push that the dead letter sale of the following year is chiefly recruited. At the holidays many persons who are not familiar with the preparation of parcels for the mails make use of this service with the to-be-expected sequel of improperly wrapped parcels, missing addresses, etc. Thus, too, it is during the Christmas holidays when the volume of mail is heaviest that the greatest proportion of wrappers are accidentally torn from parcels in transit, thus creating wafers of the mails. Finally there is less tracing of packages lost at Christmas than at other seasons for the reason that many a prospective recipient of a Christmas gift, unless independently advised, has no means of knowing that a parcel has been mailed to his address, whereas the giver, unless an acknowledgement is requested, has no means of knowing that the gift failed to reach its destination. Doubtless many a heartburn has been caused by the failure to deliver the articles that have place in Uncle Sam's huge auction stock.

The annual auction sale of postal odds and ends having been so largely derived from Christmas postal derelicts it is peculiarly appropriate that the articles should be sold at the holiday season when these self-same articles can be made to a second time do service as gifts. There is no doubt that this is the disposition to which many of the purchases are put. Then too, it is a genuine bargain sale. Uncle Sam has no "reserve price" and he never "bids in" an article. The articles are sold in regular order, numerically, as they are listed in the catalogue, and each lot in turn is knocked down to the highest bidder without reserve, and without regard to how inadequate the price may be as compared with the real value of the article.

Although the annual postal sale is conducted under the direction and supervision of the officials of the Dead Letter office, the actual barter is in the hands of a private auctioneer—this task being bestowed by contract upon the lowest bidder—that is, the auctioneer who is willing to sell the postal stock on the lowest percentage of commission. The terms are strictly cash. Uncle Sam usually derives gross receipts in excess of \$10,000 from this sale, deducting for the cost of catalogues and other expenses, means at least \$8,000 net profit. This is turned over to the United States treasury. However, if at any time, within three years a

person shall prove that any article disposed of at the sale, was his property when lost in the mails, the government will restore to that individual the sum derived at the sale, from the disposition of his property. Because of this responsibility it is necessary for the government officials to keep an accurate detailed record of the transactions at each sale, with the notation as to the sum received for each article sold.

There is always plenty of amusement for the vast throngs that crowd each dead letter auction sale. For all that each lot offered is comprehensively, though briefly described in the catalogue, there are invariably numerous bidders who through failure to consult the catalogue or because they are carried away by the spirit of the occasion, purchase on the "pig in a poke" plan, and the dismay that results when some of these "sight unseen" parcels are opened, is sufficient to recompense those spectators who have come to the sale merely for the fun that is provided for the on-looker.

The average price, per "lot" brought at the dead letter sale is well above \$1. The lowest prices recorded are usually for the parcels of vocal and instrumental music which go for 50 or 40 cents per "lot," whereas the top-notch prices are derived of course, from the jewelry sales, notably the diamond rings. A solid gold ring set with a diamond weighing slightly more than half a karat sold for \$50—a decided bargain at the prices at which diamonds were then selling. All the packages containing jewelry of value are sealed, but the post-office officials supervising a sale will usually break the seals and display in advance any designated pieces of jewelry if requested to do so by bona-fide bidders. Not all the parcels offered at the postal sale are such as can be carried home by the purchaser. Many a "lot" is contained in a huge wooden box. In this year's sale one item is represented by a packing case, as large as a piano box, filled with souvenir cards. Another almost as large, holds a miscellaneous assortment of cheap jewelry.



WRAPPING UP PACKAGES FOR AUCTION SALE

TALES OF THE CHRISTMAS GREENS

"And they found written in the law . . . Go forth into the mount and fetch olive branches, and pine branches, and myrtle branches, and palm branches, and branches of thick trees to make booths."

In the days of Joshua the custom of using greens for midwinter festivals was popular among the Hebrews—in fact, it was obligatory. And the use of mistletoe by the old Druids and of holly by the Romans were customs all ready centuries old when Christianity adopted them. The use of Christmas greens began before Christmas.

Now you are preparing, doubtless, to decorate your home, to twine ivy about the paintings in the drawing room or parlor, to hang on walls and in windows holly wreaths and suspend mistletoe from chandeliers and door frames. But do you know the legends of these greens, of the significance of the ivy, the holly and the mistletoe?

Holly was used by the Romans in the feasts of Saturn, to whom it was dedicated. It was an emblem of peace and good will. When the early Christians began to celebrate the birth of Christ, holly became the symbol of resurrection. Even the Persians regarded this plant as sacred and believed that "the sun never shadowed the holy tree." They would drench

The Exceptional Equipment

of the California Fig Syrup Co. and the scientific attainments of its chemists have rendered possible the production of Syrup of Figs and Elixir of Senna, in all of its excellence, by obtaining the pure medicinal principles of plants known to act most beneficially and combining them most skillfully, in the right proportions, with its wholesome and refreshing Syrup of California Figs.

As there is only one genuine Syrup of Figs and Elixir of Senna and as the genuine is manufactured by an original method known to the California Fig Syrup Co. only, it is always necessary to buy the genuine to get its beneficial effects.

A knowledge of the above facts enables one to decline imitations or to return them if, upon viewing the package, the full name of the California Fig Syrup Co. is not found printed on the front thereof.

BUT SHE HAD ENOUGH.



Johnny—Mother, let's go in here and buy a baby; they're cheap to-day.

Purchasing Power.

A young gentleman of our acquaintance, who had just reached the age of six, was recently waiting with his mother for a train at a railway station, when he noticed a penny-in-the-slot weighing machine. He asked his mother a great many questions about it, and at last received permission to drop in his penny and be weighed. Having obtained that important information, he said: "How much would I have weighed, mamma, if I had dropped in a dollar?"

Christmas Post Cards Free.

Send 2c stamp for five samples of our very best Gold and Silk Finish Christmas, Flower and Motif Post Cards, beautiful colors and loveliest designs. Art Post Card Club, 792 Jackson St., Topeka, Kan.

The Hint That Failed.

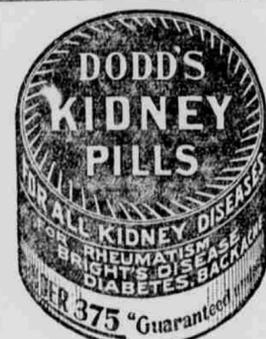
Wife—A tree, you know, gets new clothes every spring—hat, parasol, everything!
Husband—Yes, darling, and makes them all itself.—Fliegende Blaetter.

Lewis' Single Binder made of extra quality tobacco, costs more than other 5c cigars. Tell the dealer you want them.

In the opinion of the beauty doctor many a homely woman has a fine face for business.

Mrs. Winslow's Soothing Syrup. For children teething, softens the gums, reduces inflammation, allays pain, cures wind colic. 25c bottle.

The less a man knows about women the more he thinks he knows.



SICK HEADACHE

CARTER'S LITTLE LIVER PILLS. Positively cured by these Little Pills. They also relieve Distress from Dyspepsia, Indigestion and Too Hearty Eating. A perfect remedy for Dizziness, Nausea, Drowsiness, Bad Taste in the Mouth, Congested Tongue, Pain in the Side, TORPID LIVER. They regulate the Bowels. Purely Vegetable. SMALL PILL. SMALL DOSE. SMALL PRICE.

CARTER'S LITTLE LIVER PILLS. Genuine Must Bear Fac-Simile Signature. *Brewer's* REFUSE SUBSTITUTES.

BROWN'S BRONCHIAL TROCHES Instantly relieve Sore Throat, Hoarseness and Cough. Unexcelled for clearing the voice. Absolutely free from opiates or any other harmful. Price, 25 cents, 50 cents and \$1.00 per box. Sample sent on request. JOHN I. BROWN & SON, Boston, Mass.

TAKE A DOSE OF **PISO'S CURE** THE BEST MEDICINE FOR COUGHS AND COLDS

It will instantly relieve that racking cough. Taken promptly it will often prevent Asthma, Bronchitis and serious throat and lung troubles. Guaranteed safe and very palatable. All Druggists, 25 cents.

the faces of babies with water in which the bark was saturated. In France it was hung outside of houses to protect them from lightning.

Ivy, which lent itself to the decoration of houses, was the vine of Bacchus. Whence the old proverb:

Nay, ivy, nay, it shall not be, I say; Let holly baffle the mystery as the manner is. Holly stood in the halls, fairs to behold; Ivy stood without the doors, she is full here a cold.

Holly was preferred, but ivy became popular in the course of time. Mistletoe has all ways shared with ivy the popularity of Christmas. Mistletoe is more rare and more associated with myths.

Of old the Druid priests at their yearly celebrations were wont to send out persons to discover the newest of the mistletoe growth at a season when the voice of a cuckoo was first heard. Only that which grew on an oak tree was acceptable. When it was found, great sacrifices were prepared.

On the day appointed, when the moon was six days old, there were led to the place two white bulls; a white-robed priest would ascend the tree and cut the mistletoe with a sickle of gold. The sickle was never used for any other purpose; all the fragments of the plant were gathered, and with great rejoicing the Druids proceeded to their sacred grove, where the sacrifices were made and particles of the plant distributed.

It was believed that the mistletoe brought with it the good will and blessings of the fairies, for, it is said, they sought protection with it during the winter when all other trees were leafless.

In Sweden for many years it has been regarded as a cure of epilepsy and an antidote for poisons. In southern Wales it is worn about the neck as a protection against snake bites. The belief of the old Druids that the possession of it guaranteed children is believed in many parts of England to this day.

TYPICAL LOTS

THE U.S. DEAD LETTER OFFICE

OPENING DEAD LETTERS