SAXONY SANTA CLAUS

HANS RUPPERT WALKS ALL THE WAY FROM RUSSIA.

A Great, Gallant Figure, With Top Boots and Mighty Pack—Christmas Customs of the Fatherland—Procession on Christmas Eve.

Hans Ruppert is the name of the Santa Claus of Saxony given by the simple, pious peasantry. "Hans Ruppert will arrive tonight!" the children of Saxony cry all along the dear, darkening twilight of Christmas eve, as they flatten their little Saxon noses against the cottage window panes, peering out along the winter roads for "our Hans Ruppert." "Hans Ruppert is coming tonight!" say the simple hearted grown up folk to one another, a people who have one evening in the winter twilight of their hard, stern lives when it will be all glow and glamour and froth of fun.

Hans Ruppert comes from Russia, from its silent mysteries of steppe and of snows. But he is not a Slav. Hans Ruppert is not the traditional Santa Claus of the Teuton land—a jolly old man with curly beard and winking smile. "Hans Ruppert is a tall, brawny, peasant looking fellow," say the good Saxony folk with a sublime earnestness as if they had seen him. Hans Ruppert has muscles minted from their own brave life of gray toil. Hans Ruppert walks all the way from afar, from the Asiatic Russland and, at every step he takes toward the Caucasus chain, at every stride up and up, still up the ledges of its rock and bluff and brae, across its brawling streams, now down on the other side of its stern shoulder shadowed in the star calm, at every pace past the Russian villages twinkling through the night mists like sparklets struck off from the czar crown way off there above the Neva, as he foots it grandly—this great, grand, gallant Hans Ruppert—his top boots that at the beginning of the long Christmas march reached only below the knee, grow taller and taller, still higher—until when he hears the Rhein-strom murmur and the golden voice above the Lorelei rock, and at last at the gates of Berlin sees the mighty gleam of the army of the vaterland, the Hans Ruppertish boots are up to the loins, cuirassier fashion, accordion wrinkled and mirror in their mighty polish the very "Sword of My Illustrious Grandfather!" And Hans Ruppert stands a grenadier, one of the sacred bodyguard around an emperor, stands with star on breast and double headed eagle on helmet, stands a mighty ghost to deal death to the foes of vaterland—until next Christmas.

On his back, through all his long trudge tonight, Hans Ruppert carries his pack. It is a pack of good things. Thou hast no Christmas tree within that mighty bundle, Hans! The peasant children have made the tree all ready for Hans in the diligent purchase from their little Saxon pfennige on the market day. Hans Ruppert brings the garments for the Christmas tree. Here in his pack is the Christ child's hair, the gold and silver filigree which Hans will twist across the branches with his own brawny hands. Here are the candles, the Christ child's eyes, and the toys and the gifts, "the blessings that drop from the hands of Baby Jesus."

And now the procession forms at 8 o'clock on Christmas eve to go to see what Hans Ruppert has brought to the little family. The procession begins with grandfather and grandmother, on whose seamed and yellowed cheeks glistens the gentle tear of age. Then follow the father and the mother and the unwedded uncles and aunts, and now the children, according to age and size, who are awed in anticipation of "our Hans Ruppert" on the other side of that door toward which the procession is now moving. They stand up on tiptoe and peer behind father's stalwart frame, rebuked by das mutterchen, with a solid Saxon cuff on the unwilling ear. "Ach, mutterchen, it's heilige Nacht!" pleads the father, and mother moderates. Here are the servants of the household, wearing their good Christmas starch of check apron stiffness. How it stands out in its buckram beauty! If it were possible—which the dear Herr Gardener of us all forfend—the apple cheeks of the good house girl glow with a more fruity glisten as she gazes down upon the spheric circumference of starch. The housemaid's smile is laundered, too, and it never leaves her lips until that mysterious door off there is opened by grandfather's trembling old hand, and now some one in the Christmas procession has struck the sweet, resonant, prolonging chords of the zither, and the hymn rises as one "pure concert" along the whole of the household's heart:

CHRISTMAS CHEER.

At Christmas play and make good cheer,
For Christmas comes but once a year.
—Tusser.

Be merry all, be merry all!
With holly dress the festive hall;
Prepare the song, the feast, the ball
To welcome merry Christmas.
—W. R. Spencer.

It is the Christmas time:
And up and down 'twixt heaven and earth,
In the glorious grief and solemn mirth,
The shining angels climb.
—D. M. Mulock.

The time draws near the birth of Christ:
The moon is hid; the night is still;
The Christmas bells from hill to hill
Answer each other in the mist.
—Tennyson.

Heap on more wood! the wind is dull,
But let it whistle as it will
We'll keep one Christmas merry still.
—Sir Walter Scott.

This is the time when the very old man
Leaps back to the days of youth;
When brows and eyes wear no disguise,
But flush and gleam with truth.
Oh, then is the time when the soul exults
And seems right heavenward turning;
When we love and bless the hand we press,
When the Christmas log is burning!
—Cook.

We speak of a merry Christmas
And many a happy New Year,
But each to his heart is thinking
Of those that are not here.
—Longfellow.

They who do their souls no wrong,
But keep at eve the faith of morn,
Shall daily hear the angel song,
"Today the Prince of Peace is born!"
—James Russell Lowell.

CHRISTMAS IN THE ARMY.

How the Soldier Boys Celebrated During the Sixties.

The Army of the Potomac, under General George B. McClellan, was camped about Washington from August, 1861, to March, 1862, and most of it in Virginia as far down the Potomac as Alexandria, as far up as Chain bridge and as far out toward General Beauregard and his tenacious Americans as Munson's hill. Early in December word came to the soldiers that railroad and express companies would carry free packages intended for Christmas presents and dinners for the soldiers.

That year there was a Christmas dinner for every mess. From the rich homes of the large cities had come the best in the market. From tens of thousands of farms had come the daintiest dishes that mothers, wives, sisters, daughters and sweethearts could prepare.

On Christmas, 1863, the army was shivering along the rivers Rappahannock and Rapidan, and as far out as Culpeper Court House. It was too cold, and the men were too poorly housed to enjoy the day. It was not a holiday to many—a day of misery, instead. That was the coldest Christmas the south had seen for 50 years, and it has not seen one like it since.

Christmas dinners were the order of the day in 1864. The army was strung along behind fortifications from Richmond to below Yellow House, on the Weldon railroad, a distance of nearly 40 miles. The sanitary and Christian commissions had arranged to supply the army with a Christmas dinner. Few men were overlooked. Except that in 1861, it was the happiest Christmas for the Union army since the trouble began. There were many signs that the next Christmas would be enjoyed at home, and so it was by all who escaped the hot times from March 29 to the evening of April 9, after Grant and Lee met at Appomattox.—Milwaukee Sentinel.

Christmas Table Decoration.

A very pretty decoration for the table at the Christmas dinner is a tiny Christmas tree. Candied fruits and gilded and silvered walnuts make it bright and seasonable, while a little frosting with the powder that comes for the purpose makes it a beautiful object under the glitter of the lights. The tree will be trimmed and prepared for you by any florist and should be planted in a fancy low vase or dish. The picturesque dwarf evergreens that come from Japan are most effective when used in this way, and yet they are such costly treasures that few who own them are willing to make table decorations of them. —Philadelphia Ledger.

Adorning the Christmas Tree.

The foliage of a Christmas tree may be brushed here and there with mucilage and then sprinkled with common salt and a very pleasing result is obtained. A pretty drapery for the tree is made by cutting long strips, about four inches wide, of tissue paper, then cutting it closely, partly, but not entirely, across the widths, making fringes. If the strips be dampened and held over a hot stove, the fringed edges will curl and look quite ornamental.—Omaha Bee.

FATHER CHRISTMAS.

A Suggestion to the Boys For Christmas Celebrations.

Why couldn't our boys get up some holiday plays similar to the immemorial "Father Christmas" play, in which the lads of Merrie England have so much fun? The origin of this play is lost in antiquity, but it deals with knights and their adventures, certain of which challenge and fight the followers of Father Christmas, and are in turn routed, till Father Christmas and the Black Knight cope in mortal combat, the latter, of course, being worsted.

The boys are dressed in fantastic style, with tall paper caps on and paper fringe around their jackets, wearing masks to conceal their identity. They are called the "mummers," and go from house to house of their friends, invariably receiving a kind welcome and a little treat at the end of the performance. They also take up a penny collection, and everybody has a penny for the mummers who afford so much amusement.

In our early history there is abundant scope for the youthful playwrights, and the object of their performances in holiday week might be some charity in which boys are the beneficiaries, such as a treat of "goodies" to a dozen newsboys or bootblacks, to get supplies for a sick boy or the like.

The Indian in our early history is as good as the knight element for a stirring play for mummers—Massasoit and his tribe, in war paint, feathers and blankets, on the one side, and on the other the prim Puritans, in broad brimmed hats and short breeches.

Or the Pocahontas and Powhatan drama, with John Smith, the hero, and a band of cavaliers to make it lively. The boys of Boston Common and the red coated Britishers was an episode to inspire their fraternity of today, and it would be great fun for our laddies in Christmas week to dress up and illustrate the valor of their ancestors, as their English cousins annually commemorate some otherwise forgotten achievement of feudal days.—Philadelphia Record.

A Turkey's Lament.

Ah, distinctly I remember—
It was only last November
That they chased me through the back yard
And across the old barn floor!
Valiantly and well I fought me
Till at last the villains caught me
And proceeded then to trot me
To the ax beside the door;
But, ashamed, they let me go, for
I was bones and nothing more—
Skin and bones and nothing more.

Now, I see it is December,
And no doubt they will dismember
Me, for all my fatter friends
Have gone to that other shore;
I've grown pale from apprehension,
For of late some marked attention
Makes me think it's their intention
To cut off my legs and serve me
As a reedbird from the store—
Just a reedbird, nothing more!
—Chicago Inter Ocean.

CHRISTMAS AT KENO.

How Hard Luck Hankins' Tree Was Decorated.

"Speakin of Christmas trees," said Cyclone Murphy as he snuffed a candle on the topmost twig of the Keno Gulch Sunday school tree with his trusty six shooter and then nipped remonstrance in the bud by getting the drop on the Sunday school superintendent, "reminds me of a galoot named Hard Luck Hankins, who lived up on Tenderfoot ridge and who was the biggest kicker that ever kicked. This yere Hard Luck Hankins lived in a cabin on top of the ridge and p'tended ez how he was a miner, but he didn't never seem to mine anything and was ginerally regarded ez a feller without visible means of support. Some folks said he was a road agent and others opined ez how hoss stealin might be the mine he was workin.

"The only thing Keno Gulch ever really knowed him to be doin was puttin up a powerful kick about one thing er another. He allers had some hard luck story to tell, and that was why folks called him Hard Luck Hankins.

"There wasn't a decent lookin tree on top of the hull ridge except one, and that tree was a mighty handsome pine that stood right in front of Hard Luck Hankins' shanty. 'She's my old Christmas tree,' Hankins would growl every time Christmas come around, 'but, dern her ole hide, Santy Claws don't never hang nothin on her fer me.'

"That was jes' Hard Luck's pesky and onery way—allers kickin about somethin—and that handsome tree never havin anything hangin on it fer him seemed to rile him 'specially every year. 'What's the use havin a blame Christmas tree that never don't have nothin hangin on to it?' he'd growl. 'Have a dern good notion to cut her down!'

"This went on year after year, and the boys kep' a-wonderin and a-wonderin how Hard Luck got a livin. One Christmas eve they found out, and it put an end to Hard Luck's quarrel with his big pine Christmas tree.

"Fer the very first Christmas sence Hard Luck had been livin in Keno there was somethin hangin on his Christmas tree.

"What was it?" repeated Cyclone Murphy as he snuffed another candle. "Why, it was old Hard Luck Hankins hisself, and he was—kickin—ez—usual, and kickin with both feet."—Selected.

Ontario Gold Strike.

WINNIPEG, Man., Dec. 20.—Rat Portage, Ont., is wild with excitement over a marvelous strike made in the Mikado gold mine. The ore fills a slope forty feet high and two and one-third feet wide, and the richest ore is worth, on a conservative estimate, from $25,000 to $35,000 a ton in free milling gold.

A newspaper is a necessity.