

Santa Claus and Little Billee

By John Kendrick Bangs

Author of "A House-Boat on the Styr," "The Idiot," etc.

(Copyright, The Frank A. Munsey Co.)

He was only a little bit of a chap, and so, when for the first time in his life he came into close contact with the endless current of human things, it was as hard for him to "stay put" as for some wayward little atom of atoms and jetsam to keep from tossing about in the surging tides of the sea.

His mother had left him there in the big toy shop, with instructions not to move until she came back, while she went off to do some mysterious errand. She thought, no doubt, that with so many beautiful things on every side to delight his eye and hold his attention, strict obedience to her commands would not be hard. But, alas, the good lady reckoned not upon the magnetic power of attraction of all those lovely objects in detail.

When a phonograph at the other end of the shop began to rattle off melodious tunes and funny jokes, in spite of the instruction Little Billee had received, off he pattered as fast as his little legs would carry him to investigate. After that, forgetful of everything else, finding himself caught in the constantly moving stream of Christmas shoppers, he was borne along in the resistless current until he found himself at last out upon the street—alone, free, and independent.

It was great fun, at first. By and by, however, the afternoon waned, and Little Billee began to grow tired. He thought of his mamma, and tried to find the shop where he had promised to remain quiet until her return. Up and down the street he wandered until his little legs grew weary; but there was no sign of the shop, nor of the beloved face he was seeking.

Once again, and yet once again after that, did the little fellow traverse that crowded highway, his tears getting harder and harder to keep back, and then—joy of joys—whom should he see walking slowly along the sidewalk but Santa Claus himself! The saint was strangely decorated with two queer-looking boards, with big red letters on them, hung over his back and chest.

With a glad cry of happiness, Little Billee ran to meet the old fellow, and put his hand gently into that of the saint. He thought it very strange that Santa Claus's hand should be so red and cold and rough, and so chapped; but he was not in any mood to be critical.

Santa Claus, of course, would recognize him at once, and would know just how to take him back to his

home again, won't you?" said the child.

"Surest thing you know!" answered Santa Claus, looking down upon the bright but tired little face with a comforting smile. "Where do you live?"

"As if you didn't know that!" cried Little Billee, giggling.

"Ha, ha!" laughed Santa Claus. "Can't fool you, can I? It would be funny if, after keeping an eye on you all these years since you was a baby, I didn't know where you lived, eh?"

"Awful funny," agreed Little Billee. Just then Little Billee noticed for the first time the square boards that Santa Claus was wearing.

"What are you wearing those boards for, Mr. Santa Claus?" he asked.

If the lad had looked closely enough, he would have seen a very unhappy look come into the old man's face; but there was nothing of it in his answer.

"Oh, those are my new-fangled back and chest protectors, my lad," he replied. "Sometimes we have bitter winds blowing at Christmas, and I have to be ready for them. It wouldn't do for Santa Claus to come down with the sneezes at Christmas time, you know—no, siree! This board in front keeps the wind off my chest, and



"What Are You Wearing Those Boards for, Mr. Santa Claus?"

the one behind keeps me from getting rheumatism in my back. They are a great protection against the weather."

"You've got letters printed there," said the boy, peering around in front of his companion. "What do they spell? You know I haven't learned to read yet."

"Merry Christmas to Everybody!" said Santa Claus. "I have the words printed there so that everybody can see them; and if I miss wishing anybody a merry Christmas, he'll know I meant it just the same."

They walked on now in silence, for Little Billee was beginning to feel almost too tired to talk, and Santa Claus seemed to be thinking of something else. Finally, however, the little fellow spoke.

"I guess I'd like to go home now, Mr. Santa Claus," he said. "I'm tired, and I'm afraid my mamma will be wondering where I've gone to."

"That's so, my little man," said Santa Claus, stopping short in his walk up and down the block. "Your mother will be worried, for a fact; and your father, too—I know how I'd feel if my little boy got losted and hadn't come home at dinner time. I don't believe you know where you live, though—now, honest! Come! Fess up, Billee, you don't know where you live, do you?"

"Why, yes, I do," said Little Billee. "It's in the big gray stone house with the iron fence in front of it, near the park."

"Oh, that's easy enough!" laughed Santa Claus nervously. "Anybody could say he lived in a gray stone house with a fence around it, near the park; but you don't know what street it's on, nor the number, either I'll bet fourteen wooden giraffes against a monkey on a stick!"

"No, I don't," said Little Billee frankly; "but I know the number of our ortymobile. It's—N. Y."

"Fine!" laughed Santa Claus. Then he reflected for a moment, eyeing the child anxiously.

"I don't believe you even know your papa's name," he said.

"Yes, I do," said Little Billee indignantly. "His name is Mr. Harrison, and he owns a bank."

"Splendid! Made of tin, I suppose, with a nice little hole at the top to drop pennies into?" said Santa Claus.

"No, it ain't, either!" retorted Little Billee. "It's made of stone, and has more than a million windows in it. I went down there with my mamma to papa's office the other day, so I guess I ought to know."

"Well, I should say so," said Santa Claus. "Nobody better. By the way, Billee, what does your mamma call your papa? 'Billee,' like you?" he added.

"Oh, no, indeed," returned Little Billee. "She calls him papa, except once in a while when he's going away, and then she says, 'Good-by, Tom.'"

"Fine again!" said Santa Claus, blowing upon his fingers, for, now

that the sun had completely disappeared over in the west, it was getting very cold. "Thomas Harrison, banker," he muttered to himself. "What, with the telephone book and the city directory, I guess we can find our way home with Little Billee."

He led the little fellow into a public telephone station, where he eagerly scanned the names in the book. At last last it was found—"Thomas Harrison, seven-six-five-four Plaza." And then, in the seclusion of the telephone booth, Santa Claus sent the gladdest of all Christmas messages over the wire to two distracted parents:

"I have found your boy wandering in the street. He is safe, and I will bring him home right away."

Fifteen minutes later, there might have been seen the strange spectacle of a footsore Santa Claus leading a sleepy little boy up Fifth avenue to a cross street, which shall be nameless. The boy vainly endeavored to persuade his companion to "come in and meet mamma."

"No, Billee," the old man replied sadly, "I must hurry back. You see, kiddle, this is my busy day."

But it was not to be as Santa Claus willed, for Little Billee's papa, and his mamma, and his brothers and sisters, and the butler and the housemaids were waiting at the front door when they arrived.

Led by Little Billee's persistent father, Santa Claus went into the house. Now that the boy could see him in the full glare of many electric lights, his furs did not seem the most gorgeous things in the world. When the flapping front of his red jacket flew open, the child was surprised to see how ragged was the thin gray coat it covered; and as for the good old saint's comfortable stomach—strange to say, it was not!

"I wish you all a merry Christmas," faltered Santa Claus; "but I really must be going, sir—"

"Nonsense!" cried Mr. Harrison. "Not until you have got rid of this chill, and—"

"I can't stay, sir," said Santa. "I'll lose my job if I do."

"Well, what if you do? I'll give you a better one," said the banker.

"I can't—I can't!" faltered the man. "I—I've got a Little Billee of my own at home waitin' for me, sir. If I hadn't," he added fiercely, "do you suppose I'd be doin' this?" He pointed at the painted boards, and shuddered.

"I guess Santa Claus is tired, papa," said Little Billee, snuggling up closely to the old fellow and taking hold of his hand sympathetically. "He's been walkin' a lot today."

"Yes, my son," said Mr. Harrison gravely. "These are very busy times for Santa Claus, and I guess that, as he still has a hard night ahead of him, James had better ring up Henry and tell him to bring the car around right away, so that we may take him back—to his little boy. We'll have to lend him a fur coat, to keep the wind off, too, for it is a bitter night."

"Oh," said Little Billee, "I haven't told you about these boards he wears. He has 'em to keep the wind off, and they're fine, papa!" Little Billee pointed to the two sign-boards which Santa Claus had leaned against the wall. "He says he uses 'em on cold nights," the lad went on. "They have writing on 'em, too. Do you know what it says?"

"Yes," said Mr. Harrison, glancing at the boards. "It says 'If You Want a Good Christmas Dinner for a Quarter, Go to Smithsonian's Cafe.'"

Little Billee roared with laughter. "Papa's trying to fool me, just as you did when you pretended not to know where I lived, Santa Claus," he said, looking up into the old fellow's face, his own countenance brimming over with mirth. "You mustn't think he can't read, though," the lad added hastily. "He's only joking."

"Oh, no, indeed, I shouldn't have thought that," replied Santa Claus, smiling through his tears.

"I've been joking, have I?" said Little Billee's papa. "Well, then, Mr. Billiam, suppose you inform me what it says."

"Merry Christmas to Everybody," said Little Billee proudly. "I couldn't read it myself, but he told me what it said. He has it printed there so that if he misses saying it to anybody, they'll know he means it just the same."

"By Jove, Mr. Santa Claus," cried Little Billee's papa, grasping the old man warmly by the hand. "I owe you ten million apologies! I haven't believed in you for many a long year; but now, sir, I take it all back. You do exist, and, by the great horn spoon, you are the real thing!"

Little Billee had the satisfaction of acting as host to Santa Claus at a good, luscious dinner, which Santa Claus must have enjoyed very much. After dinner Henry came with the automobile, and, bidding everybody good night, Santa Claus and Little Billee's papa went out of the house together.

Christmas morning dawned, and Little Billee awoke from wonderful dreams of rich gifts, and of extraordinary adventures with his new-found friend, to find the reality quite as splendid as the dream things.

As for Santa Claus, Little Billee has not seen him again; but down at his father's bank there is a new messenger, named John, who has a voice so like Santa Claus' voice that whenever Little Billee goes down there in the motor to ride home at night with his papa, he runs into the bank and has a long talk with him, just for the pleasure of pretending that it is Santa Claus he is talking to.

INTERNATIONAL SUNDAY SCHOOL LESSON

(By E. O. SELLERS, Acting Director of Sunday School Course.)

LESSON FOR DECEMBER 20.

THE ASCENSION.

LESSON TEXT—Luke 24:50-53. Acts 1:1-11. GOLDEN TEXT—He was taken up; and a cloud received Him out of their sight.—Acts 1:9.

We have now reached the final lesson of the present course in the life of Christ, next Sunday being devoted to the review. The lesson committee have selected the continuous account of this final earthly act of our Lord as given us by St. Luke, for the Book of Acts is a continuation of the Gospel of Luke (Acts 1:1). Inasmuch as this is really but one account we will consider only that found in the Acts.

I. The Proof of the Resurrection, vv. 1-3. This book of "The Acts" is a continuation of what Jesus "began to do" and gives us the record of how he continued this work by means of those "whom he had chosen" (v. 2). Following his resurrection he gave them commandments "through the Holy Spirit," viz. in the power of the Holy Spirit. A like honor rests upon every believer to hear and to obey the commands of Jesus given in the power and demonstration of the Holy Spirit. The all-sufficient proof (see also I Cor. 15:4-8) was that Jesus had been seen for a period of 40 days. This is the "many infallible proofs." During that time they not alone saw the risen Lord, but conversed with him, ate with him, and had communion with him. During these days of communion he gave them his commands as to the "things concerning the kingdom of God." This entailed a burden that these commands be proclaimed in ever widening circles to the utmost bounds of the earth.

Additional Experience.

II. The Promise of the Father, vv. 4-8. The disciples were not to begin the proclamation of their message until they were fully equipped, until they had received that all essential preparation, the endowment of the Holy Spirit. Here, again, the Scriptures are to be fulfilled (Isa. 44:3; Joel 2:8, also Luke 24:49). That ten days' delay was not time lost, for time spent in preparation is never time lost. We must not suppose these men as not regenerate (John 13:10; 15:3), but as lacking an equipment necessary for the successful execution of their important task. We as believers cannot call him Lord except by the power of the Spirit (I Cor. 12:3), but we do not all have that infilling of the Spirit which alone will enable us to render effective service. This is an additional experience, but one open to all who will honestly and intelligently seek it (see Acts 8:12, and other references). This experience is (a) commanded, "charged not to depart till, etc.," (b) to be preceded by "repentance," and (c) to carry with it authority, v. 7 R. V. It does not mean, either, temporal power nor is it the prerogative of a visible church and confined to an elect few. This kingdom is a spiritual one. The program of Jesus is Spirit-filled men to be his witnesses, and to begin "at Jerusalem." A true reception of the Holy Spirit means world-wide missionary endeavor.

Presumptive Ignorance.

III. The Present Place of Jesus, vv. 9-11. Even yet the disciples failed to grasp the idea of a spiritual kingdom as evidenced by verse six. In a most emphatic way he tells them that it is not for them to know the "times and seasons which the Father hath set within his own power" (authority, v. 7, R. V.). Their power is not to be earthly, but spiritual (v. 8). It is the height of presumptive ignorance for any one to set the date of our Lord's return (Deut. 29:29). Jesus has given us explicit information on this question (Matt. 24:36), and his parables all warn us to "watch." While Jesus talked with his disciples concerning the reception of this new power and the place where they were to begin to exercise it, his feet were parted from the earth and a cloud received him from their sight as he ascended "into heaven" (Luke 24:51; I Pet. 3:22; see also Gen. 5:24 and Heb. 9:28 R. V.). His parting benediction was an adjuration to a life of service not in their weakness, but in the blessed endowment of power. Yonder into heaven he had gone to prepare a place for us (John 14:2; Heb. 9:24). There he ever liveth to intercede for us (Heb. 7:25). His presence there makes us eternally secure (Rom. 8:34, Heb. 7:25). His presence in the heavenlies is the guarantee that we, too, shall one day be "with him" (John 12:26, Rev. 2:21). This hope inspires the church to evangelism, to holy living and to faithful service. It was necessary that our Lord's work be transferred from his invisible person. Lifted up he was on Calvary, lifted up he was into glory, that "if I be lifted up, will draw all men unto me." Mysterious birth, wondrous life, glorious, marvelous ascension!

As this is written Europe is bathed in blood, and America is engaged in a set season of prayer for peace. The only abiding peace we can hope for will be when the Prince of Peace shall return to rule and to reign.

FIND TIME FOR KINDNESSES

Two Stories of Courteous Conductors Who Looked After Their Passengers.

"Once I was down in Louisiana," a traveler began, "on a little railroad that runs from Franklin to Week's Island. It took five hours to go 20 miles. The most amazing thing to me was that the conductors stopped the train anywhere he was asked to, and if there were no one to meet a woman passenger with innumerable bags and the inevitable baby, he helped her across a plowed field or sent a brakeman to carry her traps to her own gate and the train waited until he came back."

"Nothing surprising about that," returned a born New Yorker. "The Madison avenue cars stop every day for reasons quite remote from a regular schedule. I was on a car this afternoon and a little boy dropped his mother's umbrella out of the window. The conductor stopped the car and ran back a block and a half, got the umbrella, delivered it to the woman and incidentally advised her not to let her son have it again."

"Besides, I've known of more than one eye being punched out by a careless baby with such a plaything,"—New York Times.

For Itching, Burning Skins.

Bathe freely the affected surface with Cuticura Soap and hot water. Dry without irritation and apply Cuticura Ointment with finger or hand. This treatment affords immediate relief, permits rest and sleep and points to speedy healing in most cases of eczemas, rashes, itchings and irritations of the skin and scalp of infants, children and adults. Free sample each with 32-p. Skin Book if you wish. Address post-card: Cuticura, Dept. X, Boston. Sold everywhere.—Adv.

Cure for Thirst.

"What do you want the ten cents for?" asked the minister.

"Booze," replied the bleary beggar, shamelessly. "I need it awful bad—it's jest about killin' me."

"Isn't there any way you can get rid of that terrible appetite for drink?" "Yep—I kin do it in a holy minute if you'll lemme have that dime."—Toledo Blade.

Beyond Its Power.

"That rich Mrs. Stiggins doesn't speak to me now. Yet she used to be my next-door neighbor—and they were awfully common."

"Well, there are some things money can't do."

"What?"

"Make oldtime neighbors forget the early days."

A Comparison.

"There goes the Widow Blym. She's been married three times and she's still as pretty as a picture."

"That shows the superiority of a woman over an automobile."

"In what respect?"

"After a car has changed hands two or three times it's a sight to behold."

"Watchful Waiting."

"What are we to do for fashions, if the war in France continues?"

"Wear as little as we can, and wait."—Cleveland Plain Dealer.

YOUR OWN DRUGGIST WILL TELL YOU that Murine Eye Remedy for Red, Weak, Watery Eyes and Granulated Eyelids; No Stinging; Just Eye Comfort. Write for Book of the Eye by mail free. Murine Eye Remedy Co., Chicago.

It isn't always love that makes a man attentive to his wife. Maybe he is afraid of her.

The young man fresh from college always thinks that the world has a lot to learn.

DEFIANCE STARCH is constantly growing in favor because it Does Not Stick to the Iron and it will not injure the finest fabric. For laundry purposes it has no equal. 16 oz. package 10c. 1-3 more starch for same money. DEFIANCE STARCH CO., Omaha, Nebraska

A Misanthropic Reader. "I don't believe more than half of what I see in print," said the incredulous man. "Trying to be on the safe side?" "Yes. And even at that, I generally pick the wrong half."

Self-Satisfaction Explained. He—I like simple things best. She—I've noticed how self-satisfied you are.—Boston Transcript.



His Mother Had Left Him There in the Toy-Shop.

mamma at home—wherever that might be. Little Billee had never thought to inquire just where home was. All he knew was that it was a big gray stone house on a long street somewhere, with a tall iron railing in front of it, not far from the park.

"Howdidoo, Mr. Santa Claus?" said Little Billee, as the other's hand unconsciously tightened over his own.