

# Under The Mistletoe

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## Toys that Tickled the Tots, Before the Days of Santa Claus

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**C**HILDREN'S toys in this year of grace are so elaborate that good old-fashioned folk are filled with amazement, and make up their minds that the little people of today are of a brand different from those of the last generation. On the surface they are quite right, too. It does look as if the modern child was essentially different from his brother of years ago, but the difference is largely superficial. The toys of today are elaborate, but they are just the same kind of toys that have always delighted children. Every boy and girl who labors today to indite a fine, clear letter to Santa Claus wants just about what every other boy and girl wants. What is more, each wants just the same things that boys and girls always have wanted. The idea of the toy remains today essentially what it was when the first affectionate cave man took the baby on his knee and hacked away at a bit of wood for its edification. There is proof a-plenty of this, rescued from the depths of the earth each year.

The adult's life of today is little enough like that of even 100 years ago. A worthy gentleman of the powdered queue period would feel utterly at a loss in any club of any city, bereft of snuffbox, finding few men of the "four-bottle" variety, forbidden to defend his honor with the sword, wholly out of touch with the conversation about stocks and bonds and strikes.

But take a child not of 100, or of 1,000, but of 2,000, or 3,000 or 4,000 years ago, and there would be small hiatus between him and the little ones of the modern nursery. Their games, their toys, even their fairy stories, would seem to him quite like those that amused him before the Death Angel carried him away from his eastern home, centuries ago. For the child, in a world of change, is eternal.

Walk through any of the great toy shops and you see dolls that cost \$200 or \$300. Presumably these are bought by someone, and perhaps they do not spoil the unfortunate child's imagination, and again perhaps they do. The dolls of the little girls of long ago were quite as satisfactory to their young mothers, that is certain; and these proud creatures of 1902 are only their fashionable sisters. The family likeness is marked.

The animals of today cry "moo" and "baa" and "wee wee" in sure enough voices but they are only the old, old toys become sophisticated. They cost dollars upon dollars, and if the sun goes down on Christmas day leaving them unbroken it will be merely

because the children are more sophisticated still, and prefer the little automobiles and the performing gentlemen who cost \$200 or \$300.

But today's collection of millionaire live stock has some reason for putting on airs. Their family tree is ever so many thousands of years old. It can be traced back as clearly as need be for forty long centuries.

Never were children's toys so elaborate as today. One would think that the light of fancy had gone out in every childish brain and that nothing not absolutely obvious could by any chance appeal to the childish mind. The good old-fashioned brand of infant which sought out a stick or old bottle and "loved" it energetically all day is at a discount now. Her dolls come very near to polite conversation in French and German. As for the boys, they can learn a trade from the automatic toys that Santa Claus will put in their stockings if he has money enough.

But in spite of appearances, fashions in games and toys are the only fashions which remain the same forever. Today's fashions may share the modern tendency towards complexity, but the principle of them all is unchanging. From the tombs of Egypt they dig today playthings which, recovered with gay paint, might pass unnoticed among a twentieth century child's belongings. And when children grow tired and seek their mother's laps with the world-old demand for a story, the tales the mothers tell are strangely like those of old centuries—all alike, whether told under the shadow of the young pyramids or under the shadow of the American school house.

Almost as much is known of the child life of two or three thousand years ago as of that of a century ago. A sweet and gentle belief that reigned in the hearts of the ancient Egyptians has enabled us to learn all about their little ones' lives. When a child died, long ago, its spirit, according to their faith, began another similar existence, and they who loved the little one could not bear to think that in the world of shadows their child should have nothing to play with. So the weeping mothers gathered up the favorite toys and put them in the small graves, there to lie until eager hands, thousands of years later, should break in upon the child's rest and take out the playthings that love had put beside him.

Perhaps the archaeologists are so intent on deciding the exact period to which the findings belonged that the human side of the matter does not come into their minds; but if archaeologists were women their

first thought in taking up the toys would be of the mother heart of old Egypt that pined to keep her darling's playthings in remembrance, but gave them up that the little one might have something to bear it company on the long journey that even tiny feet must travel alone.

These findings in tiny graves of the past show that children of the Pharaohs had a pretty good time of it in the matter of toys. There were dolls, of course, for the girls, and quite elaborate ones, painted gaily, with movable joints and bright clothing. They could not make the few pithy remarks which are the stock in trade of expensive dolls of this age, but they were fine ladies, for all that.

And as for their wardrobes, they were very complete. They had chairs and mirrors, such as they were, and bedsteads of elaborate pattern, and sedan chairs to take the air in, and, crowning glory, lackeys to carry them on their excursions. This is doing pretty well for any age, and there is no doubt that the children of the Pharaohs were better off than most children of only a few hundred years ago, so far as toys went.

Little boys played with boats and mechanical toys, thousands of years past, just as they do now. The boats were cut out of wood or stone, and often were large and elaborate.

The mechanical toys are thrown into deep shadow by those of the present day, but they served their purpose very well. Animals on wheels could be pulled around then as now, and were trailed in the wake of little Egyptians, who ran to see Moses when he passed down the street with his kind princess.

They were well made, the crocodiles and lions and birds, and still hold up their heads bravely, inviting comparison with the product of modern toy shops.

In the time of Aristotle there were many mechanical toys, and one Heron of Alexandria before the Christian era had made toys that danced through some contrivance of steam. This was deemed worthy of mention at the time, not because there was anything strange about mechanical toys, but by reason of its exceptional ingenuity.

There are many sets of checker men in ancient tombs, and the game was a favorite in ancient Egypt. "Odd and Even" and "Jacks" were played on every side, and marbles, too, of course. All these were the delight of some children and found a place in some graves. Inscriptions show how familiar were the games that

were played without toys.

So many toys are dug up that one might be tempted to think that time had not dealt kindly with children in building school houses and printing books, if it were not for a pile of copy books as high as that of playthings. If a dead child must have his toys, in order not to be lonely in the "unknown bourne," it was equally important that he should carry with him his credentials to show that in this world he was a good scholar and carefully taught. So his papyrus school books went into the grave, too. They are imposing even today.

Balls are often excavated, and it was apparently considered great sport to play a game of ball, each boy sitting on the shoulder of some other boy. This combination of ball and leap frog would be rather strenuous even for football-playing boys of today.

In ancient Egypt boys of good family had much to learn. There were two languages to begin with, the common and the literary, and then all sorts of mathematical problems had to be solved. The Nile, in overflowing its banks, obliterated landmarks, and land surveyings was a very necessary part of a boy's schooling.

Geometry and astronomy were taught to every boy at an early age, and if he did not learn there was a supple rod in waiting for him.

In learning to write, then as now, the children copied wise sayings and stories. One of the maxims to copy which must have been a great joy runs: "Let no day pass in idleness, for then thou wilt be flogged. A boy's ears are in his back and a flogging makes him hear." Even these terrible warnings, however, did not prevent boys from scribbling all over their copy books. Sketches of animals, and what may be caricatures of teachers appear on many a copybook.

Scholars did not always have to copy maxims, however. Fairy tales were much in evidence, too. They have a singularly familiar sound. One of the most popular begins in this way:

"There was once a king who had no son. He desired a son and prayed the gods to give him one, which was ordered by them. The Hathors, or Fates, consult at his birth and decided that he shall die by the bite of a snake, a crocodile or a dog. The king was greatly troubled when he heard this. He built a great castle in the midst of a wood and furnished it with all that was best in the palace, and set keepers over it, and forbade the child to go beyond it."

Does not this sound like the opening of

many a fairy tale of today, especially that of the Sleeping Beauty? The story goes on to recite how the prince, grown to manhood, saw and loved a beautiful girl, whom he married. They loved each other dearly, and when the prince went beyond the palace in the wood the faithful wife kept watch over him. He is nearly bitten by a serpent, but she saves him. Then the story breaks off.

It would be pleasant to know if the wife saved him from all dangers, but, unfortunately, the Egyptians' reverence for the word of the Fates probably gave a different ending. Besides, before the story ends, the prince had also seen and loved a dog which had followed him faithfully for years. The love between them was so great that the prince would not part from his four-footed friend, even though he knew that death might result. It would be too bad to have him die from his faithful dog's bite, as perhaps he did, so it is just as well that there is no ending to this story of long ago.

Even a bit of it goes to prove that civilization may come and civilization may go, but childhood will remain the same until the big ball called earth shrivels up and goes wandering, a pale old ghost, among the warm young worlds.

### Love Story in Curves

Baltimore American: He loved her devotedly. He was also bow-legged. Both facts gave him pain at times. He passed it by with a rueful smile, when she merrily said that his affliction gave him such an arch look, and that, after all, he was a pretty good sort when you got on to his curves. He bore it patiently when she referred to his walk as a parenthetical progress. But he rebelled and broke the engagement when she called her pet dog through the wicket formed by his legs.

"I may not be so overly ornamental," said he, "but I emphatically object to being made useful so unseasonably early in the game!"

### Shop Talk

Baltimore American: Mrs. Gabber—And your husband is purchasing agent for a waterproof house?

Mrs. Blabber—Yes, he does all the selecting and buying of gutta percha, etc.

Mrs. Gabber—Then he must make long and frequent trips abroad.

Mrs. Blabber—Frequent, but not long. He goes away and rubbers around for a few weeks at a stretch, and then flies right back—Oh, it's a snap!