Title: Colonel Crockett's Co-operative Christmas

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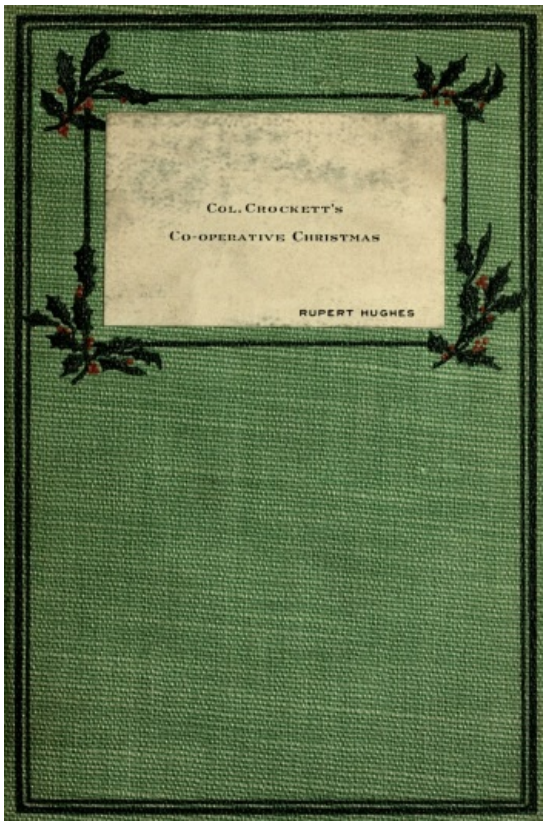
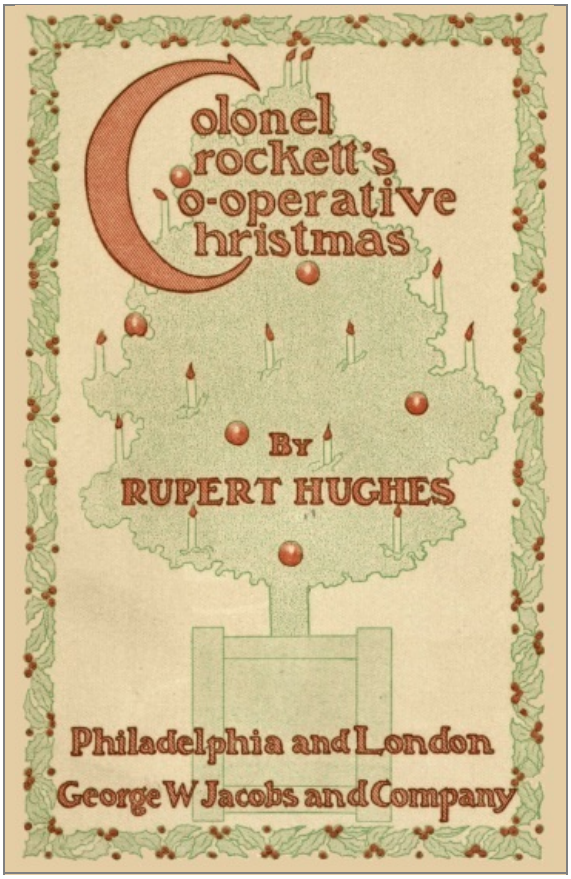


Colonel Crockett's Co-operative Christmas

Last night I ate a horrible mockery of a Christmas dinner in a deserted restaurant



Colonel Crockett's Co-operative Christmas

By Rupert Hughes

Philadelphia and London
George W Jacobs and Company

Published September, 1906

[9]

Foreword

Of all the strange gatherings that have distinguished Madison Square Garden, the strangest was probably on the occasion, last Christmas, when the now well-known Colonel D. A. Crockett, of Waco, rented the vast auditorium for one thousand dollars, and threw it open to the public. As he is going to do it again this coming Christmas, an account of the con-, in-, and re-ception of his scheme may interest some of the thousands who find themselves every Christmas in the Colonel's plight. My plan to describe it was frustrated by the receipt, from his wife, of three

[10] letters he wrote her. It seems only fair, then, that the author of an achievement which is likely to become an institution should be allowed to be the author of its history. I shall, therefore, content myself with publishing verbatim two of the Colonel's own letters.

RUPERT HUGHES

[11]

LETTER ONE

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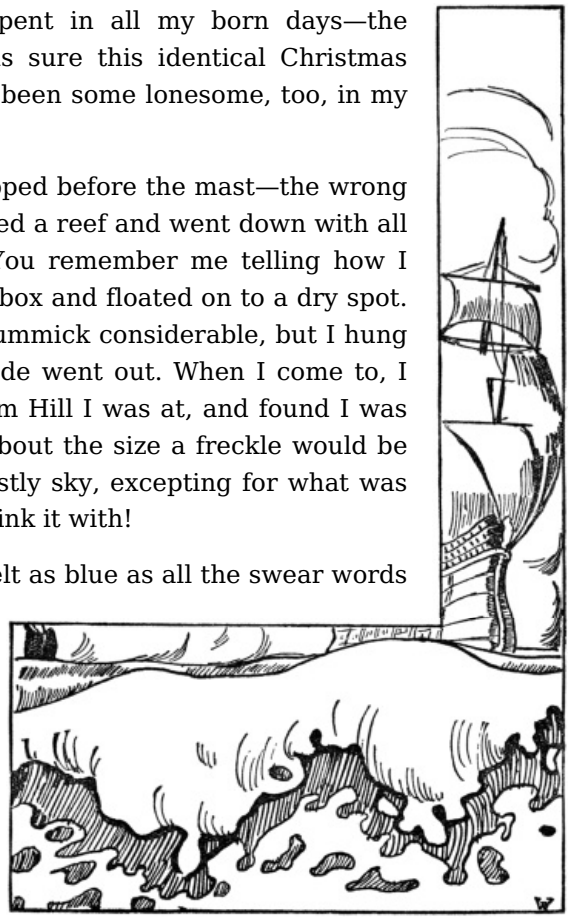
New York, N. Y., Dec. 26, 1904.

FRIEND WIFE:



The miserablest night I ever spent in all my born days—the solitariest, with no seconds—was sure this identical Christmas night in New York City. And I've been some lonesome, too, in my time.

I've told you how, as a boy, I shipped before the mast—the wrong mast—and how the old tub bumped a reef and went down with all hands—and feet—except mine. You remember me telling how I grabbed aholt of a large wooden box and floated on to a dry spot. It knocked the wind out of my stummick considerable, but I hung

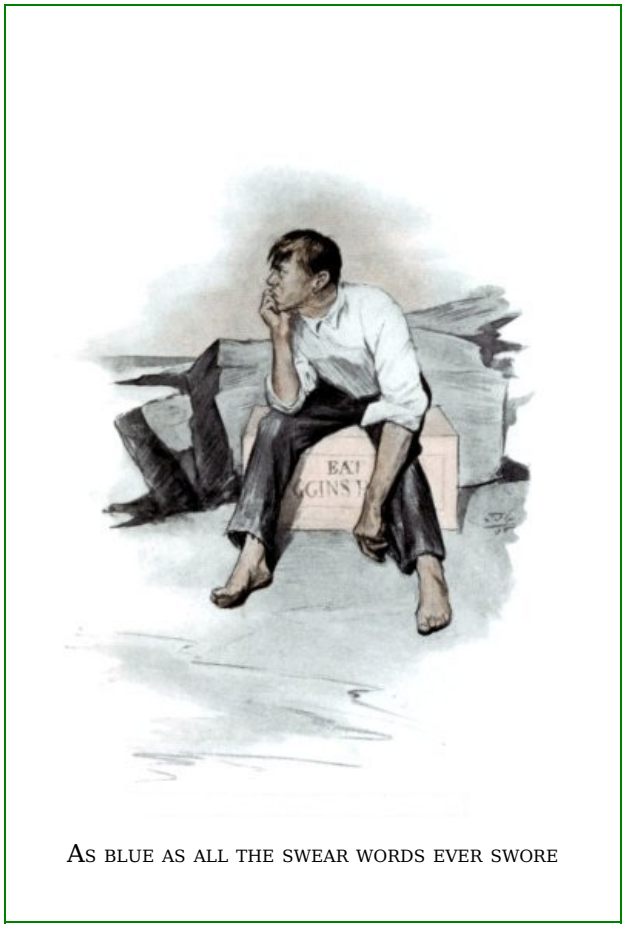
[14]

on kind of unconscious till the tide went out. When I come to, I looked round to see where in Sam Hill I was at, and found I was on a little pinhead of an island about the size a freckle would be on the moon. All around was mostly sky, excepting for what was water. And me with nothing to drink it with!

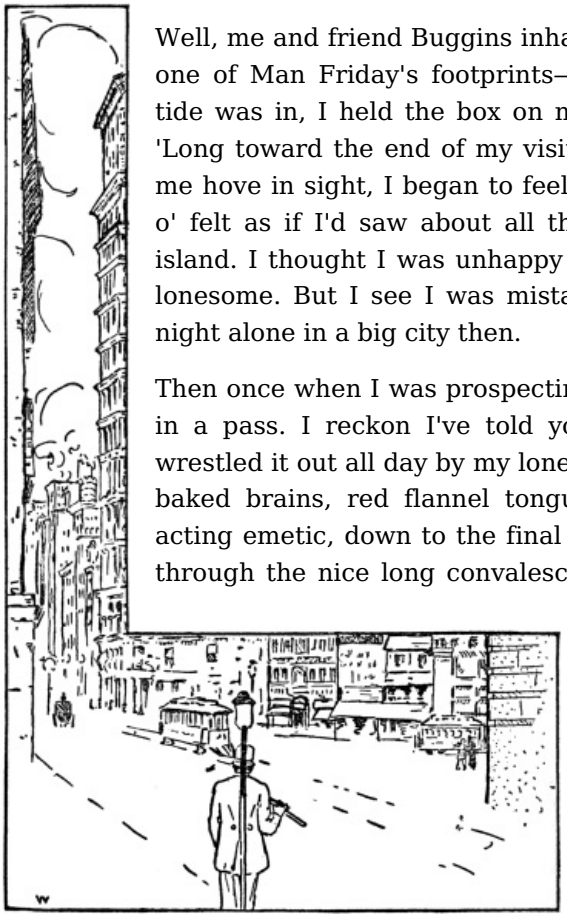
I set down hard on the box and felt as blue as all the swear words ever swore. There was nothing in sight to eat, and that made me so hungry that me and the box fell over backward. As I laid there sprawled out, with my feet up on the box, I looked between my knees and read them beautiful words, "Eat

[15]

Buggins' Biscuit," in plain sight before me on the end of the box.



As blue as all the swear words ever swore



Well, me and friend Buggins inhabited that place—about as big as one of Man Friday's footprints—for going on four weeks. When tide was in, I held the box on my head to keep my powder dry. 'Long toward the end of my visit, just before the ship that saved me hove in sight, I began to feel a mite tired of that place. I kind o' felt as if I'd saw about all that was int'resting on that there island. I thought I was unhappy and I had a sneaking idea I was lonesome. But I see I was mistaken. I hadn't spent a Christmas night alone in a big city then.

[16]

Then once when I was prospecting for our mine, I was snowed up in a pass. I reckon I've told you how I got typhoid fever and wrestled it out all day by my lonesome; unparalleled thirst, Boston baked brains, red flannel tongue, delirium dreamins, and self-acting emetic, down to the final blissful "Where am I at?" and on through the nice long convalescence till my limbs changed from twine strings to human members. Six weeks doing time as doctor, patient, trained nurse and fellow-Mason all in one, was being alone right smart. But it wasn't a patch on the little metrolopis of Manhattan on Santy Claus day.

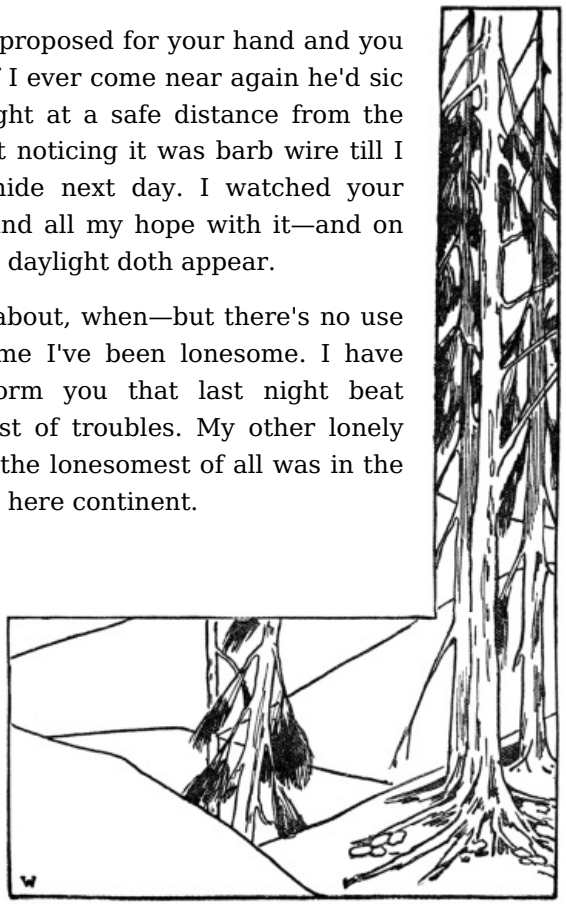
[17]

Then once I had a rather unrestful evening out in the western part of Texas. A fellow sold me a horse right cheap, and later a crowd of gentlemen accused me of stealing it, and I was put in jail with a promise of being lynched before breakfast. That was being uncomfortable some, too. But I wished last night that my friend, Judge Watson, hadn't come along that night and identified me. It would have saved me from New Yorkitis.

[18]

Then there was the night when I proposed for your hand and you sent me to your pa, and he said if I ever come near again he'd sic the dogs on me. I spent that night at a safe distance from the dogs, leaning on a fence, and not noticing it was barb wire till I looked at my clothes and my hide next day. I watched your windows till the light went out and all my hope with it—and on after that till, as the poet says, till daylight doth appear.

Then there's the time I told you about, when—but there's no use of making a catalog of every time I've been lonesome. I have taken my pen in hand to inform you that last night beat everything else on my private list of troubles. My other lonely times was when I was alone, but the lonesomest of all was in the heart of the biggest crowd on this here continent.



He said if I ever come near again he'd sic the dogs on me

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There was people a-plenty. But I didn't know one gol-darned galoot. I had

plenty of money, but nobody to spend it on—except tiptakers. I was stopping at this big hotel with lugsury spread over everything, thicker than sorghum on corn pone. But lonely—why, honey, I was so lonely that, as I walked along the streets, I felt as if I'd like to break into some of the homes and compel 'em at the point of my gun to let me set in and dine with 'em.

I felt like asking one of the bell-boys to take me home and get his ma to give me a slice of goose and let her talk to me about her folks.

[20] There was some four million people in a space about the size of our ranch. There was theatres to go to—but who wants to go to the theatre on Christmas?—it's like going to church on the Fourth of July. There were dime muzhums, penny vawdevilles, dance-halls.

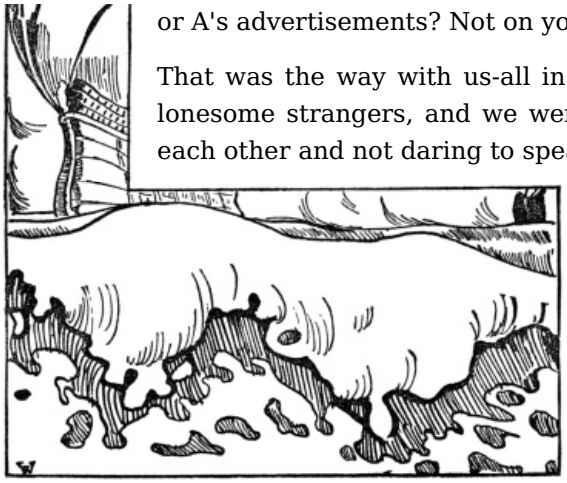
There was a big dinner for news-boys. The Salvation Army and the Volunteers gave feeds to the poor. But I couldn't qualify. I wasn't poor. I had no home, no friends, no nothing.

[21] The streets got deserteder and deserteder. A few other wretches was marooned like me in the hotel corridors. We looked at each other like sneak-thieves patroling the same street. Waiters glanced at us pitiful as much as to say, "If it wasn't for shrimps like you, I'd be home with my kids."

The worst of it was, I knew there were thousands of people in town in just my fix. Perhaps some of them were old friends of mine that I'd have been tickled to death to fore-gather with; or leastways, people from my State. Texas is a big place, but we'd have been brothers and sisters—or at least cousins once removed—for Christmas' sake. But they were scattered around at the St. Regis or the Mills Hotel, the Martha Washington or somewhere, while I was at the Waldorf-hyphen-Astoria.

[22]

[23] It was like the two men that Dickens—I believe it was Dickens—tells about: Somebody gives A a concertina, but he can't play on it; winter coming on and no overcoat; he can't wear the concertina any more than he can tootle it. A few blocks away is a fellow, Mr. B. He can play a concertina something grand, but he hasn't got one and his fingers itch. He spends all his ready money on a brand-new overcoat, and just then his aunt sends him another one. He thinks he'll just swap one of them overcoats for a concertina. So he advertises in an exchange column. About the same time, A advertises that he'll trade one house-broken concertina for a nice overcoat. But does either A or B ever see B's



or A's advertisements? Not on your beautiful daguerreotype.

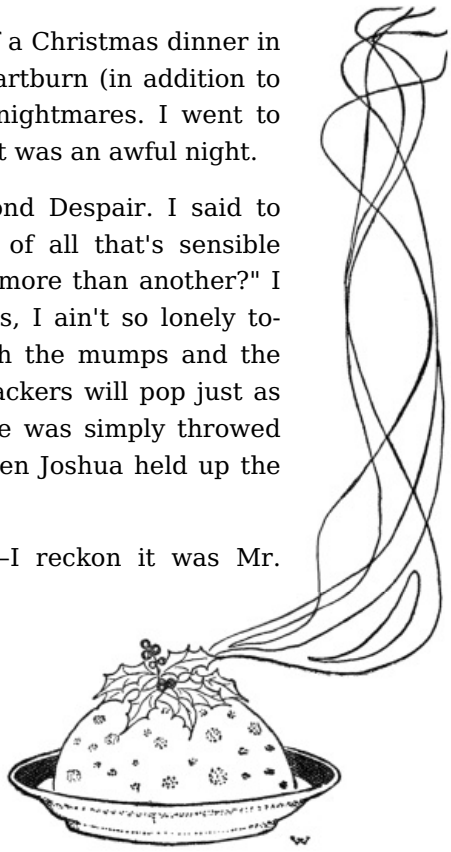
That was the way with us-all in New York. The town was full of lonesome strangers, and we went moping round, stumbling over each other and not daring to speak.

They call us "transients" here. It's like a common sailor that's lost at sea; he's only a "casualty." So us poor, homeless dogs in New York are only transients. Why, do you know, I was that lonely I could have stood out in the square like a lonely old cow in the rain, and just mooed for somebody to take me in.

[24] I'd have telegraphed for you and the childern to come to town, but Texas is so far away, and you'd have got here too late, and you couldn't come anyway, being sick, as you wrote me, and one of the kids having malary. How is his blessed self to-day? I hope you're feeling better. Telegraph if you ain't, and I'll take the first train home.

Well, last night I ate a horrible mockery of a Christmas dinner in a deserted restaurant, and it gave me heartburn (in addition to heartache) and a whole brood-stable of nightmares. I went to bed early, and stayed awake late. Gee! that was an awful night.

[25] I tried Philosophy—the next station beyond Despair. I said to myself, "You old fool, why in the name of all that's sensible should you feel so excited about one day more than another?" I wasn't so lonely the day before Christmas, I ain't so lonely to-day, but then I was like a small boy with the mumps and the earache on the Fourth of July. The firecrackers will pop just as lively another day, but—well, the universe was simply throwed all out of gear, like it must have been when Joshua held up the moon—or was it the sun?



You remember reading me once about—I reckon it was Mr. Aldrich's pleasing idea of the

[26] last man on earth; everybody killed off by a pestilence or something, and him setting there by his lonely little lonesome; and what would he have done if he had heard his door-bell ring? Well, I reckon he'd have done what I'd have done if I'd met a friend—given one wild whoop, wrapped his arms round his neck, kissed him on both cheeks, and died with a faint gurgle of joy. I'd of been glad to have died so, too.

Finally, I swore that if I ever foresaw myself being corralled again in a strange city on Christmas, I'd put on a sandwich board or something and march up and down the streets with a sign like this:

[27]

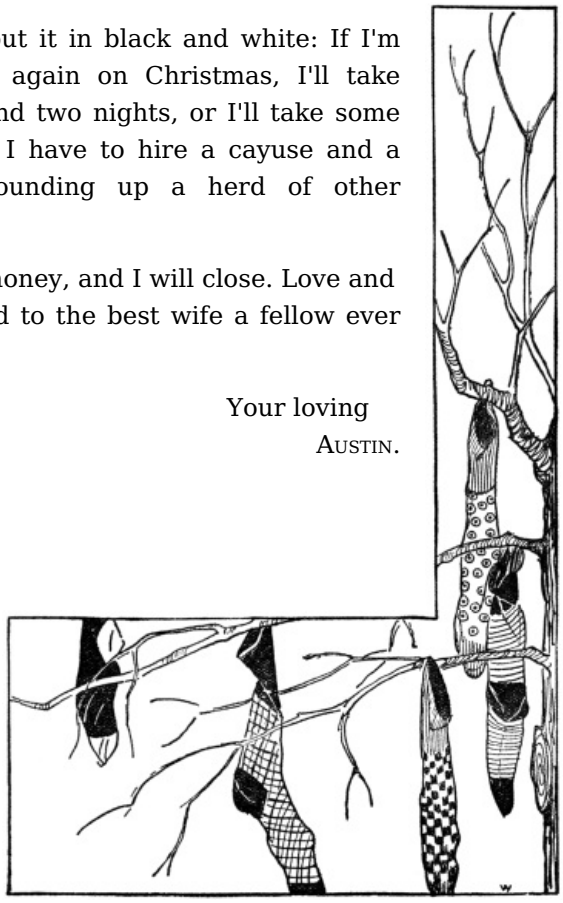
I'm lonely!
I'm homesick for a real
Christmas!
There must be others.
Let's get together!
Meet me at the Fountain
in Union Square!
We'll hang our stockings on the trees.

Perhaps some snow will fall in 'em.
Come one—Come all!
Both great and small!

I bet such a board would stir up a procession of exiles a mile and a half long. And we'd get together and have a good crying match on each other's shoulders, and wring each other's hands, while the band played Old Lang's Sign.

[28] But it's over now. I've lived through the game of Christmas solitaire in a big city, and I feel as relieved as a man just getting out of a dentist's office. He's minus a few molars, and aches considerable, but he's full of a pleasing emptiness.

But let me say right here, and put it in black and white: If I'm ever dragged away from home again on Christmas, I'll take laughing-gas enough for a day and two nights, or I'll take some violent steps to get company, if I have to hire a cayuse and a lariat and rustle Broadway, rounding up a herd of other unbranded stray cattle.



Well, this is a long letter for me, honey, and I will close. Love and
[29] kisses to the sweet little kids and to the best wife a fellow ever had.

Your loving
AUSTIN.

P. S. I pulled off the deal all right. The syndicate buys the mine. I get $500,000 in cash and $500,000 in stock, and I start for home in three days. We'll hang up our stockings on New Year's Day.

[30]

[31]

[32]

[33]

Between Letters

The Fates accepted Colonel Crockett's challenge, and, by an irresistible syndication of events, forced him to be alone in New York again the very next Christmas. After a series of masterly financial strokes, he had felt rich enough in his two millions to spend a year abroad with his family. A cablegram called him to America early in December, to a directors' meeting. Expecting to return at once, he had left his family in Italy. A legal complication kept him postponing his trip from day to day; and finally an important [34] hearing, in which he was a valued witness, was postponed by the referee—or deferee—till after the holidays. The Colonel saw himself confronted with another Christmas far away from any of his people. The first two days he spent in violent profanity, and in declining invitations which he received from business acquaintances to share their homes. Then he set out to make the occasion memorable. Once more we may leave the account to him.

[35]

[36]

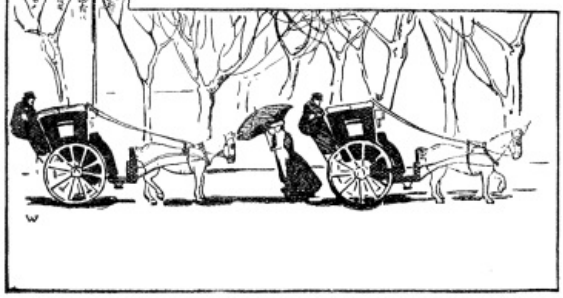
[37]

New York, N. Y., Dec. 28, 1905.

Friend Wife:

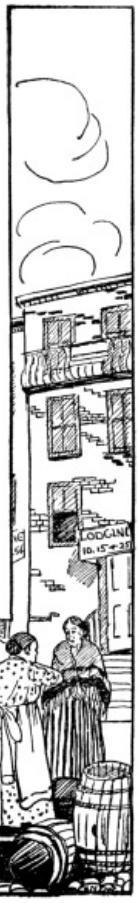
Well, I've been and went and gone and done it! And golly, but it was fun—barring wishing you and the little ones had of been here, too. Next year we'll arrange it so, for I'm going to do it again. You remember Artemus Ward's man who "had been dead three weeks and liked it." Well, that's me. This camping out in New York is getting to be a habit. I'm sending you a bundle of newspaper clippings as big as a stovepipe—all about Yours Truly.

As soon as I saw that circumstances had organized a pool to [38] corner me and my Christmases, I spent a couple of days sending up rain-making language. Then I settled down to work like a bronco does to harness after kicking off the dashboard and snapping a couple of traces.



"If I've got to be alone this Christmas," I says to myself, "I'll make it the gol-blamedest, crowdedest solitude ever heard of this side of the River."

I looked for the biggest place in town under one roof. Madison Square Garden was *it*. You remember it. We was there to the Horse Show—so-called. You recollect, I reckon, that the Garden holds right smart of people. At a political meeting [39] once they got 14,000 people into it, and there was still room for Grover Cleveland to stand and make a speech.



Well, feeling kind o' flush and recklesslike, I decided to go and see the manager, or janitor, or whatever he is. And go I did. I says to him: "Could I rent your cute little shack for one evening—Christmas night?"

"Certainly, sir," he says. "There happens to be nothing doing this Christmas."

"How much would it set me back?" I says very polite.

"Only one thousand plunks," says he smiling.

"But, my dear Gaston," I says with a low bow, "I don't want to buy [40] your little Noah's Ark for the baby. I only want to borrow it for one evening."

"One thou. is our bargain-counter limit," he says. "I couldn't make it less for the poor old Czar of Rooshy."

I kind o' hesitated, remembering the time when a thousand dollars would have kept me comfortable for about three years. It's hard to get over the habit of counting your change. Then Mr. Janitor, seeing me kind o' groggy, says, a little less polite:

"If that's more than you care to pay for a single room you can get a cot for five cents on the Bowery; for a quarter you can get a whole suite."

"Only one thousand plunks," says he

[41]

That riled me. I flashed a wad of bills on him that made his eyes look like two automobile lamps. He could see it wasn't Confederate money, either. Then I shifted my cigar to detract attention while I swallowed my Adam's apple, and I says:

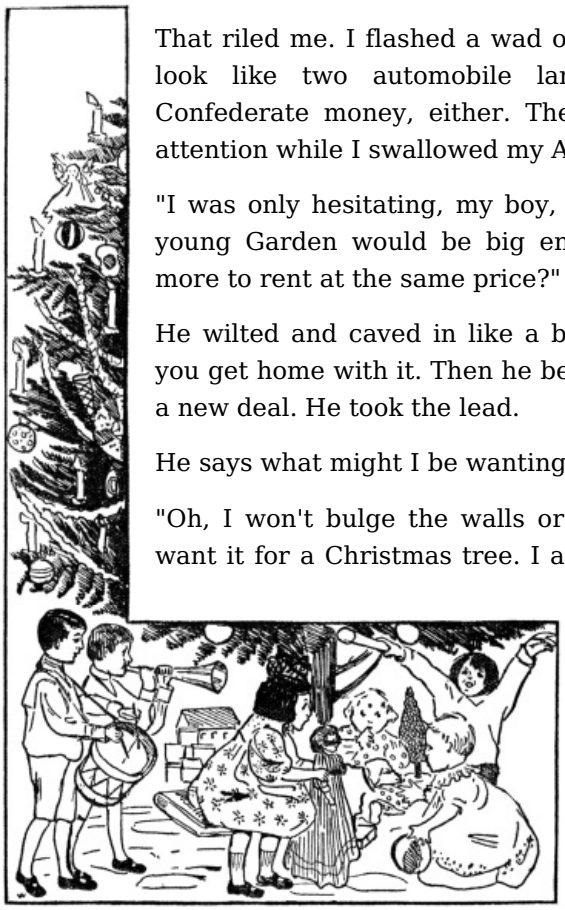
"I was only hesitating, my boy, because I wondered if your nice young Garden would be big enough. You haven't got a couple more to rent at the same price?"

He wilted and caved in like a box of ice cream does just before you get home with it. Then he began to bow lower, and we cut for a new deal. He took the lead.

He says what might I be wanting to use the Garden for?

[42]

"Oh, I won't bulge the walls or strain the floor," I says. "I only want it for a Christmas tree. I am going to invite my friends to a little party."



"Whew, but you must be popular!" he says. "Who the dickens are you? Brother Teddy, or Mother Eddy?"

"I'm Colonel D. Austin Crockett, of Waco," I says as meek as I could.

"Pleased to meet you, Colonel," he says. "What you running for?—District Attorney? Or are you starting a new Mutual Benefit Life Assassination?"

"Neither," I says; "I'm a stranger in New York."

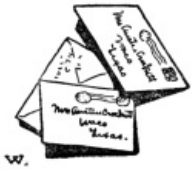
[43]

"But these friends of yours?" he gasped. "Is all Waco coming up here on an excursion? Is the town going to move bodily?"

"Mr. Prosecutor," I says, "if you'll stop cross-examining a minute, and let me tell how it all happened, it will save right smart of time. I am a stranger here to about four million people. They are strangers to me. We ought to know each other. So I'm going to give a little Madison Square Garden warming and invite 'em in."

"What are you going to sell 'em—prize poultry, or physical culture?"

"I've nothing to sell. I'm just going to entertain 'em."



[44]

"Well, I've heard of Southern hospitality," he says, "but this beats me. How much you going to charge a head?"

"Nothing. Everything is to be free. Admission included."

"Not on your dear old Lost Cause!" he exclaims. "Leastways not in our little doll's house. Not for ten thousand dollars! Why, man, do you realize that if you offered these New York, Brooklyn, Bronx, Hackensack and Hoboken folks a free show, more'n two thousand women would get trampled to death? Did you ever see a bargain-counter crowd on Twenty-third Street?
[45] Well, that's only for a chance to get something they don't want at a fishbait price. But if you offered them a free, 'take-one' chance—holy keewhiz!—I can just see it now! The Garden ain't half big enough in the first place. There's enough Take-One'ers in these parts to fill the old Coliseum. And they'd make the wild animals look like a cage of rabbits or white mice."

Well, the upshot of it was, he persuaded me to charge an admission; so we set it at $1.00 a head "on the hoof." I wrote out a card and sent it to all the papers to print at advertising rates. It cost right smart, but it looked neat:

[46]

TO EVERY STRANGER IN NEW YORK, AND HIS LADY

If you are not otherwise engaged on Christmas night, the honor of your presence at Madison Square Garden is requested by

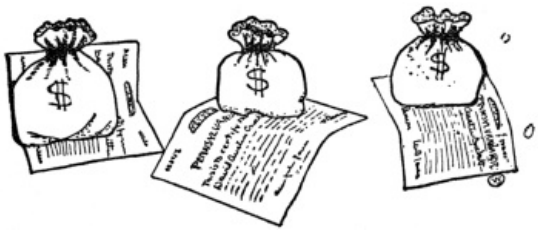
DAVID AUSTIN CROCKETT

Colonel Fifth Texas Cavalry, C. S. A.

Music, Dancing, Refreshments, Souvenirs. For the purpose of keeping out the undesirable element a charge of $1.00 will be made.

I knew that them magic words, "Refreshments" and "Souvenirs," would hit 'em hard. In order to whet the public interest, I asked the papers where I advertised to give the thing some editorial or
[47] other reference. But they was very cold and said the best they could do was to send their dramatic critics to criticise the show afterward. A lot of good that would do me! So I took more space in advertising.

In a day or two I was visited at the hotel by one of the most imperent young fellows I ever met up with. He sent up a card, "*James J. James, Publicity Expert.*" I said to show him in, and he sort of oozed through the door—he was that oily. He looked about to see if we was alone; then winked slow and important, and says:



"What's your game, Colonel? It looks pretty slick, but I can't quite make it out. It's a new bunco, all right, but slick as it looks, it ain't quite so slick as it ought to be."

[48]

"Look here, you cub," I roared, "if you imply that I have any evil motives in this, I'll shoot you so full of holes you'll look like a mosquito net!"

He wasn't a bit scared; he simply winked the other eye, and said in a kind of foreign-sounding language:

"Forget it, Colonel! Cut it out! Back to the alfalfa with your Buffalo Bill vocabulary! If you are really on the level, you don't need to prove it with artillery. But it makes no diff. to me about that. My business is producing fame, not merit. Once more I ask, what's your lay?"

James J. James, Publicity Expert

[49]

I overcame a desire to kick him through the ceiling, and told him I proposed

to entertain the strangers in New York.

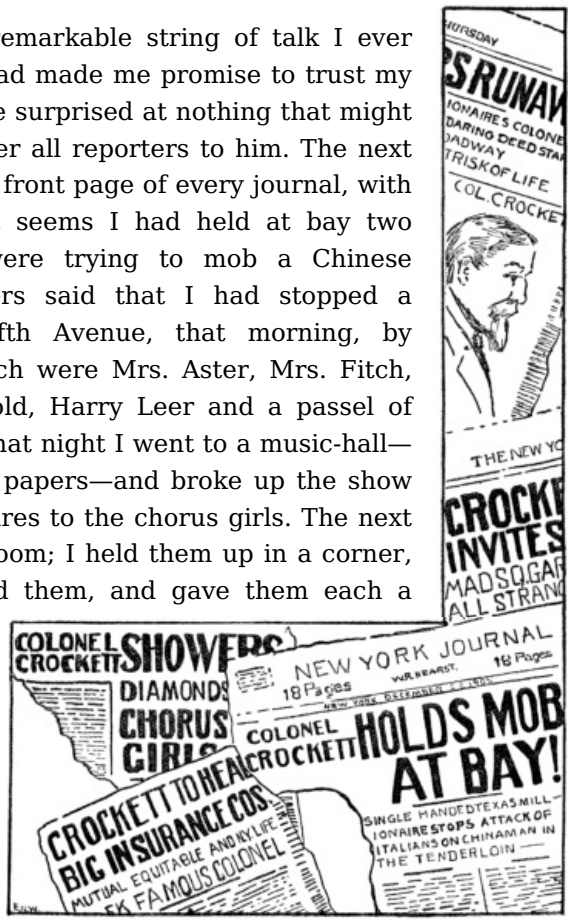
"Strangers in New York?—Why, that means everybody! There's been only one man born in New York since the war, and he's kept in alcohol at a dime muzhum. Your idea is really to give old New York a Christmas party, eh? Very pretty! Very pretty, indeed! But if you insist on exploding money all over the place, I don't see why you shouldn't get a run for it. Besides, I need a bit of it myself. What you want is a press agent. You're starting all wrong. People in New York can't understand or believe anything except through

[50] the language of the press agent. You take one on your staff, and in three days you'll be so famous that, if a child in a kindergarten is asked who is the Queen of Holland, it will answer: 'Colonel Crockett, of Waco.'"

Well, he poured out the most remarkable string of talk I ever heard, and before I knew it he had made me promise to trust my soul and my scheme to him; to be surprised at nothing that might appear in the papers, and to refer all reporters to him. The next morning I found my name on the front page of every journal, with my picture in most of them. It seems I had held at bay two

[51] hundred angry Italians who were trying to mob a Chinese laundryman. The evening papers said that I had stopped a runaway coach-and-four on Fifth Avenue, that morning, by lassoing the leader. On the coach were Mrs. Aster, Mrs. Fitch, Reggie Vanderbuilt, George Goold, Harry Leer and a passel of other "Among those presents." That night I went to a music-hall—according to the next morning's papers—and broke up the show by throwing a pocketful of solitaires to the chorus girls. The next day three burglars got into my room; I held them up in a corner, took away their masks, spanked them, and gave them each a hundred-dollar bill to help them

[52] to avoid temptation. That afternoon the three big life-insurance companies asked me to be president. And so on—you can read for yourself in the clippings—only for Heaven's sake don't believe any of it. In every article was a neat allusion to my Christmas party.



I wanted to kill James J. James, and I scoured the town for him, but he dodged me. He kept his word, though. For the last few days I've been the most talked-of man in town. Looks like I'd been the Only man in New York.

And now to tell about my little party. For two days a regiment of men was

[53] working in the Garden under my direction—and at my expense. It was like paying the war appropriation of Russia. But it was worth it.

At six o'clock Christmas night the crowd began to line up at the Garden doors. At 6:30 a platoon of police arrived. At 6:40 the line reached twice around the Garden. At 6:45 they sent for more police. At 7:15 every street

was solid with people. They called out the police reserves and clubbed about four hundred innocent bystanders insensible. At 7:45 the fire department was called and played the hose on the crowd.

This thinned 'em off a bit on the outsquirts. Then the ambulances
[54] give out and the fainting women was carried home in express wagons and wheelbarrows. The subway was the only line that could run cars.

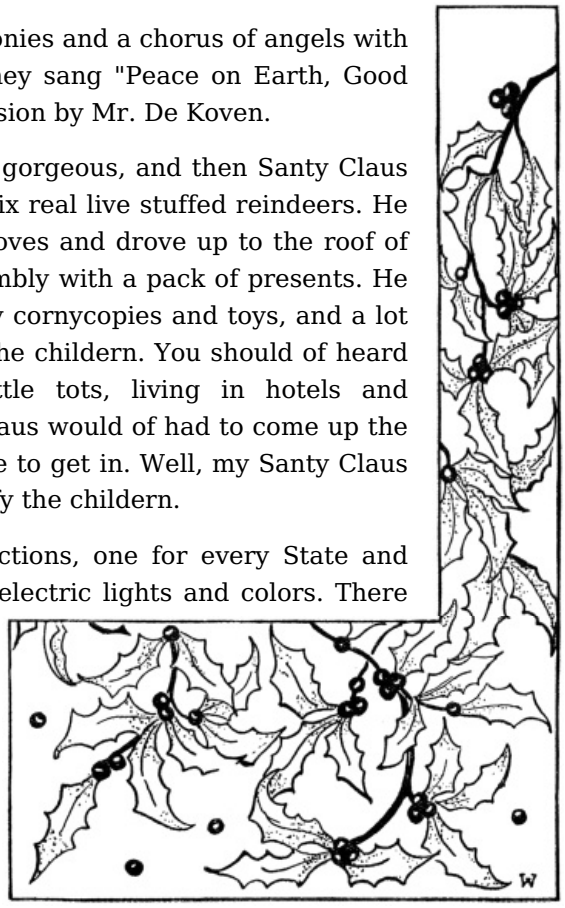
At 8:30 the doors opened. You should of seen the rush. The Galveston flood wasn't in it. At 8:45 the Garden was so full they closed the doors. That sent some of the outside crowd home.

The Garden was a beautiful sight. On the tower outside, in big electric letters, there was a sign, "Merry Christmas to you and yours."

Inside it was decorated with holly leaves and berries—tons and tons of it. At one end was built a big house with a chimbly and an old-fashioned fireplace.
[55] The roof of the house was covered with snow (cotton), and the sky back of it was full of electric stars that twinkled something beautiful. And there was a moon that looked like the real thing.

There was four bands in the balconies and a chorus of angels with real wings and electric halos. They sang "Peace on Earth, Good Will to Men," written for the occasion by Mr. De Koven.

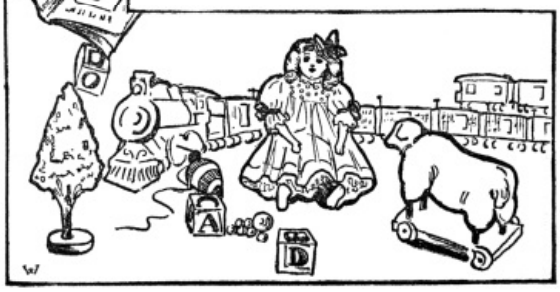
By and by all the bands bust out gorgeous, and then Santy Claus appeared in a sleigh drawed by six real live stuffed reindeers. He run along the sky on unseen grooves and drove up to the roof of
[56] the house, and slid down the chimbly with a pack of presents. He filled all the stockings with candy cornycopies and toys, and a lot of attendants passed 'em out to the childern. You should of heard them squeal with joy—poor little tots, living in hotels and apartment places where Santy Claus would of had to come up the steam radiator or the gas-log pipe to get in. Well, my Santy Claus had to make sixteen trips to satisfy the childern.



The Garden was divided into sections, one for every State and Territory, with its own shield in electric lights and colors. There was a native of every State in charge, and every State had its own big Christmas tree, and reception-room and refreshments. Some of the
[57] people I noticed seemed to of been born in several States at once, the way they passed from one booth to another fillin' up their pockets and stummicks. I reckon they paid for it the next day in doctors' bills.

But there was nary a sign of rowdyism. That dollar admission was a regular sieve for straining out the toughs. Then there were policemen everywhere, and every other man nearly was a plain-clothes man or a detective. Besides, after sober consideration, and on advice from the Gardeners, I cut out all drinks, except soft stuff. So there were no jags, except what some people brought [58] with them from their Christmas dinners and loaded plum puddings.

And then, of course, that peculiar something we get into us at Christmas time filled everybody with a sort of loving fellowship and a hankering to hug their neighbors and divvy up their funds like a Mutual Life Insurance Company prospectus says it's a-going to do some day.



In the centre of the hall there was a big sign in electric letters:

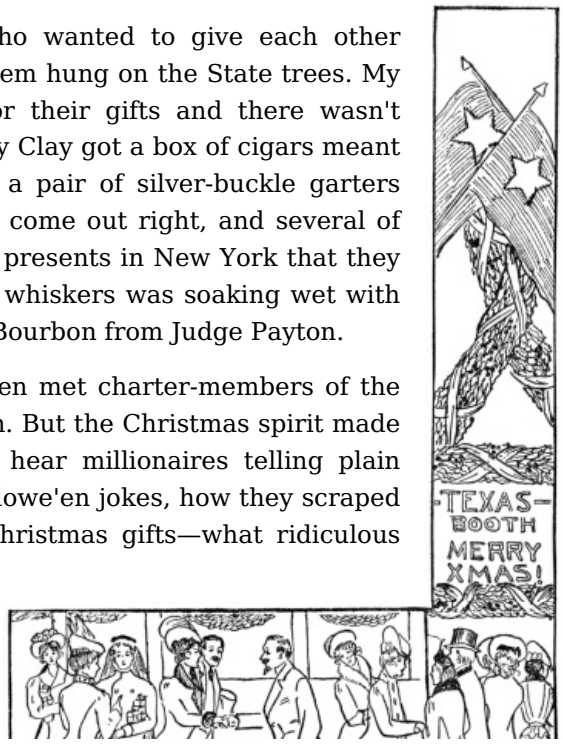
EVERYBODY IS HEREBY
INTRODUCED TO EVERYBODY
ELSE—FOR TO-NIGHT ONLY

At every State booth you'd see people gathering and recognizing old friends [59] or introducing theirselves to new ones. It was surprising how each State had its gathering.

At the Texas booth there was a big, immense crowd. A lot of them turned out to be old friends of ours; school friends of yours, ranch friends of mine, people I had worked for, people who had worked me—or for me. A lot of them sent their love and a Merry Christmas to you. I remember especially —— [Here we omit a list of names, somewhat lacking in universal interest.]

I had advertised that people who wanted to give each other Christmas presents could have them hung on the State trees. My [60] attendants gave them checks for their gifts and there wasn't many mix-ups. Old Miss Samanthy Clay got a box of cigars meant for Judge Randolph, and he got a pair of silver-buckle garters meant for her. But most of them come out right, and several of them was so surprised at getting presents in New York that they bust out crying. Major Calhoun's whiskers was soaking wet with tears when he got a bottle of old Bourbon from Judge Payton.

Rich folks who had been poor men met charter-members of the "I'm on to your origin" association. But the Christmas spirit made them forget to be snobs. You'd hear millionaires telling plain [61] people how they used to play Hallowe'en jokes, how they scraped up to buy their mothers little Christmas gifts—what ridiculous things they used to get and give!



Old Miss Samanthy Clay got a box of cigars meant for Judge Randolph

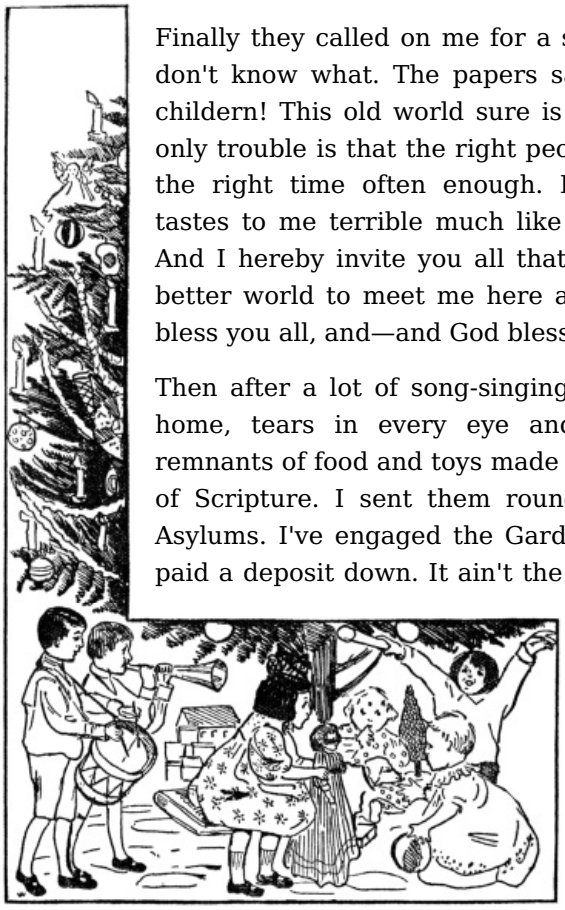
All evening as fast as anybody went out they'd let somebody else in. Along about eleven o'clock a lot of the people began to go home. Then a new crowd come in. People who had taken their childern home and put them to bed would come back for more fun. Others, who had spent the evening dining, began to dribble in.

All the actor-people and singers came. It was good to see them. Some of them told me what a god-send such a thing [62] was to them, homeless by profession. A lot of them brought their wives and babies. One father was playing Romeo in Newark, his wife was playing Little Eva in Harlem, and their daughter was playing Camille on Broadway. You should of seen them rejoicing round the Kansas tree!

About midnight the big refreshment hall was opened and everybody that could squeeze in set down to long tables where I had supper served. I had some of the best after-dinner speakers in town come in, and you should of heard some of the funny stories—it would of brought back dear old childhood memories. Mayor [63] McClellan gave us all a welcome, and then there was Chauncey Depew, of course, and Simeon Ford, and Augustus Thomas, and Wilton Lackaye, and Job Hedges, and Lemuel Ely Quigg, and General Horace Porter, and a passel of others.

They all made the most surprising allusions to your poor old husband. They called me Daddy and sang about me being a jolly good fellow. And one of them christened me "Santy Crockett." Why, my ears burned so hot I near set my collar on fire! It sure was worth all I spent, and I had a terrible time to keep from blubbering. I must of swallowed about four hundred and eleven Adam's apples.

[64]



Finally they called on me for a speech. I just kind o' gibbered—I don't know what. The papers say I said: "Merry Christmas, my childern! This old world sure is some comfortable, after all. The only trouble is that the right people can't seem to get together at the right time often enough. But this here Christmas supper tastes to me terrible much like More. I'm going to try it again. And I hereby invite you all that ain't in any better place or any better world to meet me here a year from to-night. And so God bless you all, and—and God bless everybody!"

[65]

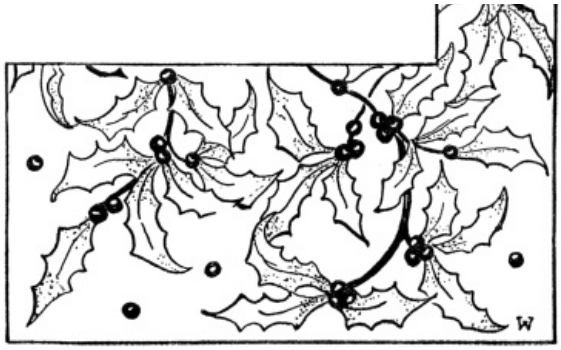
Then after a lot of song-singing and hand-wringing we all went home, tears in every eye and smiles on every mouth. The remnants of food and toys made more than the twelve baskets full of Scripture. I sent them round to the Hospitals and Orphant Asylums. I've engaged the Garden again for next Christmas and paid a deposit down. It ain't the extravagance it looks, either, for while the expenses was high—twelve thousand-odd dollars—they took in at the door nearly eighteen thousand dollars. I sent the profit to the Salvation Army and the Volunteers, and now I'm being prayed for and hallelooyied for everywhere there's a bass drum. But I'd do it again if it cost me twenty thousand. It's worth that and more to have your heart nearly break wide open with joy and fellowship.

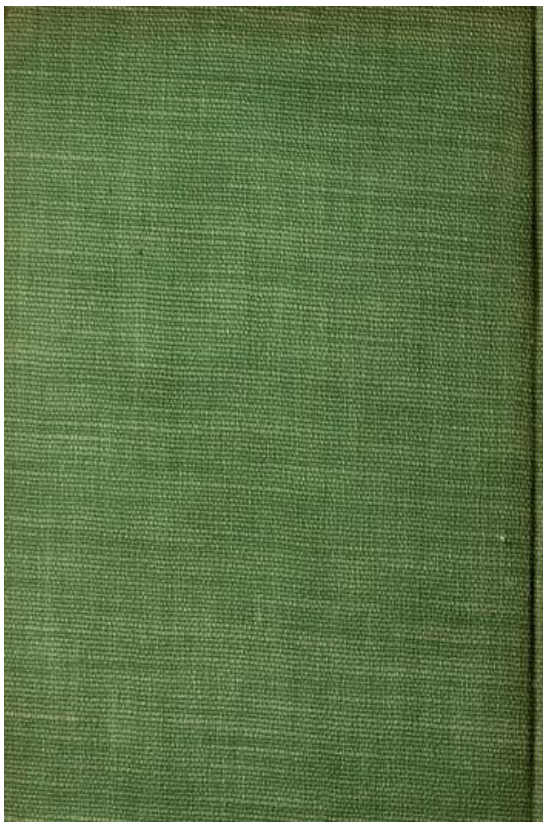
[66]

It was broad daylight when I got to bed, all wore out with happiness. I cuddled up, like I was a little boy once more in the days when I used to get up Christmas morning, cold and early, and look at my presents and then crawl back under the covers again with a double armful of toys, to keep warm and sleep some more.

If only you and the chicks had of been there! Next time you shall be.

Your loving
AUSTIN.





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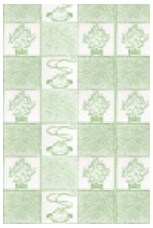

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