

THE KIND DEEDS MESSENGER

The Latham Foundation Story Service
for the Public Schools

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It is character building which is our great business in this world. No small part is done by our treatment of the animals committed to our care.—RUSKIN.

Old Jessie's Christmas

By ANNA HARRIS SMITH

Author of FOUR-FOOTED FRIENDS



THE hour for closing school had struck and still the boys and girls in Miss Martin's schoolroom lingered in their seats. Miss Martin was talking to them and they were listening with great interest. She was saying:

"Our Christmas collection is much larger than it was last year. We had a tree, a little feast and a good time then, and we can do it on the same amount this year. You have a chance to vote what we shall do with the ten dollars we have left. Who will make a motion?"

There was silence for a minute, then one of the girls said, "We might buy coal for some poor woman."

"Do you know of anyone who needs it in our village?" asked the teacher.

"No," was the reply, "but I thought you might."

Miss Martin replied, "I do know of several families who need fuel, but I know of six men who have offered our charity club enough money to buy all the fuel needed, and other kind men and women have offered flour and clothing for the poor families we have about here who need help."

"What do you think we had better do with the money?" asked one of the boys. "We might give books to the library or send it to some city charity, but it seems more like Christmas to make some one have a good time with it around here."

Miss Martin looked at her school without speaking for a moment, then she said, "There is an old Christmas story, children, that you all know. It is the story of what is called through the Christian

world the first Christmas, and that Christmas was celebrated in a stable among the cattle. Do you not all know these lines of that beautiful old hymn:

"Cold on his cradle the dewdrops are shining,
Low lies his head with the beasts of the stall?"

Yet how few of us ever think to make these lowly friends of ours happier on Christmas Day. Who of you has tried to share a little of the Christmas joy with your useful, faithful friends, the horse, the dog, the cat?"

Four hands went up, and Miss Martin called on Mary Prentiss first. Mary said:

"I always have something on the tree for my cat Flossy. Last Christmas she had a new cushion to lie on and a bag of catnip."

Mary's brother Tom was called on next and he said, "I gave my dog Rollo a hard rubber ball last year and an extra good dinner."

Then Robert Graves spoke: "Papa let me give our horse Fanny an extra feed and a new blanket."

It was now Alice Maynard's turn. "We always give our animals a little feast and some presents they can play with," she said. "We had great fun last year with a little toy that we could wind up, and the cat and dog both chased it and played with it."

"I am glad to hear this," said Miss Martin, "for now I am sure of some help in my plan for Christmas. I am going to ask you to help make a poor suffering animal happy on Christmas Day. I will tell you my plan. Perhaps some of you have noticed lately an old, wretched looking horse that a rag and junk peddler drives through the village to the city every day."

Nearly a dozen hands went up and voices broke out in excited tones: "I have seen him." "And I." "So have I."

"I see this man every afternoon after I go home from here," Miss Martin said, "and I spoke to him once about his horse. He answered me very unpleasantly and said, 'My horse is all right. I feed her, but she is one of the poor kind. You can't prove that I don't feed her.' Then I sent a complaint to the agent of the society in the city, but he wrote that if the horse was able to work at all he 'couldn't take a poor man's horse away from him.' The poor old creature looks thinner and weaker every day. Some nights she can hardly crawl along, and her master always has a whip in his hand. Yesterday she seemed very lame. Now what do you say to buying this horse and giving her a happy Christmas?"

"Oh, let us do it!" cried the children almost as one voice.

"A kind farmer has offered to keep the horse for us until we decide what is best to do for her. When the peddler drives home the day before Christmas, Mr. Prentiss will call him into his yard and offer him some old iron he has there, then he will try to buy the horse, and if he succeeds he will have her taken out of the wagon at once. Mr. Prentiss has invited us all there to our Christmas tree, you know, so we can join in giving a Christmas greeting to poor old Jessie. I call her Jessie because she looks so like a horse of that name my aunt once owned. Do you all like this plan?"

Every hand was raised, and eager girls and boys began to tell how they would try to make poor Jessie comfortable and happy again. Then school was dismissed.

It was the day before Christmas. Great preparations had been going on at the large, cheerful farmhouse for the Christmas party. The boys had set up a tree in the parlor. Some of the older girls had dressed it. The mothers had bountifully supplied a table with the good things that young people enjoy. All the guests were there, when about five o'clock an old wagon, drawn by a thin, limping horse, appeared at the foot of the hill.

The horse dreaded the hill; that was plainly to be seen. Horses hasten joyfully toward snug stables, a good supper, a smooth road or a drinking fountain, which shows that they can anticipate good things and hurry to meet them. As this we know is true, surely they can anticipate things that are painful also, and hold back in dread of them. So poor old Jessie, her trembling legs almost failing her, stopped at the foot of the hill, and if she could have spoken in our language she would have said: "I cannot crawl up this steep hill; it is slippery. I am badly shod and lame. Besides I am all fired out, and when I get to the end of my journey I have only a cold shelter and a little poor hay and ice-cold water. I wish I could lie right down here and die." But her brutal owner gave her a cruel cut with the whip, and with another great effort she started up the hill. The eager faces watching behind curtains grew sad, and Robert Prentiss cried out: "I won't stand this; I'm going to tell that man what I think of him."

"If you make him angry we can't get the horse," said wise little Mary.

The Prentiss house was halfway up the hill. Waiting outside, well wrapped up, for it was a bitterly cold night, was Mr. Prentiss; and as the horse slowly and painfully was limping by he hailed the man.

"Hold on. I've got something you may like."

The man stopped, and at Mr. Prentiss's motion drove into the yard.

"I've a pile of old iron in my barn. It's worth considerable, for there is a pretty good stove with it. Want to look at it?" The men went into the barn. Several of the boys, too eager to wait, stole out of the house, watched by twenty pairs of eyes from windows up stairs and down. The boys looked into the wagon in vain for a blanket to cover the trembling old horse, who stood with drooping head, first lifting one foot, then another, in a poor attempt to rest. "No matter," Robert whispered to them, "father will get her. He never fails; then we'll fix her up fine."

The men came out of the barn. "Look here," said Mr. Prentiss, "your horse is not fit to travel another step. She's too old or too weak for your work anyway. I hate to see a horse like this in harness. Now we would like to give you and your family and this old horse a merry Christmas. You say you've had hard luck. Well, I'll give you the stove and the old iron and a five-dollar bill, and you give me the old horse. I will lend you one of my horses to take you home with your load."

The man hesitated. "Give me ten and I'll do it," he said. "Your horse isn't worth five," Mr. Prentiss said, "but I'll give you what I said, and I'll add a bag of corn meal, a bushel of potatoes and a load of wood for a Christmas gift to your wife and send them to you tomorrow morning."

"I'll take her out," said the man slowly, eyeing the horse curiously, as if a new thought had come to him.

"Work lively," said Mr. Prentiss, "it is cold." At the first word half a dozen boys and a few girls appeared. In an astonishingly short time the old horse was taken out and led into a wide stall, where two of the boys with gentle hands began rubbing her tired legs. If ever a horse expressed by grateful looks her pleasure, poor old Jessie did as she turned her dim eyes first to one side, then to the other, and rubbed her poor old nose against her benefactors.

Two more boys, under Mr. Prentiss's direction, prepared a warm mash for her supper, another fixed her straw bedding, and two of the girls stood ready to cover her with a good blanket they had insisted on warming, to Mr. Prentiss's secret amusement.

The peddler stood looking on in great surprise. What did it all mean, this care for a poor old horse that he thought was not worth her feed? But as Mr. Prentiss purposely delayed getting him off, the man began to understand that it meant kindness, a fair return for faithful labor, and tender thought for the helpless creature that had suffered so at his hands, and even to his blinded vision the gratitude of the cold, hungry, tired horse was apparent.

As he was driven into his yard up to the miserable shed, through every crack of which the cold wind was whistling, and as he opened it to leave his wagon, he was ashamed to have Mr. Prentiss see that he took no pains to give his horse a comfortable shelter; ashamed of the narrow, dirty stall with no bed in it and no blanket but a thin piece of ragged carpeting. He knew that he had been quite able to make his faithful helper far more comfortable, and inwardly he determined to make his shed snug and warm before he put another horse in it, to widen the stall and to take better care of his horse in every way.

In Mr. Prentiss's snug stable, in a roomy stall, Jessie was eating her warm mash with the eagerness of starvation, and a happy group of children took turns in getting as near as possible to enjoy seeing her eat. Now and then she would stop a second and look around as if to say "Am I dreaming?" then rub her nose on the nearest boy in affectionate gratitude.

At last the mothers summoned the children to the house, but amid all the joy of feasting and Christmas gifts nothing gave the guests such pure and deep happiness as the thought of the old horse who had served mankind faithfully all her life, and now, through their means, was going to be tenderly cared for.

WHAT CHILDREN CAN DO

They can see that their own horses, dogs, cats and hens have fresh water kept where the thirsty creatures can get it, not once, but any time during the day or night. They can feed their dog or cat morning and night, remembering that all the animals and fowls have as good appetites and suffer as much when hungry and thirsty as boys and girls do. They can see that all these animals are made comfortable at night and never turned out in the cold. They can feed and try to find shelter for homeless dogs and cats, and be careful never to lose a dog or a cat, or to let one be left behind them if they move, unless they have got some one to take good care of it. Every kind act that children do not only makes the world better, but helps to make them better and happier men and women.—ANNA HARRIS SMITH.

QUESTIONS

1. Do you know the story of the first Christmas?
2. Why do you think the children in the story of OLD JESSIE'S CHRISTMAS spent the Christmas money wisely and well?
3. Retell the story.
4. When we are kind, does it teach others to be kind also?
5. What was the effect of the good example on the peddler?
6. Give some Kind Deeds school children can do at Christmas time. At other times.
7. Name at least two Kind Deeds you can do to animals.
8. In planning your Christmas gifts, how are you going to remember your animal friends?
9. Is it good for you to eat too many sweets at holiday time? Why should you be careful not to give your pets too many?
10. Will making others happy make you happy?
11. Describe some pretty Christmas customs in other lands.

SOME CHRISTMAS CUSTOMS IN OTHER LANDS

In several of the Slavic countries all the domestic animals are remembered in some kind way at Christmas, and people also carry baskets of crumbs and grain to the parks and squares, where they scatter the contents around to the delight of the wild birds and small animals that do not go south or hibernate during the winter.

In Norway and Sweden, when the country people thresh their grain in autumn, they carefully put aside the last two sheaves. These are saved until Christmas, when they are fastened to the outer door, to the window frames, to the garden gate, or to trees near the house, as a feast for the wild birds. In some parts of our own country, where people from Norway and Sweden are settled, the same thing may sometimes be seen, and when it is, we ought to be grateful to have had so attractive and kindly a custom introduced among us.

In Finland, another northern country which you can find on your maps of Europe, every family pays a special visit at this season to all the farm animals, carrying a dainty of some kind for each. There is a pretty belief, which is shared with Lithuania and many other European countries, that on Christmas Eve animals can speak as human beings, because of the part they played at the birth of the Christ Child.

THE PUZZLE

We received many answers to the Puzzle which appeared twice in THE KIND DEEDS MESSENGER, but no one answered it altogether correctly. The right solution is:

Among the BRAES of Scotland green
The BEARS can wander at their will.
Till man appears with SABER keen
And BARES his arms intent to kill.
The BASER sort of man is he
Who kills for sport, it seems to me.

You will notice that each of the omitted words has five letters and that the same letters differently placed appear in each word.

The following pupils, who are all in the sixth

grade, came the nearest to guessing all the words and are awarded the three one dollar prizes: Louise Spencer, Kern County (Calif.) Union Grammar School; Donna Scholes and Doris Den Beste, who worked together; and Doris Aardappel and Charoleen Montagne, who also sent in a joint solution. The last four were from the Armour Grammar School, South Dakota.

Two California girls, also sixth grade pupils, missed getting a prize because they used the word *bravest* instead of *baser*. We trust every KIND DEEDS CLUB member knows why this was the biggest mistake of any that could have been made.

KIND DEEDS CLUB

As the school year advances we are hearing more regarding old and new KIND DEEDS CLUBS, not only in California schools, but also in public schools in other states. The members of some of these clubs have already earned their KIND DEEDS BUTTONS, which means that they know the required Pledge and Poem and have reported two Kind Deeds done, one to a human being and one to an animal. The Christmas season offers a rather unusual opportunity to many of us—big and little—for doing thoughtful kindnesses and so the Latham Foundation is looking forward to getting next month some particularly full reports, to place on file, of activities by KIND DEEDS CLUB members.

AN EARNEST APPEAL TO GIVE CHILDREN CONSTRUCTIVE INSTEAD OF DESTRUCTIVE TOYS FOR CHRISTMAS

We walked along, the boy and I, he a lad of fifteen, home from school for his Christmas holidays, and I a child of ten. It was bitterly cold in the Berkshire hills where we lived. Most of the birds had sought refuge in a less rigorous climate, but some few even of the choicest varieties remained all through our winter blizzards, because a bird-loving neighbor had improvised a sanctuary, where the feathered folk soon discovered that they would be cared for in sheltered houses and provided with an abundance of the kind of food they best liked.

"I had a bully Christmas," exclaimed the boy enthusiastically. "Sis and I sneaked downstairs at four o'clock to find our chairs just stacked with presents and just look here what I found," caressing a gun which he held in his hand. "D'you know I just hate soft presents done up in tissues, for I always know they are sissy things that Granny and Ma have made, but when I struck this yesterday in a box I couldn't pinch it, it was so hard, and then I knew it was something real. Gee, just look at it!"

We were skirting a deep, silent forest of evergreens. A sudden fluttering sound made us both look up, and perched on a near-by branch appeared a saucy, dapper little fellow chirping merrily as though he had caught something of the spirit of the season. Up went the gun in a jiffy and in a flash the joyous

note was stilled and on the ground lay, stone dead, the little victim's body. "What did he ever do to you?" I stormed in an agony of rage and despair. "I—I," but the words died on my lips as I watched the boy's features contorted with emotion. "I had no idea I was going to hit him," he ventured. "I never aimed at a bird before." He picked the gun up from the ground where it had fallen, and dejected and remorseful he crept home. I never saw that gun again. This boy didn't have an impulse of cruelty in his whole make-up. He was just thoughtless like every other boy.

Friends who read this, I have prefaced my appeal for constructive instead of destructive toys for children with a true story out of my own experience, because it made a deep and painful impression and from that day I have never been able to understand why we must celebrate the birth of the Prince of Peace by giving our children murderous weapons. Only think that there are 60,000 families in America who mourn the death of loved ones through the carnage of the last war. Why do we want to make our children happy with firearms, which are reminiscent of that terrible tragedy?

Instead of destructive toys, inspiring the thought and desire to kill, why not substitute presents of a constructive nature, which appeal to the higher instincts and faculties of children? I have seen boys sprawl on the floor for hours at a time studying out with mechanical toys the construction of a derrick, hoist or crane or bridge. Most boys have a mechanical turn of mind and sharpen their wits with the right kind of toys. Says Alice Park:

"No store would put into stock a toy guillotine, or a headsman's ax and block, with puppets to be beheaded. Parents would revolt at the idea of their children playing games with such toys of violence and death. If they would think, they would revolt at the idea of all kinds of war toys and war clothes."

Our little MESSENGER has put on his seven league boots to carry our message to our friends far and near, our CHRISTMAS GREETING of Peace on Earth, Good Will to All, which goes from our shores to far distant lands, to Rumania, New Zealand, Australia and the Philippines, and to many clergymen in our own land who repudiate war and its kindred evils as bitterly as do we. This is an opportunity for them and for you, our friends the teachers, to advocate the putting aside of swords, guns, cannon and soldiers and, discouraging a wish for these, to instill a love and sense of reverence for all life.

"Life, which all can take but none can give;
Life, which all creatures love and strive to keep;
Wonderful, dear, and pleasant unto each,
Even to the meanest; yea, a boon to all
Where pity is, for pity makes the world
Soft to the weak and noble for the strong."

—Edith Latham.



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