Famous Writer Gave Most Unusual 'Christmas Gift' in All History

In 1891 Robert Louis Stevenson "Bequeathed" His November 13 Birthday to a Little Girl In New England Who Was Unhappy Because She Had Been Born on December 25 and Thus Was "Cheated Out of a Birthday Party Like All the Other Children Have"

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By ELMO SCOTT WATSON

FORTY-SEVEN years ago Henry Clay Ide, a Vermont lawyer who had held various public offices in the Green Mountain state, was appointed American commissioner in the Samoan islands, then held jointly by the United States, Great Britain and Germany. It was not a very important appointment but it became the first link in a chain of circumstances which resulted in one of the most unusual "Christmas gifts" in all history.

Ide's wife and two daughters did not accompany him when he went to Samoa but remained in their Vermont home. Among the residents of Samoa Ide found a famous writer who had become a voluntary exile there for the benefit of his health. This was Robert Louis Stevenson, author of "Treasure Island," "Kidnaped" and a number of other books which have become English classics.

Ide and Stevenson became warm friends. During a conversation one day about the coming Christmas holidays the American told the Englishman that he had a little daughter, Annie, back in

ANNIE IDE COCKRAN

Vermont who was always unhappy at Christmas time because she had been born on December 25 and thus was "cheated out of a birthday party like the other children have." Although he and his wife tried to compensate for this by giving her more than the usual number of Christmas presents, Annie continued to mourn over her lack of a "real birthday."

Thereupon Stevenson sat down and wrote out the following remarkable document:

"I, Robert Louis Stevenson, Advocate of the Scots Bar, author of the Master of Ballantrae, and Moral Emblems, stuck civil engineer, sole owner and patentee of the Palace of Plantation known as Vallima, in the Island of Upolu, Samoa, a British subject, being in sound mind, and pretty well, I thank you, in body:

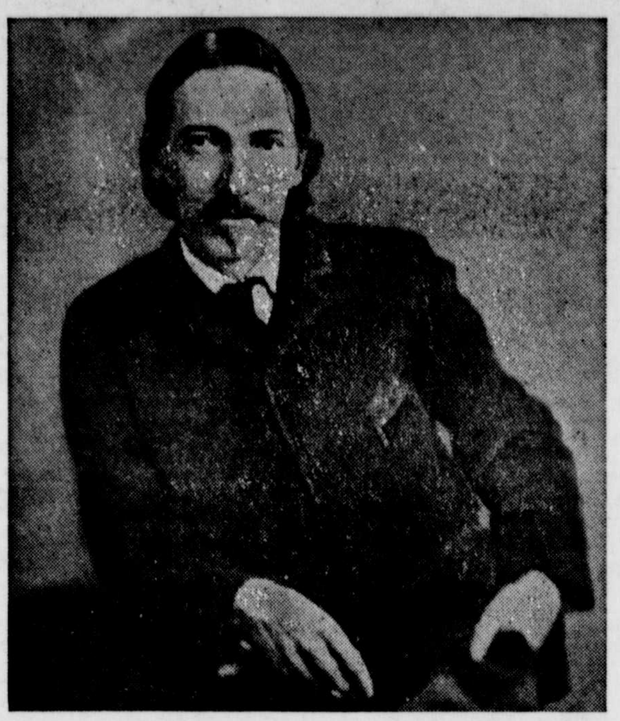
"In consideration that Miss Annie H. Ide, daughter of H. C. Ide, in the Town of Saint Johnsbury, in the County of Caledonia, in the State of Vermont, United States of America, was born, out of reason, upon Christmas Day, and is therefore out of all justice denied in consolation and profit of a proper birthday:

"And considering that I, the said Robert Louis Stevenson, have attained the age when, O, we never mention it, and that I have now no further use for a birthday of any description:

"And in consideration that I have met H. C. Ide, father of the said Annie H. Ide, and found him about as white a land commissioner as I require,

"Have transferred, and do hereby transfer, to the said Annie H. Ide all and whole my rights and privileges in the thirteenth day of November, formerly my birthday, now hereby and henceforth, the birthday of the said Annie H. Ide, to have, to hold, exercise and enjoy the same in her customary manner, by the sporting of fine raiment, eating of rich meats and receipt of gifts, compliments and copies of verse, according to the manner of our ancestors:

"And I direct the said Annie H. Ide to add to the said name of Annie H. Ide the name of Louisa—at least in private—and I



ROBERT LOUIS STEVENSON, famous author who "willed" his birthday as a Christmas gift to a little girl in New England.

charge her to use my said birthday with moderation and humanity, et tanquam bona filia familiae, the said birthday not being as young as it once was, and having carried me in a very satisfactory manner since I can remember.

"And in case the said Annie H. Ide shall neglect or contravene either of the above conditions, I hereby revoke the donation and transfer my rights in the said birthday to the President of the United States of America for the time being.

"In witness whereof I have hereto set my hand and seal in the year of grace eighteen hundred and ninety-one.

"ROBERT LOUIS STEVENSON"

After having this document witnessed by his friends, Lloyd Osbourne and Harold Watts, Stevenson gave it to Ide who sent it with a letter of explanation to his wife. On the morning of December 25, 1891, little Annie Ide walked slowly into the room where a Christmas tree was laden with presents for her and her sister. As usual, she was brooding over her "lost birthday." But her mood soon changed when her mother handed her the "deed of gift" which was hanging on the tree and explained its meaning to her. Thanks to the famous Robert Louis Stevenson she now had a "birthday of her very own" and its celebration would not be overshadowed by the celebration of Christmas.

Little Annie immediately wrote a letter of thanks to Stevenson and sent with it photographs and drawings of herself. In acknowledging her letter Stevenson explained to her how her "new birthday" would work. He wrote:

"You are thus become a month and twelve days younger than you were, but will go on growing older for the future in the regular and human manner from one thirteenth of November to the next. The effect on me is more doubtful; I may, as you suggest, live forever, I might, on the other hand, come to pieces like the one-horse shay at a moment's notice; doubtless the step is risky, but I do not in the least regret that

which enables me to sign myself your revered and delighted name-father."

Two years later Mrs. Ide took her two daughters to Samoa to join their father. They arrived on November 12 and were met by Ide and Stevenson. The next day, being little Annie's "new birthday," she was a guest at a huge feast which the natives had arranged for Stevenson in honor of his birthday which he, unknown to them, had "willed" to the little American girl. She sat beside him at the end of the native dais and received many fine gifts.

The next year the event was repeated and there was a dinner party in the evening besides. The famous author enjoyed the occasion as much as did the little girl. But that was their last dual celebration for Stevenson died on December 3, 1894. Annie Ide, however, continued to carry out faithfully the conditions of the birthday deed "by the sporting of fine raiment, eating of rich meats and receipt of gifts."

Even after she became a woman and married W. Bourke Cockran, famous New York political leader and congressman, she con-

PRINCE EDWARD

tinued to observe the "birthday" which Stevenson had willed to her. Stevenson proved to be a good prophet for her husband was a wealthy man, and in their luxurious home at Port Washington, Long Island, she received her "gifts" of costly jewelry and arrayed herself in her "fine raiment" of Paris gowns.

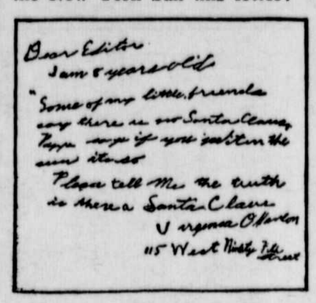
Last year, Mrs. Cockran decided that she had enjoyed more than her share of the unique Christmas present which Stevenson had "willed" to her. So, instead of letting it revert to the President of the United States, as Stevenson had whimsically suggested would be done if she should "neglect or contravene" the provisions of his will, she passed the birthday along to her niece, Anita Leslie, a well-known British author who is the daughter of Shane Leslie, Irish poet, novelist and dramatist, and Marjorie Ide Leslie, sister of Annie Ide Cockran.

If ever Miss Leslie decides that she no longer wishes to keep Stevenson's "gift birthday," there are several notables, born on December 25, who would doubtless welcome it. It would be especially fitting, perhaps, if she conferred it upon a little boy who is "out of all justice denied in consolation and profit of a proper birthday" even though he is a scion of royalty. That little boy is Prince Edward, the young son of the duke and duchess of Kent.

Or she might pass it along to another member of the royal house of her native England—young Prince Edward's aunt, the duchess of Gloucester. Some other notables born on December 25 are Evangeline Booth, world commander of the Salvation Army; Helen Twelvetrees, actress; Rebecca West, novelist; Gladys Swarthout, opera singer; Robert L. Ripley, the "Believe It or Not" man; Paul Manship, sculptor; Belle Baker, singer, and Jerry Rodman, six-day bicycle racer.

Six years after the little girl in Vermont had been made happy by Robert Louis Stevenson, who "willed" her his birthday, another little girl in New York city was also made happy by a writer, but in a different way.

One day in September. 1897, there came to the office of the New York Sun this letter:



Dear Editor
I am 8 years old.
"Some of my little friends say there is no Santa Claus. Papa says if you see it in the sun it is so
Please tell me the truth is there a Santa Claus
Virginia O'Hanlon
115 West Ninety Eighth Street

Thereupon Francis P. Church, an editorial writer, wrote a reply which was printed as an editorial in the Sun on September 21, 1897. It said:

IS THERE A SANTA CLAUS?

We take pleasure in answering at once and thus prominently the communication below, expressing at the same time our great gratification that its faithful author is numbered among the friends of the Sun:

Dear Editor—I am eight years old. Some of my little friends say there is no Sar ta Claus.

Papa says: "If you see it in the Sun it's so."

Please tell me the truth' "is there a Santa Claus?"

"Virginia O'Hanlon."

Virgina, your little friends are wrong. They have been affected by the skepticism of a skeptical age. They think that nothing can be which is not comprehensible by their little minds. All minds, Virginia, whether they be men's or little children's, are little. In this great universe of ours man is a mere insect, an ant, in his intellect, as compared with the boundless world about him, as measured by the intelligence capable of grasping the whole of truth and knowledge.

Yes, Virginia, there is a Santa Claus. He exists as certainly as love and generosity and devotion exist, and you know that they abound and give to your life its highest beauty and joy. Alas! how dreary would be the world if there were no Santa Claus. It would be as drear as if there were no Virginias. There would be no child-like faith then, no poetry, no romance to make tolerable this existence. We should have no enjoyment, except in sense and sight. The eternal light with which childhood fills the world would be extinguished.

Not believe in Santa Claus? You might as well not believe in fairies! You might get your papa to hire men to watch in all the chimneys on Christmas Eve to catch Santa Claus, but even if they did not see Santa Claus coming down, what would that prove? Nobody sees Santa Claus, but that is no sign that there is no Santa Claus. The most real things in the world are those that neither children nor men can see. Did you ever see fairies dancing on the lawn? Of course not, but that's no proof that they are not there. Nobody can conceive or imagine all the wonders there are unseen and unseeable in the world.

You may tear apart the baby's rattle and see what makes the noise inside, but there is a veil covering the unseen world which not the strongest man, nor even the united strength of all the strongest men that ever lived, could tear apart. Only faith, fancy, poetry, love, romance, can push aside that curtain and view and picture the supernal beauty and glory beyond. Is it all real? Ah, Virginia, in all this world there is nothing else real and abiding.

No Santa Claus? Thank God! he lives forever. A thousand years from now, Virginia, nay, ten times ten thousand years from now he will continue to make glad the heart of childhood.

A "Newspaper Classic."

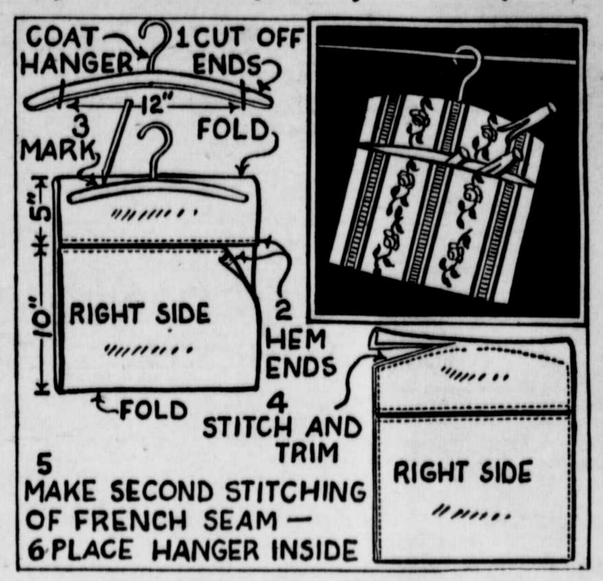
Around Christmas time, the next year after this editorial appeared in the Sun, that newspaper began receiving requests from its readers: "Please reprint the editorial called 'Is There a Santa Claus?' " Each year thereafter it received the same request and each year the editorial was reprinted in the columns of the Sun.

More than that, it was reprinted in other newspapers which also received the same request annually. It became a "Newspaper Classic," which has been reproduced thousands of times during the 40 years that have elapsed since it first appeared, and it has been translated into many foreign languages—even the Chinese!

Next to Clement C. Moore's poem, "A Visit From St. Nicholas" (also called "The Night Before Christmas"), this editorial is probably the best known bit of writing associated with Christmas ever produced in America and it seems destined, like Santa Claus, to "live forever."

HOW TO SEW

by Ruth Wyeth Spears



Make a bag on a hanger.

THIS bag has been a great success. Several others can be made for different purposes. They are good to hang in the closet or the sewing room for patterns or small equipment. When traveling I find a little bigger one perfect for laundry. The size shown here requires ⅜ yard of bright ticking. You will notice in the sketch that French seams are used. This makes the first stitching of the seams on the right side. Trim close to this stitching, turn the bag inside out and stitch the seams again so that the raw edges are covered. Punch a small hole in the center top for the hanger hook. Clip today's lesson and add it to the many gift suggestions contained in the books offered below.

NOTE: Mrs. Spears' Book 2—Gifts, Novelties and Embroidery, has helped thousands of women to use odds and ends of materials and their spare time to make things to sell and to use. Book 1—Sewing, for the Home Decorator, is full of inspiration for every homemaker. These books make **the most delightful gifts. Mrs.** Spears will autograph them on request. Books are 25 cents each. Crazypatch quilt leaflet is included free with every order for both books. Address: Mrs. Spears, 210 S. Desplaines St., Chicago, Ill.

It's a Dress

"My wife is very busy. She's going to address the women's club."

"I suppose she's working on the address."

"No, the dress."

Customer (to head waiter)—Just as a matter of curiosity, did the waiter who took my order leave any family?

Qualified

"A comet is a star with a tail," said teacher, giving the class a lesson about the stars. "Can anyone name a comet?"

"Yes, miss," cried one little lad, "Mickey Mouse!"

Topsy Turvy World

Customer—Isn't the price rather high for such a little pillow?

Shop Assistant—Well, you see, madam, down is now up.

Right Road

The truck driver was unfortunate enough to run his car into a house where a woman stood ironing. Having lost his nerve he did not know what to say and blurted out:

"Can you tell me the way to Detroit?"

"Yes, straight past the sideboard and then to the left past the piano," replied the woman.

Or What?

Police Sergeant—Give the prisoner a bath and clap him in irons.

Crook—Gosh! First I was collared, now I'm being washed and ironed. Is this a police station or a laundry?

OUT OF SORTS?
Here is Amazing Relief for Conditions Due to Sluggish Bowels
Nature's Remedy NATURE'S LAXATIVE NR
If you think all laxatives act alike, just try this all vegetable laxative. So mild, thorough, refreshing, invigorating. Dependable relief from sick headaches, bilious spells, tired feeling when associated with constipation.
Without Risk get a 25c box of NR from your druggist. Make the test—then if not delighted, return the box to us. We will refund the purchase price. That's fair. Get NR Tablets today.
NR TO-NIGHT TOMORROW ALRIGHT
ALWAYS CARRY TUMS QUICK RELIEF FOR ACID INDIGESTION

Respect for Self

A man should take care above all things to have a due respect for himself.—Pythagoras.

It's No Disgrace to Be Gray!
Still, in these modern youthful times, it's often a handicap, particularly in the business world. How much better to disguise this condition by the application of
LEA'S HAIR PREPARATION
as thousands have already successfully done. No magic about it, but repeated applications give gray, faded hair a shade approximating the original without that "dyed" appearance so quickly detectable in many hair-coloring products on the market. Even the first bottle gives appreciable results! If your druggist doesn't have it, send a dollar and your name and address—money cheerfully refunded if not satisfied.
LEA'S TONIC COMPANY
BRENTWOOD, MD.

WRITE TODAY FOR MY MONEY-MAKING PLAN to sell and introduce our QUALITY Baby Chicks, Ducklings and Turkey-Poults in your community.
S. R. SCHLEY - Pikesville, Md.

GRIN
You needn't grin and bear a cough due to a cold. Get Smith Bros. Cough Drops! Just 5¢!
Smith Bros. Cough Drops are the only drops containing VITAMIN A
This is the vitamin that raises the resistance of the mucous membranes of the nose and throat to cold infections.
TRADE MARK

The Housewife . . .
"Research Professor of Economy"
SHE'S not a Ph.D. or an LL.D. She hasn't a diploma or a cap and gown. Her research is not done in the laboratory or the library. As a matter of fact, her findings are made, usually, in the street car, in the subway, in the suburban commuter's train.
She reads the advertisements in this paper with care and consideration. They form her research data. By means of them she makes her purchases so that she well deserves the title of "Research Professor of Economy." She discovers item after item, as the years roll on, combining high quality with low.
It is clear to you at once that you . . . and all who make and keep a home . . . have the same opportunity. With the help of newspaper advertising you, too, can graduate from the school of indiscriminate buying into the faculty of fastidious purchases!