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1917

**CHRISTMAS
IN THE
MOUNTAINS OF KENTUCKY**

In the Land

Where the Creeks

Run Through

Set into type, printed, folded and sewed by mountain men and girls
at the
Caney Creek Community Center, Inc
Pippapass, Knott County, Kentucky

Reprinted by Request

THE

OF

THE

In the

Where the

Run Through

Reprinted by Request

CHRISTMAS ON THE CREEK OF CANEY

TIME
Christmas Day
1917

PLACE
Caney Creek Community Center
in the
Land Where the Creeks Run Through

PARTICIPANTS

Master of Ceremonies
Rear Guard - Stationed at the door
Front Guard - Stationed at the Christmas Tree
Outside Guard Patrolling the grounds
Manager of the Illiteracy Prizes . J . Com
District Nurse - In care of the babies and aged
"Santa Claus"
Big Sandy's Sandy
Wolvery Withens
Fiddling Rufus
Uncle Eph
The Massive Woman
Aunt Selina
Leatherwood - Jumbo - Napoleon - Noah

Between five and six hundred
Kentucky Mountaineers

SETTING



THE CHRISTMAS TREE

The biggest greenest smellyest Christmas Tree that "never was." Its top branches pressed against the ceiling. Glittering all over with big gold stars and scarlet crinkly bells; shimmering with tinsel baubles and crystal snow. Its pointed slender tips swaying with red-lemon-pink-purple-green tartan candy-bags. Its branches weighted with blue-eyed dolls and golden-brown Teddy-bears; and noisy whistles and rattles and clappers and drums; and comfy mittens and mufflers and sweaters and hoods and caps and socks.

THE LADDERS



And each side of the biggest greenest smellyest Christmas Tree that "never was".... a Ladder wound with red and green and sparkling ropes of silver and gold tinsel, packed to the height of each step with "s'prises" - presents for most everybody, and you couldn't tell the least little bit WHAT they were 'cause they were all done up in watery-red-white-and-blue paper and tied with the sparklingest cords and some were bulgy and some were squasby, and some were knobby and some were level, and some were great-big presents and some were teeny-weeny ones.

THE RAILING



And all around the biggest greenest smellyest Christmas Tree that "never was" and the shimmery Ladder (over in the corner of the Assembly Hall of the Caney Creek Community Center) there was the most perfectly wonderful FENCE. It was a black-red-green-white-yellow-gray-crepe-paper FENCE, streaming all down with gold and silver and scarlet shining through and just splattered (seemed like) all over with the gleamingest snow.

THE CEILING AND THE WALLS AND THE WINDOWS



And the ceiling AND the walls AND the windows of the GREAT-BIG room were festooned with red and green and yellow and black and white streamers. Curling and fluffy ropes of gold from corner to corner, clear way across, with flags every little while. And big Santa Clauses. And in the middle of the GREAT-BIG room - just exactly where all the streamers meet - the hughest, scarletest, sparklingest Christmas Bell that "ever was" most as big as the biggest greenest smellyest Christmas Tree that "never was."



PROLOGUE

North and south winds the Creek of Caney. In the narrow valleys through which it flows, are scores and scores and scores of cabins of logs.

Off from the Creek of Caney, to the right and to the left, water-sheds come flowing. Laid into the mountain sides from which rise the water-sheds are "flats." On these "flats" of the mountain sides are dozens and dozens of cabins of logs.



From this winding Creek of Caney, North and South, from these water-sheds descending, Christmas Day 1917, on horse-back, on mule-back, in jolt-wagon, in sleds, on foot as rhythmically as the muffled beat of a march for the dead, there slowly approached, in the driving sleet, hundreds and hundreds and hundreds of Kentucky mountaineers.

A solemn cavalcade to be coming to the biggest greenest smellyest Christmas Tree that "never was."



Old men and women in homespun the women had sheared and carded and spun and woven and bunglingly cut into crude garments; the old man in the saddle, the old woman "up behind."

Young-old fathers, their cheeks painted with the doom of race-decay, coughing in the storm; thinned young mothers sadly smiling, from the family jolt-wagon, to greet once more their kin, the annual progeny squirming and sprawling in the wagon bed.

Boys in their teens, "guns" in hip-pockets, to whom nothing new is to happen in their experience.

Girls, frustrated in opportunity, listless in their "boughten clothes."

Children, vaguely wistful, inarticulately hopeful that their birthright just to be a child may be ONCE realized at the biggest greenest smellyest Christmas Tree that "never was."

And...the BABIES: the hope of the regenerated and joyful Creek of Caney.



From the North, from the South of the winding Creek of Caney, from the water-sheds descending, in the driving sleet, over rocky trails, through icy creek-beds, they slowly approached...hundreds and hundreds and hundreds of Kentucky mountaineers.

As solemn a cavalcade and as patient as a camel-train across the desert: "The Desert of Waiting."

ILLITERACY CONTEST PRIZES

"I was born among you. I am a Caney boy," were the first words that J Com spoke to his gathering kin-folk. It ill becomes me to cast reflection upon my own people, but when I found that but two out of every ten men and women of the Creek of Caney could read a word... I was tempted to disown the Creek of my birth. But studying the matter (hired to eradicate illiteracy by the Caney Creek Community Center and the Kentucky Illiteracy Commission,) I have come to understand that you have not been to blame. For 200 years, the odds have been against the mountaineer. It is time that we took into our own hands, our battle to survive. We could never have entered the fight alone.

"We have entered the fight now because the Caney Creek Community Center has put the only weapon we need into our hands... OPPORTUNITY.

"Forty-one of us, in this contest, have learn'd to read and write. Forty one of us who, three months ago, could not read one word nor write one letter of the alphabet. The judges have awarded the prizes as follows."

J Com calling the names, long blue envelopes were passed about in the crowd - everyone helping to guide the prize money to the successful contestants.

"Now I aim tew make MYSELF heard," announced Wolvery Withens.

"My old woman, Serilly here, she's hed passed to her one of them thar ten dollar certifi-cates. That's justice. She's worked and earnt hit.

"But I aim tew make my own statement about that mule I air erbout tew acquire. Until I tuk up with this learning, I couldnt hev done what I hev done. I acquired me a mule and she's on her way tew me partly by train and partly by mail from the U-nited States. And I set my own fist to the paper that'll bring her ... me, that hashad tew make my mark tew my vote for forty years.

"I haint no prize winner yet, but I hev set my fist tew a paper that'll bring Serilly and me a mule that gar-en-teen-ed not tew be mean or onery in none of her antiks - a mule that air bound tew be a comfort tew me and my old woman ez our hair is turning tew the grave."

"I never aimed fer the prize," stammered Cephy. "But I dont say ez I cant use the money, being plumb bare-footed - act'lly, but ef I hed tew choose between them, I'd sooner have my eddication than the stiffercate. I treasure that I kin read outern the Bible fer myself.

"Haint you remembering J Com, when my little Vestal died? How I could n't take no comfort nowhar, 'cept when you came and read tew me the Sams outern the Bible?"

"Now ef Kanzali wuz tew die to-night, I'd be a heap more comfortabler reading the Same myself because I could read on the Bible anytime, and I wouldnt hev tew wait on anybody like you, with the larning, tew come tew me in my mis'ry. But I dont aim in this place, at this time, tew speak of dying; but I do treasure my eddication. And I do thank you-all.

"But I reckon I air keeping the children from their pretties..."

"I reckon SO" assented J Com. "Santa Claus, it's your turn now."

THE BIGGEST GREENEST SMELLYEST CHRISTMAS TREE

"Just one moment, Santa Claus," cautioned the Master of Ceremonies. "This is a large crowd. There are hundreds of presents to be given out. If the names are to be heard, every person must be quiet."

"Ef airy a man hez a differeant notion than TEW be quiet, he hez me to reckon with," announced big Sandy's Sandy, who had stationed himself as volunteer guard over the District Nurse who had gathered into one of the corners, all the detached infants.

"The first present goes to Humpty Joab," decreed Santa Claus. Hardhanger spoke up: "He's a-coaling, but I'll fetch it tew him." Here ye go, Hard;" Through willing hands went the present.

"Son's Jim's twins," called the Front Guard. "Son's Jim's Sarah," echoed the Rear Guard. "Sarah's a-nursing them twins over thar by Melinda-Jane. Ketch them presents for her Melinda," ordered Fiddling Rufus, head and shoulders above the crowd from his vantage point on the box. "Three pokes of candy air a-following."

"Sunny Alamanda," said Santa Claus. "Sunny Alamanda's Marthy," echoed the Front Guard. "Sunny Alamanda's Sambo," re-echoed Fiddling Rufus.

~~There~~ "There's a pair, one of the breed that haint down with the measles," volunteered wizened Uncle Eph. "I brought a wagon on purpose. I kin take their pretties to 'em. I reckon you-all hez their names: 'Tom-Boy,'..."

"Never mind about telling us the names of the whole fifteen, Uncle Eph, interupted the Master of Ceremonies. "We have a present for each one."

"That's what I allowed," agreed Uncle Eph. I allowed you-all wouldn't forget none uv them, seeing ez they WUZ down with the measles."

"The Ladders are emptied," called the Front Guard. "Napoleon and Noah will now out the dolls from the Christmas Tree. Don't cry, Ophelia, there is a doll for every little girl."

ONE HUNDRED PRESENTS. TWO HUNDRED. THREE HUNDRED
FOUR HUNDRED FIVE HUNDRED.....
ONE HOUR. TWO HOURS. THREE HOURS.....

QUIET WAS THE CROWD

"Now will each person who has received a present and a bag of candy leave the room," firmly requested the Rear Guard. "Each person who has not received a present and a bag of candy, move toward the Christmas Tree."

"And ef airy a man hez a different notion, he hez me to reckon WITH," announced Big Sandy's Sandy from the corner full of babies.

"I reckon I may ez well linger till I see ef airy another breed on Possum Fork haint here on account of the measles. I hev fetched a wagon - a-purpose tew fetch their pretties tew 'em," said wizened Uncle Eph.

LINGERERS

"What erbout hit! I haint hed no present!" Above the Front Guard there towered the Massive Woman. There was only the tinsel FENCE between them.

IT HAD NOT BEEN LONG. THE FRONT GUARD KNEW, SINCE THE MASSIVE WOMAN, FOR FIFTY CENTS, HAD AGREED TO GUIDE SOME SURVEYORS TO A DIVISION LINE ON A MOUNTAIN TOP - HALF WAY UP THE MOUNTAIN, THE MASSIVE WOMAN HALTED. "YONDER" SHE POINTED, "WHAR THAT HICK'RY AIR A-BREEZING, IS WHAT YOU-ALL AIR A-LOOKING FER."

"BUT YOU AGREED," SAID A SURVEYOR, "TO TAKE US THERE."

THE MASSIVE WOMAN PULLED OUT FROM HER BELT, A 45-COLT, "GIT," SHE SAID.

"What erbout hit! I haint had no present!" repeated the Massive Woman.

"You belong to the Rock Pit district," said the Master of Ceremonies, as he stepped in front of the Front Guard. "Your present will be given to you next Saturday at the Rock Pit Christmas Tree."

"That air jest Per-FECTLY satisfactory tew me. But I haint the woman to be left out uv nuthing a-purpose," said the Massive Woman, ameliorated.

"Honey," said Aunt Selina to the district Nurse, "I hev brung my witchy bag tew you for a Christmas pretty. My witches hez been plumb druve away by hit. I hev heered that where you-all cum from, the Germanys is a pestering. Ef the Germanys is like my witches and you send this yere witch ball tew YOUR kin in them furrign parts - that the Germanys will quit pestering too."

Announced Jumbo: "When I hearn that Cephy had took to larning, I figgered that ez she were so nigh the grave with the CON-sump-tion, that she better be having her thoughts on her God. But seeing ez by her larning, she kin read her Bible FUR herself, I allow ez I might ez well hev tuk up with hit. I haint never favored this yere larning much, because ef I hed been able tew write just when ever I tuk a notion, I'd hev been in the PEN-i-ten-tiary for signing another feller's name tew a check. But my nature is Calm-ing some and mebbe ef I could read my Bible, I might be a CALM-ing more. But hit's too late now."

"No, its not too late, Jumbo," reassured J Com. "We are starting another illiteracy contest, with prizes to be given a year from today at our Christmas Tree. I'll enter your name for that."

"Cum erlong boys, let's be a-travelling," called Big Sandy's Sandy. To the Rear Guard, in passing, he announced.

"Me and the boys haint done celebrating Christmas yet. We aim tew shoot considerable more But we haint going to harm noone: We jest hev tew shoot. But ez a weapon hit certainly AIR true (what J Com hez said) we dont need nary another cept the one that you-all air a-giving the mountain people. J Com called hit 'OPPORTUNITY.' I calls hit 'A CHANCE TEW ERMOUNT TEW SUMTHING.'

"Cum erlong boys, boys. Let's be a-travelling."

EPILOGUE

"REST AGAINST OUR SHOULDERS FOR A LITTLE WHILE," SAID THE CANEY CREEK COMMUNITY CENTER TO THE SOULS WITH THE VEILS ACROSS THEIR FACES.

AND THEY RESTED

"NOW LIFT YOUR HEADS!" AND THE SOULS THAT WERE LOST IN THEIR OWN SHADOWS LIFTED THEIR HEADS. THE VEILS SLIPPED FROM THEIR FACES. STRENGTHENED, THEY RESUMED THEIR JOURNEY.

THE CANEY CREEK COMMUNITY CENTER WATCHED THEM AS THEY TRAVELLED.....

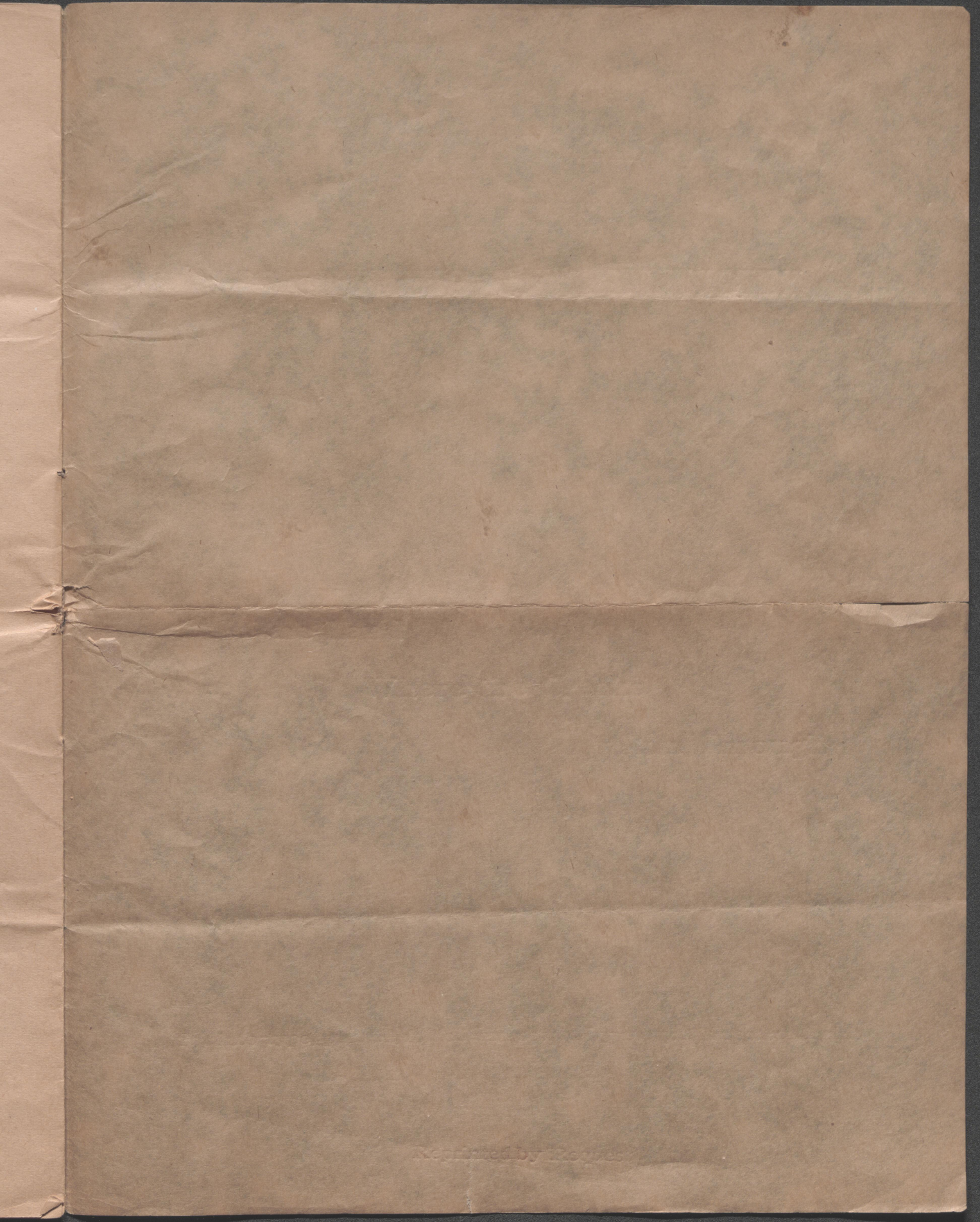
THROUGH THE ABATING STORM. NORTH AND SOUTH.....

UP THE WATER-SHEDS..... ASCENDING.....

HUNDREDS AND HUNDREDS AND HUNDREDS OF KENTUCKY MOUNTAINEERS



UP THE WATER SHEDS ASCENDING



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