

THE WOODEN SHOE OF LITTLE WOLFF

By FRANCOIS COPPEE

Once upon a time,—it was so long ago that the whole world has forgotten the date,—in a city in the north of Europe, whose name is so difficult to pronounce that nobody remembers it,—once upon a time there was a little boy of seven, named Wolff. He was an orphan in charge of an old aunt who was hard and avaricious, and only kissed him on New Year's Day, and who breathed a sigh of regret every time that she gave him a porringer of soup.

But the poor little lad was naturally so good that he loved his aunt just the same, although she frightened him very much; and he could never see her without trembling, for fear she would whip him.

As the aunt of Wolff was known through all the village to have a house and an old stocking full of gold, she did not dare send her nephew to the school for the poor, but she obtained a reduction of the price with the schoolmaster whose school little Wolff attended. The teacher, vexed at having a scholar so badly dressed and who paid so poorly, often punished him unjustly, and even set his fellow-pupils against him.

The poor little fellow was therefore as miserable as the stones in the street, and hid himself in the out-of-the-way corners to cry when Christmas came.

The night before Christmas the schoolmaster was to take all of his pupils to church, and bring them back

to their homes. As the winter was very severe that year, and as for several days a great quantity of snow had fallen, the children came to the master's house warmly wrapped and bundled up, with fur caps pulled down over their ears, double and triple jackets, knitted gloves and mittens, and good, thick-nailed boots with strong soles. Only little Wolff came shivering in the clothes that he wore week-days and Sundays, and with nothing on his feet but coarse Strasbourg socks and heavy sabots, or wooden shoes.

His thoughtless comrades made a thousand jests over his forlorn looks and his peasant's dress; but little Wolff was so occupied in blowing on his fingers to keep them warm, that he took no notice of the boys or what they said.

The troop of boys, with their master at their head, started for the church. As they went they talked of the fine suppers that were waiting them at home. The son of the burgomaster had seen, before he went out, a monstrous goose that the truffles marked with black spots like a leopard. At the house of one of the boys there was a little fir tree in a wooden box, from whose branches hung oranges, sweetmeats and toys.

The children spoke, too, of what the Christ-child would bring to them, and what he would put in their shoes, which they would, of course, be very careful to leave in the chimney before going to bed. And the eyes of those little boys, lively as a parcel of mice, sparkled in advance with the joy of seeing in their imagination

pink paper bags filled with cakes, lead soldiers drawn up in battalions in their boxes, menageries smelling of varnished wood, and magnificent jumping-jacks covered with purple and bells.

Little Wolff knew very well by experience that his old aunt would send him supperless to bed; but, knowing that all the year he had been as good and industrious as possible, he hoped that the Christ-child would not forget him, and he, too, looked eagerly forward to putting his wooden shoes in the ashes of the fireplace.

When the service was ended, every one went away, anxious for his supper, and the band of children, walking two by two after their teacher, left the church.

In the porch, sitting on a stone seat under a Gothic niche, a child was sleeping—a child who was clad in a robe of white linen, and whose feet were bare, notwithstanding the cold. He was not a beggar, for his robe was new and fresh, and near him on the ground were seen a square, a hatchet, a pair of compasses, and the other tools of a carpenter's apprentice. Under the light of the stars, his face bore an expression of divine sweetness, and his long locks of golden hair seemed like an aureole about his head. But the child's feet blue in the cold of that December night, were sad to see.

The children, so well clothed and shod for the winter, passed heedlessly before the unknown child. One of them, the son of one of the principal men in the village, looked at the wail with an expression in which no pity could be seen.

But little Wolff, coming the last out of the church, stopped, full of compassion, before the beautiful sleeping child. "Alas!" said the orphan to himself, "it is too bad that this poor little one has to go barefoot in such bad weather. But what is worse than all, he has not even a boot or a wooden shoe to leave before him while he sleeps to-night, so that the Christ-child could put something there to comfort him in his misery."

And, carried away by the goodness of his heart, little Wolff took off the wooden shoe from his right foot, and laid it in front of the sleeping child. Then, limping along on his poor blistered foot and dragging his sock through the snow, he went back to his aunt's house.

"Look at that worthless fellow!" cried his aunt, full of anger at his return without one of his shoes. "What have you done with your wooden shoe, little wretch?"

Little Wolff did not know how to deceive, and although he was shaking with terror, he tried to stammer out some account of his adventure.

The old woman burst into a frightful peal of laughter. "Ah, monsieur takes off his shoes for beggars! Ah, monsieur gives away his wooden shoes to a barefoot! This is something new! Ah, well, since that is so, I am going to put the wooden shoe which you have left in the chimney, and I promise you the Christ-child will leave there to-night something to whip you with in the morning. And you shall pass the day to-morrow on dry bread and water. We will see if next time you give away your shoe to the first vagabond that comes."

Then the aunt, after having given the poor boy a couple of slaps, made him climb up to his bed in the attic. Grieved to the heart, the child went to bed in the dark, and soon went to sleep, his pillow wet with tears.

On the morning, when the old woman went downstairs—oh, wonderful sight!—she saw the great chimney full of beautiful playthings, and sacks of magnificent candies, and all sorts of good things; and before all these splendid things the right shoe, that her nephew had given to the little wail, stood by the side of the left shoe, that she herself had put there that very night, and where she meant to put a birch rod.

As little Wolff, running down to learn the meaning of his aunt's exclamation, stood in artless ecstasy before all these splendid gifts, suddenly there were loud cries and laughter out of doors. The old woman and the little boy went out to know what it all meant, and saw the neighbors gathered around the public fountain. What had happened? Oh, something very amusing and extraordinary! The children of all the rich people of the village, those whose parents had wished to surprise them with the

most beautiful gifts, had found only rods in their shoes.

Then the orphan and the old woman, thinking of all the beautiful things that were in their chimney, were full of amazement. But presently they saw the cure coming toward them, with wonder in his face. In the church porch, where in the evening a child, clad in a white robe, and with bare feet, had rested his sleeping head, the cure had just seen a circle of gold incusted with precious stones. Then the people understood that

the beautiful sleeping child, near whom were the carpenter's tools, was the Christ-child in person, become for an hour such as he was when he worked in his parents' house, and they bowed themselves before that miracle that the good God had seen fit to work, to reward the faith and charity of a child.

Shop now, before it is too late to insure yourself of a wide selection.



Feast on Christmas With Our Groceries!

Here's a complete line of groceries, both staple and fancy—and also fruits, nuts and candies. An assortment which you will be proud of when you see it on the table on Christmas. Come in and order now to insure prompt delivery.

SPECIAL CHRISTMAS MEATS
CELERY—PUDDINGS—DAINTIES

Torrance Grocery Co.

R. M. TOMKINS, Prop.
Phone 18 Torrance

Christmas Is Gift Time

Our Savings Department stands ready to help you buy more gifts for 1924.

Start January 1 to save for next Christmas.

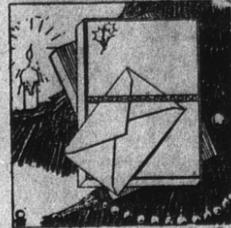
We add interest.

State Bank of Lomita

"THE FRIENDLY BANK"

H. V. ADAMS, Vice-Pres.

Lomita California



When In Doubt Say: "Stationery"



ALWAYS WELCOME
OR AN EVERSHARP PENCIL AND WE ALSO HAVE THE WAHL AND THE SWAN FOUNTAIN PENS A FINE CHRISTMAS GIFT

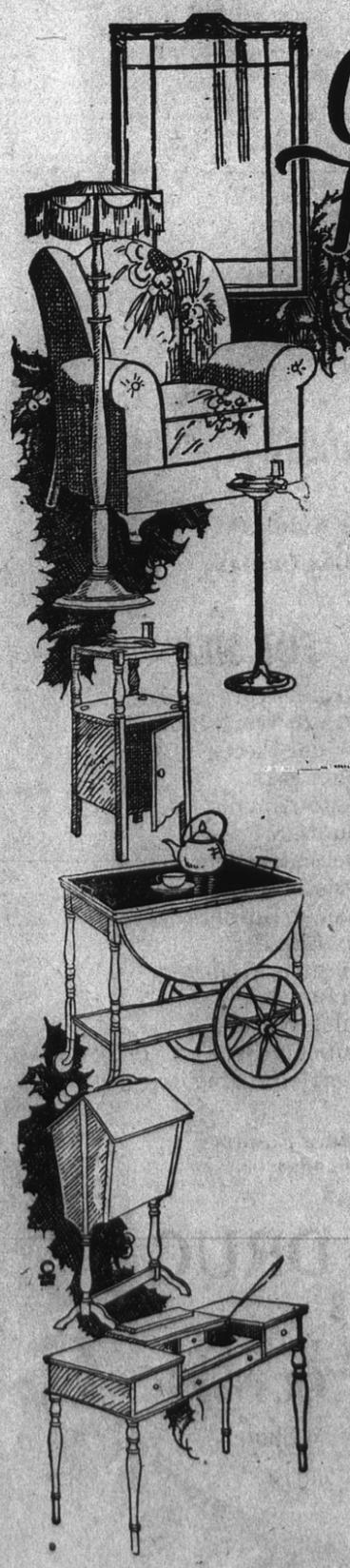
You Will find our large offerings very adequate.

La Plante's Studio

Picture Framing
1509 Cabrillo

Photographer
Brooks Bldg.

Kodak Finishing
Phone 157
Torrance



Gifts of Furniture

Useful and Appreciative

She'll be pleased with a new living room suite, or perhaps a tea cart—or maybe he is in need of a humidor, smoking stand or a reading lamp. You can find all these things—and many more—here for your holiday gift selections at prices that make a visit here imperative.

OTHER GIFTS

- ROCKERS
- DINING ROOM SETS
- GAS RANGES
- CHAIRS
- KITCHEN SETS
- RUGS
- LINOLEUM
- BABY BUGGIES

TOYS FOR THE KIDDIES

- Doll Buggies
- Teddy Bears
- Velocipedes
- Scoters

We buy and Sell Second Hand Furniture

HUDDLESTON'S FURNITURE STORE

SARTORI STREET, TORRANCE

Only 9 More Days To Shop For Christmas