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The Christmas Stocking

L. Frank Baum

An ancient Italian legend tells how Good St. Nicholas of Padua first gave presents on Christmas Eve by throwing purses in at the open windows of needy people. Purses in those days were knitted of yarn and ties with strings at the open ends. They were not unlike stockings, except that they had no feet. People began to hang these long, empty purses of yarn on their window sills on Christmas Eve, so that St. Nicholas, as he passed by could put money into them. When money became scarce the long purses were filled with presents instead, -- useful things for the big people, and books and toys for the children.

In cold countries, where windows could not be left open, folks hung their purses near the fire place, believing that St. Nicholas would come down the chimney and leave his presents for them. And after the knitted purses went out of fashion, they hung up their stockings, which closely resembled old time purses, so that there would be plenty of room for the Christmas presents, and old St. Nicholas or Santa Claus, who lived on through all the ages, would know he had been expected. That is how the Christmas Stocking came to be used, and why it will be used for many generations to come in thousands of homes on each succeeding Christmas Eve.

It is a pretty custom, expressing the confidence and trust we feel in that sweet charity which bestows loving remembrances upon the rich and poor, the mighty and the lowly, on each succeeding birthday of our Lord Jesus Christ. For it is most fitting that He, who taught the world Charity, should be honored upon His birthnight by an humble imitation of the kindly and generous creed He gave us. "Peace on Earth, Good Will to All," leads us to recognize the truth of the noble text, "It is better to give, than to receive." And so, as it teaches us kindness, good will and charity, may the Christmas Stocking endure forever!



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