

The schoolmaster explained in French that this was the "Pere de Noel" who had come down the chimney with presents for them. I loved the tone of the children's laughter, there was a note of delight in it that was exhilarating. Then they sang "Madelon" and some other songs and then the presents were given out.

Here's another picture for you. Again the map hung school-room, gay this time with colored papers; the tree loaded with toys in the middle of the side wall. A doughboy standing on each side of it to out down the presents, Santa Claus in full regalia, in front, helped by the school-mistresses - who called the names, crowding, surging, in front in a big semi-circle, a mass of excited children and behind them a solid mass of soldiers, many of them holding the littlest children, and on one side beaming, red-cheeked, rough-handed peasant women all done up in their best black dresses and stiff white caps.

Of course not half the people got there who could have come if we'd been able to have it outside - but it couldn't be helped. "What kind of a Y secretary do you call yourself?" said Mr. Helms next day "Not to arrange to have fine weather!" (He was awfully pleased that we put everything through)

I had intended to give out the socks at the same time as the toys, but after about an hour's work with the tree apparently unfinished, I decided it would make too long a show and be too confusing. But the other schoolroom was nearly empty, so the boys carried the three big packing cases of socks in there and I stood on a desk and called out the names. About half the boys were there, we finished the rest that night. It was too crowded to move much, but I'm a good shot and when a boy called "Here" his sock went flying across the room to him. One landed on the stove-pipe and had to be fished for, but the rest got there all right.

There was just a moment's breathing space after that. The next to the littlest babies - children three and four years old - did a darling little song with gestures but it was too crowded to see much.

Then they all melted away. I forget just what happened next, I only remember the relief of feeling that so far things had gone well, and the anxiety about the evening.

The next thing I remember was closing the danteen and clearing the tent at 5:30. Some job! The boys didn't want to go. Two or three of my helpers tried to get them out but they wouldn't budge so I had to do it myself. I coaxed them and reasoned with them and jollied them, and finally got it empty. Then my faithful football team turned up and guaranteed to keep it so in spite of the boys massed outside waiting for a front seat.

In the meantime Ingen got up the stage and I dressed the actors. I've told you about that; even then it didn't seem that we could be ready on time, but the first performance was scheduled to begin at 8:30 and at 8:35 we were ready!

I went out first, before the curtain was drawn, and explained the kind of show we were trying to give. I asked them to use their imaginations a bit - see the hillside and the starry night-

That very afternoon I'd received a letter from Cornelia and I ended my speech with a quotation from it about what a good Christmas it would be back home but how much better it was to be over here with the boys who had put the Merry back in Christmas. That pleased them a lot.

As I said before my soloist had failed me, so I didn't get quite the effect I wanted, musically, but we'd borrowed a portable organ and good luck sent us a violin player, just the day before so we didn't miss the voice so much.

When I finished speaking they played "It came upon a midnight clear" and then the curtains were drawn back and the play started. The coloring and light effects were lovely. By means of solid alcohol and a few sticks we managed a real fire for the shepherds - that was my chef d'oeuvre. I was really thrilled by the picture part of it. The wording I was sorry to death of, even if it was my very first produced play.