

"Gimme One, Me Sister's Got It"



The First Christmas Seal

By LEIGH MITCHELL HODGES



D ECEMBER, 1907—the World War seven years ahead, but a deadlier war at flood—tuberculosis taking one-tenth of all who died from disease—folks everywhere wondering what could be done to stem the tide.

Mid-morning, December 13—a ragged, dirty newsboy walked into a Philadelphia newspaper office. Reached up to a marble counter higher than his head, he put down a copper cent.

"Gimme one, me sister's got it."

Here, at the right, is what he was given.

Noontime, December 9, 1907, in Wilmington, capital of little Delaware, two pretty girls in Red Cross uniforms taking their place at a table in the postoffice corridor, asking a quarter each for little pay envelopes thus labeled:

fore that morning the governor-elect of Pennsylvania had asked the editor what he could do for him when he came into office.

"Just one thing, governor, try to get a big appropriation for the fight against tuberculosis."

"I will," said Edwin S. Stuart, "but what else?"

"That's enough."

"Here's the way to wipe out tuberculosis," half-shouted the man from upstairs, as he waved the sheet of stamps under the editor's nose!

"What the hell do you mean?"

A brief explanation. "Tell Miss Bissell the North American is hers from today."

"How soon can we have 50,000 of the stamps?" was asked of the lady from Delaware. She gasped, and said she'd telephone from Wilmington that evening. "Fifty thousand" she echoed as she left, "Isn't that too many?"

Ten o'clock the morning of December 13, 1907, a few thousand of the stamps, they were so-called at first, on sale in the publication office and a few more at a booth in Wanamaker's. Also a top-of-column five-bank head on page one of the North American. Next day the whole editorial space devoted to a plea to buy these "bullets in the battle against the worst foe." Then a second editorial, concluding with this:

And with confidence we call upon every man, woman and child whose heart pulses with the warmth of humanity to join our ranks in driving this curse from the land; to buy these stamps according to the measure of each one's means, and to mail no letter and send no package not decorated with these best of Christmas symbols of good will toward men.

Next day a seven-column "spread" on page one, and on December 18, with the stamps selling by thousands and telegrams from many parts of the country asking about them, this message from Miss Bissell:

Whatever the future friends or furtherance of the Christmas Stamp may be, The North American will always have the credit of being the first powerful friend of its beginning, and of having contributed most largely to its initial success.

The presses in Wilmington couldn't print them fast enough, so a Philadelphia printer was enlisted. Through its Washington correspondent, the newspaper got the postmaster general's permission to put up a booth in the Philadelphia postoffice lobby.

From Jacob Riis, on December 19: "Good for you and for Philadelphia and the North American. Keep it up. I am glad the little seed I sowed in The Outlook last summer has borne fruit." Five days before Christmas the gov-

25 CHRISTMAS STAMPS

ONE PENNY APiece

Issued by the Delaware Red Cross, to stamp out the White Plague.

Put this stamp, with message brought

On every Christmas letter:

Help the tuberculosis fight.

And make the New Year better.

These stamps do not carry any kind of mail, but any kind of mail will carry them.

Mid-morning, December 11, 1907, eighteenth floor of the North American building in Philadelphia, a day member of the staff in his cubby-hole. "A lady to see you," passing a card engraved "Miss Emily P. Bissell." "Is she good looking?" "Sure." "Show her in."

Enter the secretary of the Delaware Red Cross on unofficial business. She had come to ask a favor of the Sunday editor and thought she'd pay her respects to the columnist, who hoped the Sunday editor had granted her wish.

He had not. She had wanted him to run a little story about this, taking a sheet of stamps from her handbag. Delaware was worried about tuberculosis, needed a few hundred dollars to start caring for poor patients. She had read Jacob Riis's story about the Danish Christmas Stamp in The Outlook, wondered if Delaware couldn't issue one and sell enough to build a small shelter—here it was, but she was afraid—.

Downstairs went the occupant of the cubby-hole, two steps at a time, to the office of E. A. Van Valkenburg, president and editor of the paper that had been first to displease the doctors by proposing publicity as the weapon to use against the White Plague. A few months be-

