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Opening Extract from...

Letters from Father Christmas

Written by J. R. R. Tolkien

Edited by Baillie Tolkien

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*Letters from
Father Christmas*



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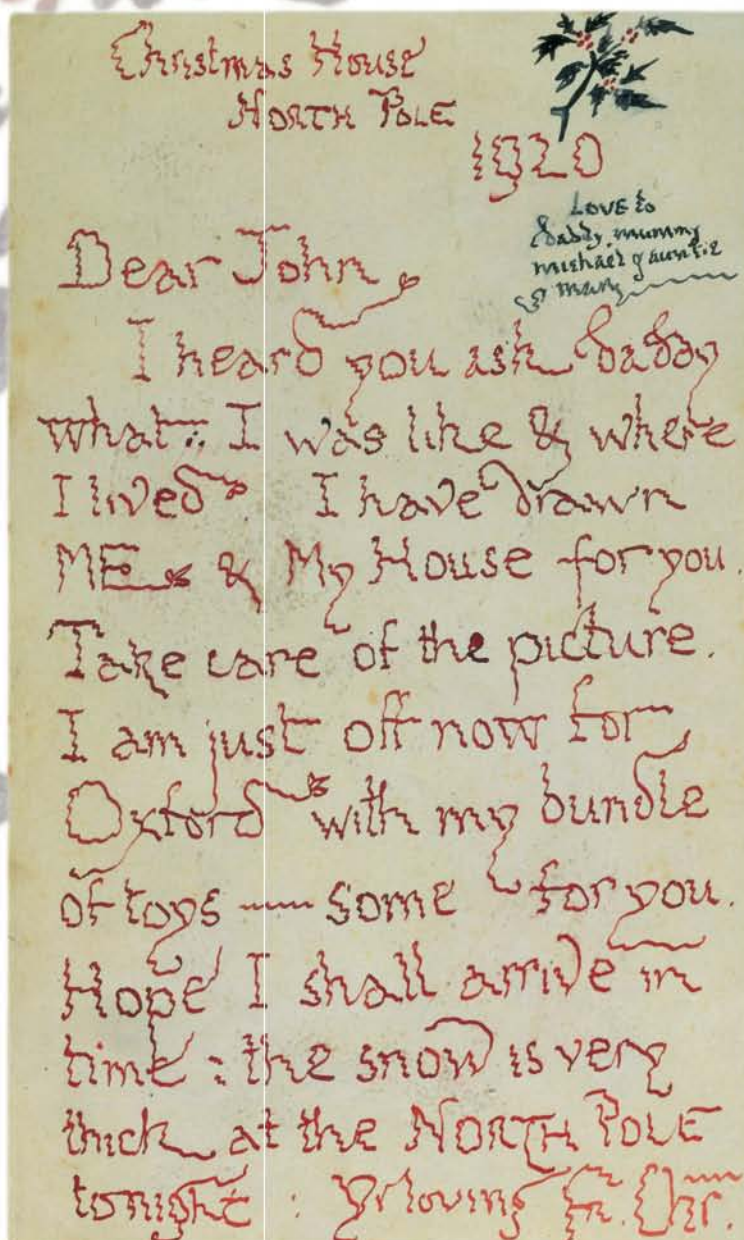
Introduction

To the children of J. R. R. Tolkien, the interest and importance of Father Christmas extended beyond his filling of their stockings on Christmas Eve; for he wrote a letter to them every year, in which he described in words and pictures his house, his friends, and the events, hilarious or alarming, at the North Pole. The first of the letters came in 1920, when John, the eldest, was three years old; and for over twenty years, through the childhoods of the three other children, Michael, Christopher and Priscilla, they continued to arrive each Christmas. Sometimes the envelopes, dusted with snow and bearing Polar postage stamps, were found in the house on the morning after his visit; sometimes the postman brought them; and the letters that the children wrote themselves vanished from the fireplace when no one was about.

As time went on, Father Christmas' household became larger, and whereas at first little is heard of anyone else except the North Polar Bear, later on there appear Snow-elves, Red Gnomes, Snow-men, Cave-bears, and the Polar Bear's nephews, Paksu and Valkotukka, who came on a visit and never went away. But the Polar Bear remained Father Christmas' chief assistant, and the chief cause of the disasters that led to muddles and deficiencies in the Christmas stockings; and sometimes he wrote on the letters his comments in angular capitals.

Eventually Father Christmas took on as his secretary an Elf named Ilbereth, and in the later letters Elves play an important part in the defence of Father Christmas' house and store-cellars against attacks by Goblins.

In this book it has been possible to give only a few examples of Father Christmas' shaky handwriting, but almost all the pictures that he sent are here reproduced; and also included is the alphabet that the Polar Bear devised from the Goblin drawings on the walls of the caves where he was lost, and the letter that he sent to the children written in it.



Christmas House, North Pole
22nd December 1920

Dear John

I heard you ask daddy what I was like and where I lived. I have drawn me and my house for you. Take care of the picture. I am just off now for Oxford with my bundle of toys – some for you. Hope I shall arrive in time: the snow is very thick at the North Pole tonight. Your loving Father Christmas

FROM FATHER • CHRISTMAS





North Pole
Christmas Eve: 1923

My dear John,

It is very cold today and my hand is very shaky – I am nineteen hundred and twenty four, no! seven! years old on Christmas Day, – lots older than your great-grandfather, so I can't stop the pen wobbling, but I hear that you are getting so good at reading that I expect you will be able to read my letter

I send you lots of love (and lots for Michael too) and Lotts Bricks too (which are called that because there are lots more for you to have next year if you let me know in good time). I think they are prettier and stronger and tidier than Picabrix. So I hope you will like them.

Now I must go; it is a lovely fine night and I have got hundreds of miles to go before morning – there is such a lot to do.

A cold kiss from

Father Nicholas Christmas

1923

Christmas Eve : 1923

Northole
My dear John

It's very cold to day and
my hand is very shaky
I am nineteen hundred and twenty
~~four~~ ^{not seven!} years old on Christmas day,
It's older than your great-grandfather,
so I can't stop the pen writing,
but I hear that you are getting
so good at reading that I expect
you will be able to read my letter

2
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I think they are prettier and stronger
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must go; it is a lovely fine night
and I have got hundreds of miles
to go before morning - there is such
a lot to do.  A cold kiss from
Fr. Nicholas Christmas

