

Primary Source: Is There a Santa Claus?

by Frances Pharcellus Church *from* The Sun (New York City, New York) September 21, 1897

This editorial from The (New York City) Sun was first published in 1897. It is in response to a real letter received by the newspaper.

Is There a Santa Claus?

We take pleasure in answering at once and thus prominently the communication below, expressing at the same time our great gratification that its faithful author is numbered among the friends of The Sun:

“Dear Editor: I am 8 years old.

“Some of my little friends say there is no Santa Claus.

“Papa says ‘If you see it in the The Sun it’s so.’

“Please tell me the truth; is there a Santa Claus?

“Virginia O’Hanlon.

“115 West Ninety-Fifth Street.”

Virginia, your little friends are wrong. They have been infected by the skepticism of a skeptical age. They do not believe except they see. They think that nothing be that is not comprehensible by their little minds. All minds, Virginia, whether they be men’s or children’s, are little. In this great universe of ours man is a mere insect, an ant, in his intellect, as compared with the boundless world about him, as measured by the intelligence capable of grasping the whole of truth and knowledge.

Yes, Virginia, there is a Santa Claus. He exists as certainly as love and generosity and devotion exist, and you know that they abound and give to your life its highest beauty and joy. Alas! how dreary would the world be if there were no Santa Claus. It would be as dreary as if there were no Virginias. There would be no childlike faith then, no poetry, no romance to make tolerable this existence. We should have no enjoyment, except in sense and sight. The eternal light with which childhood fills the world would be extinguished.

Not believe in Santa Claus! You might as well not believe in fairies! You might get your papa to hire men to watch in all the chimneys on Christmas Eve to catch Santa Claus, but even if they do not see Santa Claus coming down, what would that prove? Nobody sees Santa Claus, but that is no sign that there is no Santa Claus. The most real things in the world are those that neither children nor men can see. Did you ever see fairies dancing on the lawn? Of course not, but that’s no proof that they are not there. Nobody can conceive or imagine all the wonders there are unseen and unseeable in the world.

You may tear apart the baby’s rattle and see what makes the noise inside, but there is a veil covering the unseen world which not the strongest man, nor even the united strength of all the strongest men that ever lived, could tear apart. Only faith, fancy, poetry, love, romance, can push aside that curtain and view and

picture the supernal beauty and glory beyond. Is it all real? Ah, Virginia, in all this world there is nothing else real and abiding.

No Santa Claus! Thank God! he lives and he lives forever. A thousand years from now, Virginia, nay, ten times ten thousand years from now, he will continue to make glad the heart of childhood.

Questions

1. The author compares man to an insect. What form of figurative language is this?
2. What does dreary mean here: "how dreary would the world be if there were no Santa Claus"?
3. The text gives two examples of the difficulty in proving a negative. What is one?
4. Briefly explain the author's main idea.