

Introduction

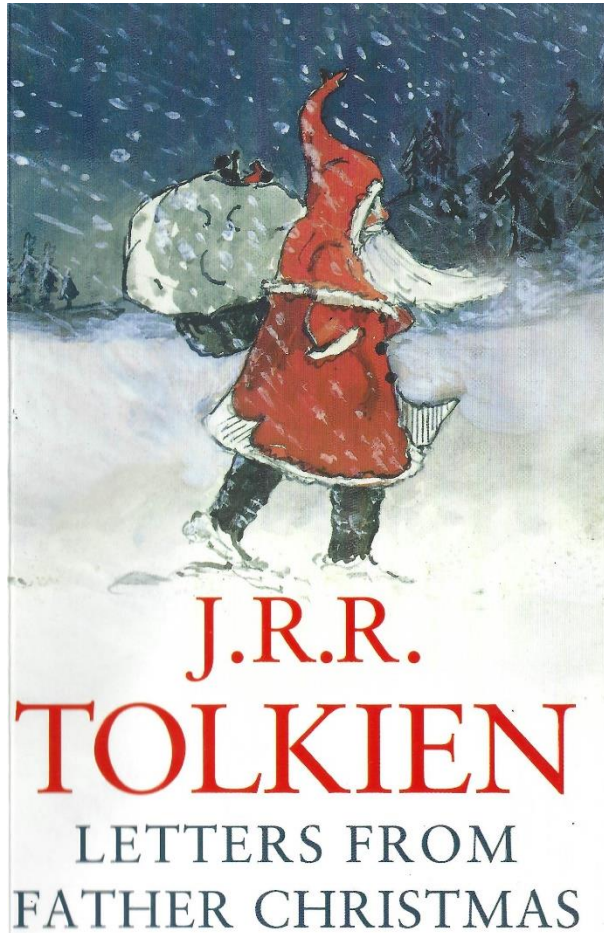
To the children of J. R. R. Tolkien, the interest and importance of Father Christmas extended beyond his filling of their stockings on Christmas Eve; for he wrote a letter to them every year, in which he described in words and pictures his house, his friends, and the events, hilarious or alarming, at 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 are presented numerous examples of Father Christmas' shaky handwriting, and almost all the pictures that he sent are here reproduced; 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.



TOLKIEN'S FIRST AND LAST LETTER:

1923

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, not 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

1943

Cliff House,
North Pole,
Christmas 1943

My dear Priscilla

A very happy Christmas! I suppose you will be hanging up your stocking just once more: I hope so for I have still a few little things for you. After this I shall have to say “goodbye”, more or less: I mean, I shall not forget you. We always keep the old numbers of our old friends, and their letters; and later on we hope to come back when they are grown up and have houses of their own and children.

My messengers tell me that people call it “grim” this year. I think they mean miserable: and so it is, I fear, in very many places where I was specially fond of going; but I am very glad to hear that you are still not really miserable. Don’t be! I am still very much alive, and shall come back again soon, as merry as ever. There has been no damage in my country; and though my stocks are running rather low I hope soon to put that right.

Polar Bear – too “tired” to write himself (so he says) –

I am, reely

sends a special message to you: love and a hug! He says: do ask if she still has a bear called Silly Billy, or something like that; or is he worn out?

Give my love to the others: John and Michael and Christopher – and of course to all your pets that you used to tell me about.

As I have not got very many of the things you usually want, I am sending you some nice bright clean money – I have lots of that (more than you have, I expect; but it is not very much use to me, perhaps it will be to you). You might find it useful to buy a book with that you really want.

Very much love from your old friend,
Father Christmas.