Enlivening the Childless Bowens

By Edith Brown Kirkwood.

The Bowens were childless. It was not that they believed in race suicide. They were devoted to all the youngsters who came their way. Anyone passing their yard on a bright summer day, never would have guessed that the dozen bare-footed boys and girls beneath the Bowen trees belonged in nearly half a dozen other homes in the neighborhood. It seemed that Nature in planning the division of the next generation just forgot the Bowens.

For years the Bowens had been the objects of the neighborhood's holiday sympathy. The overflow of feeling in their behalf started in about the week before Thanksgiving and from that day until the New Year had arrived such were the looks of commiseration bestowed upon them that the Bowens all but avoided the highways and took to the alleys and the rear gates. From January second until about October first no one in the neighborhood seemed to mind the childlessness of the Bowens. If anyone thought of it at all, it was to consider it a convenience.

"You won't mind keeping Billie and Mary after school until I can get back from the city, will you?" queried little Mrs. Jordan of Mrs. Bowen just as regularly as shopping day came. "I don't like to ask Mrs. Morrison for she has so many of her own, you know."

Mrs. Brown knew. She kept the Morrison's five regularly. Also the Leonard's three and the Thompson's two. The little recital that went with each request was the same in each instance, except in the case of Mrs. Thompson, who always added sweetly:

"You know, I don't mind asking this favor of you for children are such a novelty when one hasn't a houseful of one's own!"

It was only after the calendar had slipped past October first and the plum puddings were stored away and the price list of turkeys was being scanned, that the Jordans, the Morrisons, the Leonards and the Thompsons in turn laid down their papers and remarked:

"Don't you feel sorry for the Bowens?" with an emphasis on the "don't" that carried the sorrow of the years.

From that time the shrinkage of Bowen neighborhood-importance was equalled only by the inflation of Bowen sympathy. Thanksgiving morning always found the oldest Morrison tearing across lots with a pan from which oozed the steam of a small pudding. The littlest Jordan came bearing a dark brown dish tied with a pretty bow of red and Mr. and Mrs. Bowen knew, before lifting the lid, that within was confined delicious cranberry jelly. The middle Leonard could be seen creeping through the fence, both hands holding firmly on two plates turned together thus imprisoning a juicy mince pie, and the Thompson twins, toddled in, one carrying a small sack of nuts and the other one of raisins.

After this the telephone rang four times. When Mrs. Bowen had turned from the last conversation, Mrs. Jordan, Mrs. Morrison, Mrs. Leonard and Mrs. Thompson each had finished her inquiry:

"Did the children get over without spilling everything?"

And each had added:

"You don't know the fun you are missing by not having children around at this time!"

Annually, over Mrs. Bowen's face there stole a look of worry as if she was being accused of having bribed the stork to stay away. Annually Mr. Bowen only smiled or remarked:

"Not half bad, eh, little girl? Now, if another nice big family would consent to move into the neighborhood perhaps it would furnish us with the turkey!"

This year the parts had been played with the usual accuracy. Nothing had been omitted. In fact the Jordan bow had seemed a bit bigger and the Leonard pie somewhat juicier than ever before, if possible. According to custom, also, during the afternoon the families had trooped into the Bowen house in turns or in groups as the notion "not to be selfish with our children" entered the minds of the commiserating double quartet of parents.

Each gorged child, in turn, told and retold the tale of the annual onslaught of thankfulness and four o'clock found Mrs. Bowen cutting out pictures for the sleepy Thompson twins (released from their daily nap for the day) and Mr. Bowen blowing smoke rings, with the Leonard's second and the Morrison's fourth perched one on either knee.

Now evening had come and two fagged, childless individuals had seated themselves at their favorite table, each turning to the individual diversion which gave nerves opportunity for relaxation before seeking bed at an early hour.

For a whole month the neighborhood returned to a semi-normal state. The oldest of the Morrisons cast knowing glances at the elders in the group while the tots prattled of Santa Claus and his expected visit. Father Morrison, true to role, always winked appreciatively and Mother Morrison carefully pressed her forefinger to her lips and shook her head in warning. This meant that the Holiday Spirit had started on his annual dash and was due to spring into the neighborhood at any moment.

Three weeks before Christmas he arrived at the Bowen door in the person of Mrs. Thompson. There came a staccato knock and before Mrs. Bowen had time to pat her stray locks into place, Mrs. Thompson slipped into the room and thrust two long pasteboard boxes on to the nearest chair. The pupils of her eyes were big with excitement and she was breathless when she tarried on tiptoe to explain:

"Oh, not a minute! Can't stay a minute. I've sent the twins to the Jordans on an errand so I could slip over here and I must get back before they return. Will you hide these boxes some place? It will be so dear of you!" She was at the door without waiting for an answer. At the steps she turned to whisper to Mrs. Bowen, standing in the door:

"They're dolls for the girls, you know. I'll have to dress them at your house if you don't mind. I'll be over every day while the twins take their nap." She added the last few words as she flew across the road to her home. Mrs. Bowen turned back into the room, slowly picked up the boxes and wended her way upstairs. When Mr. Bowen sought his closet that evening two long boxes teetered on the shelf.

"What the ——" he began.

"Dolls—for the Thompson twins," Mrs. Bowen interrupted.

"Then it's here!"

"It is. Mrs. Thompson brought them over this morning. She's to come here to dress them every day—or to come every day until she's dressed them. I'm not sure which she said but anyway she's to be here every afternoon while the twins are taking their nap. What? Well, dear, your closet is the only place in the house the twins don't investigate. I keep that locked. You won't mind, will you? You see she has no other place. Everyone else in the neighborhood has——"

"Children!" finished Mr. Bowen with emphasis. "By George—! Who's that?"

A sharp whistle sounded in the front hall.

"Halloo-oo-oo! Anybody at home up there?"

It was Morrison. Bowen, turning toward his wife, was met by an "I'll-dare-you-not-to" smile.

"Your turn," she announced meaningly.

At the foot of the stairs stood Morrison, hardly visible behind a mountainous package.

"Say, old man," he called, "the wife's been shopping to-day. You can't chuck this under something, can you, and keep it until Santa Claus and his reindeers come along? It's a big red engine for Jack. Say, he'll go straight up when he sees it on Christmas morning. Bowen, old man, you ought to know the fun of playing Santa Claus yourself. Here, take this engine and make believe you have something to give it to. Just stick it under anything. We'll be over on Christmas eve. Much obliged."

Mrs. Thompson and Mr. Morrison were merely the forerunners. One by one the families came. No one dared touch the Bowen sofa in the fear of disclosing hidden treasures and danger lurked behind every book in the case. Nightly Bowen jabbed his toes against the prancing front foot of Bill Jordan's hobby horse or the handle of Tom Morrison's express wagon, concealed for the time beneath the bed.

In time, also, the Bowen attic came to resemble a cross between evrgreen forest and a carnival. Four big Christmas trees stood expectantly in the middle of the floor, hedged about by boxes of red and green and gold balls and yards and yards and yards of gilt and silver tinsel. Every nook and corner of the house held mysterious packages in original wrappings. Chiffonier drawers swelled with doll dresses and hats, new shoes, baby rattles and treacherous jumping jacks. When Susan Leonard's miniature playhouse, furnished completely from cellar to attic, and Bill Jordan's modern tunnel with river beds and lookouts and revolving lights arrived, the door to the spare bedroom upstairs was opened, the two boxes pushed in and the key carefully turned. There was room for no one to enter.

"There are the coal bin and the hayloft left," remarked Bowen facetiously. "Who cares for a quiet smoke in his own house, anyway!"

There remained two days before the momentous day. No Leonard nor Thompson nor Jordon Nor Morrison offspring was permitted to poke its nose beyond the Bowen kitchen. Mrs. Bowen, between answers to the doorbell, was making nut candies and cakes, her annual contribution to the Christmas boards of the four households. The small visitors, cracking the nuts and picking them out of the shells, wondered why the Bowen doors suddenly were locked against them. If questions became too insistent Mrs. Bowen tactfully answered:

"Well, I am keeping the house clean for Santa Claus. You wouldn't want him to pass me by just because the house was all mussed up, would you?"

Perhaps few households appreciate to the full the force of the combined holiday activity. The Bowens were among the few. Three weeks as receivers for the neighborhood efforts, three weeks as the absorbers of the neighborhood's enthusiasms, and excitement reached its climax on Christmas eve.

"Let's steal off to-night and have a quiet dinner all to ourselves, Nan," Bowen suggested at the breakfast table. "Maybe we'll not have the chance soon again."

"But the Thompsons and Jordans?" Mrs. Bowen put the question anxiously.

"To be sure," answered Dan. "Likewise the Morrisons and Leonards." Bowen pivoted the salt shaker about in meditative play and then looked up quickly at his wife. "You won't mind if I can't bring your gift out for to-night, Nan? I had hoped to have it here for Christmas eve but it—it—well, it isn't quite ready and——"

"Then we're even, dear." Mrs. Bowen flushed and laughed. "I've been wondering how I'd tell you but they couldn't—mine's been delayed, too," she finished. "But you'll love it, Dan. It's worth waiting for."

Dan inwardly thanked the rulers of his good fortune that a Christmas gift for him could still bring to the eyes of his wife such a light as he saw in them this morning.

Every youngster in the neighborhood had been bribed into bed by nine o'clock that evening but quiet did not come to the household of Bowen. If the three weeks had been busy ones, Bowen wondered that so much could have been crowded into three hours. It was a three-hour marathon.

Four times he assisted in carrying a nice prickly tree down two flights of stairs; one hundred times, according to his own computation, he dived under beds, behind dressers and into closets. When the last package had left the house it was midnight. Strewn over the floor were the books grabbed from the library in the package hunt; scraps of paper, cord and tinsel with a trail of pine needles that marked the way from the attic to the front door.

"Suppose we celebrate to-morrow by having a cleaning bee and inviting our thoughtful, unselfish neighbors and their children in to help?" queried Bowen in a weary voice. "Not another thing to-night. We're going to creep into bed this very minute. I'm dog tired. To-morrow we'll ——"

The telephone bell jingled. It was Morrison.

"Say, Bowen, you and the missus still up? Well, get on your bonnets and shawls and join the crowd. We're all going around to visit each others' Christmas trees. Aw, come on. What's the matter with you? It'll do you good. We want to give you two forlorn folks a taste of what it means to have children at Christmas time!"

Bowen pushed the receiver into its holder and stood looking at the instrument as if it were the source of his troubles. Then he whirled from it determinedly.

"Little girl," he announced, "if you don't mind I think I'd like to tell you right now what I have for your Christmas present. I've made arrangements"—he paused—"don't say a word until I've finished—I've made arrangements to adopt the cutest little blue-eyed girl you ever saw, but she can't get here until tomorrow evening. The thought came to me that eveninb Morrison brought Jack's engine—and—why—why what's—what's the matter? I thought you'd like——"

"O Dan!" Mrs. Bowen was laughing, while unbidden and unwonted tears stole down her cheeks. "Dan, you dear old love! Like it! You're late! I'll tell you what I've got for you, too, Dan. I've made arrangements to adopt the darlingest brown-eyed boy you ever laid eyes upon, but he can't get here until to-morrow afternoon. That was the notion that came to me on Thanksgiving night. You said the beginning sounded good. How does the end sound?"

For just a second Dan and Nan Bowen stood looking intently at each other. Then with one accord they opened their arms.

"Dan!" cried Mrs. Bowen.

"Nan!" exclaimed Bowen, fervently.

"Isn't it glorious?" whispered Mrs. Bowen.

"We'll adopt the whole orphan osylum if you say the word, dear" Bowen whispered in return. "I thought we'd wait until to-morrow morning but out in the barn I've hidden one grand Christmas tree with the tinsel, gifts and everything to go with it. You see, they've made us experts in hiding presents! Morrison wants us to go out with the rest of 'em to 'do' the trees. Let's go." He reached for his hat and coat. "And when we come back——"

"We'll get all Dan Junior's toys up from the cellar," Mrs. Bowen interrupted joyously, "and——"

"Decorate that tree to-night!" finished Bowen. "Come on, honey. Gee, isn't this great? Don't know why I thought I was tired!" It was real Christmas joy.

"Bowen, old man, you ought to know the fun of playing Santa Claus yourself."

May the Giver of Gifts give unto you
That which is Good and that which is True:
The Will to help and the Courage to do;
A heart that can Sing the whole year through
Whether the skies be gray or blue,
May the Giver of Gifts give these to you.

The earth has grown old with its burden of care,
But at Christmas it always is young,
The heart of the jewel burns lustrous and fair,
And its soul full of music bursts forth on the air,
When the song of the angels is sung.

—Phillips Brooks.

CONSERVATION CONFECTIONS

Approved by Canada Food Board.

WHITE CORN SYRUP CONFECTIONS.
(From left to right.)
1. Glace nuts and fruits. 2. Mexican candy. 3. Peanut brittle.

PEANUT BRITTLE.

2 cups white corn syrup, ¾ cup shelled peanuts, 1 tablespoon vinegar. Boil syrup without stirring until it will crack when dropped in cold water (temperature 354 deg. Fahr.). Add vinegar and stir in nuts just before removing from the fire. Pour on greased pan. Break in pieces when cool.

MEXICAN CANDY.
(Divinity Fudge).

2 cups white corn syrup, 1 to 2 egg whites, 1 teaspoon vanilla. Boil the syrup to 248 deg. Fahr., or until it makes a hard ball when tried in cold water. Beat the egg whites stiff and pour in slowly the boiled syrup, beating all the time. Add vanilla and continue beating until of a consistency to keep its shape when dropped on waxed paper. Nuts or fruits may be added when nearly done.

MOLASSES TAFFY.

2 cups molasses, 1 cup corn syrup, 1 tablespoon vinegar. Boil molasses and corn syrup until brittle when dropped in cold water. Add vinegar just before removing from the fire. Pour into a greased pan. When cool enough to handle, pull until light colored. Cut in small pieces with large shears or a sharp knife and place in waxed paper to cool.

MAPLE CREAM.

2 cups maple sugar, ½ to 2-3 cup milk, ½ teaspoon butter. Stir sugar and milk over the fire until sugar is dissolved. Then boil without stirring to 238 deg. Fahr., or until mixture will form a soft ball when dropped in cold water. Remove from fire, add butter and beat until thick and creamy. Pour into greased pan and mark in squares when nearly cool.

And Shall I Silent Be?

The shepherds sing; and shall I silent be?
My God, no hymn for Thee?
My soul's a shepherd too; a flock it feeds
Of thoughts, and words and deeds.
The pasture is Thy word; the streams, Thy grace
Enriching all the place.
Shepherd and flock shall sing, and all my powers
Out-sing the daylight hours.
Then we will chide the sun for letting night
Take up his place and right:

We sing one common Lord; wherefore he should
Himself the candle hold.
I will go searching, till I find a sun
Shall stay till we have done:
A willing shiner, that shall shine as gladly
As frost-nipt suns look sadly.
Then we will sing, and shine all our own day,
And one another pay;
His beams shall cheer my breast, and both so twine,
Till even his beams sing, and my music shine.

—George Herbert.

A Christmas Heaven.

A gambrel roof in a sheltered lane
And a laughing group therein.
The winds may bellow with might and main,
And the storms may clash and din.
But it's Christmas, Father Christmas,
Hath the keeping of his kin.

Outside, a traveler in the snow,
And a glad "Hello!" once more;
Within, a hearth fire all aglow
And a dear face at the door.
And it's Christmas, Father Christmas
Giveth greetings o'er and o'er.

The circles, wonderful circles, where
They are gathered to-day;
The kindness, beautiful kindness, there,
And the welcome words they say.
For it's Christmas, Father Christmas,
Turn no prodigal away.

The Next Year.

No backward glances shall hinder or appall me,
A new life is begun,
And better hopes and better motives call me
Than those the past has won.

The Origin of the Christmas Tree.

The history of the Christmas-tree is difficult to trace. It has been connected with Ygdrasil, the great tree of Norse mythology, and Christmas-trees and May-poles are known to be relics of that famous Scandinavian Ash. The roots and branches of Ygdrasil, the world-tree, or as it is sometimes called, the Tree of Time, bound together heaven, the earth, and hell. From it all tribes of nature received nourishment. According to a Scandinavian legend of great antiquity the Christmas-tree owes its origin to the service tree which sprang from soil that had been drenched with the blood of two lovers who had been foully murdered. During the Christmas season flaming lights that no wind could extinguish sprang mysteriously from its branches at night, and the practise of illuminating the Christmas-tree may, perhaps, be traced to this tradition, which no doubt was strongly influenced by the fact that lights were (and still are) a feature of the Jewish feast of the Chanuca or Lights (December 10). Among the Greeks Christmas is called the Feast of Lights.

Sir George Birdwood has traced the history of the Christmas-tree to the ancient Egyptian practice of decking houses at the time of the winter solstice with branches of the date-palm, the symbol of life triumphant over death, and therefore of perennial life in the renewal of each bounteous year.

Meeting at Bethlehem.

So dark the stables by lantern light
That I cannot tell who is here to-night;
I do not mind, for I need not see
The people I love who are here with me.

They know the road to Bethlehem,
And the Star and the singing have guided them,
Out the press of horror and pain
They have sought the promise of Peace again.

They have hastened in by the humble door,
And have knelt with us on the Eastern floor.
I do not need to put out my hand
To clasp in theirs, for they understand.

I do not need to greet them aloud
For our silence speaks in the kneeling crowd,
And, kneeling before the little Son,
Our hearts and our lives are made one —made one.

A SONG OF PEACE

Blow, whistles o' the world; ring, church bells, loudly ring,
For Peace, on joyful wing,
At blush of dawn her prized doves set free,
Heralds of Liberty,
Above this war-worn, weary world to brood,
The universal deluge rude
That flooded mother earth with grief and pain
Subsides: and on the mount of Promise see
Divinest Liberty!
Blow, whistles o' the world; ring, church bells, loudly ring.

Blow, whistles o' the world; ring, church bells, loudly ring,
This is a day of joy and merry mirth,
For Peace descends to earth,
And hopes anew in troubled hearts up-spring!
The streets with flags are gay,
The people shout and pray,
For felled to earth is Hunnish tyranny,
And ours the Victory!
Blow, whistles o' the world; ring, church bells, loudly ring!