The Voice Beloved

BY M. JESSIE LEITCH.

It was Christmas Eve. Snow had been falling softly all day long, feathering the woods with softness, heaping the hedges with purest silver and filling the world with white silence.

"It will be a white Christmas," said John Dobbs, pausing to stamp the snow off his feet before he entered the kitchen that was freshly scrubbed as to floor and fragrant with the spiciness of Christmas cakes and puddings.

Mary Dobbs, his wife, paused in her fluting of pie crust to glance anxiously at his hand. It was empty. He had gone to the village for the express purpose of getting the mail.

She sighed a little, then smiled resolutely.

"Cold, John?" she asked, balancing the pie deftly on her floury hand and smiling at him as if he were her child instead of her husband.

"Not cold. A bit disappointed. I'd set my heart on that letter with a foreign stamp. It's not like Nellie to forget 'the old folks at home' the day before Christmas."

John Dobbs looked all of his sixty years as he dragged off his overshoes, placed them in the woodbox and hung his old woolen jacket up behind the door.

"Don't worry—the letter will be along. Nellie has never forgotten yet."

His wife's voice was reassuring. She slipped her pies into the oven, moved the tea kettle to the front of the cheery old cook stove, glanced at the clock above the lamp shelf and said something about getting supper. But she knew that there would be no other mail until Christmas morning.

"There was nothing else, John?" she continued, as he untied a bundle of papers and felt for the glasses that were pushed up into his grizzled hair.

"There's a card, some place. Something about a parcel at the express office, but I called for it and it wasn't there. Here's the card—you read it."

"It's from Nellie! The parcel is from Paris. Perhaps the last train wasn't in, John? If you'd only waited!"

Mary Dobb's face was flushed, her eyes were shining.

"I was so disappointed about the letter that I didn't pay much attention to the card," he said.

Eleanor Dobbs had been in Paris for five years. She had a voice. She was studying Grand Opera. Her parents were very proud of her. They were very lonely without her but *Eleanor had a voice* and voices, her teachers had always said, were few and far between.

It had all begun years before when Eleanor, a shining-haired little girl of five, stood on the schoolroom platform and sang at the Christmas tree entertainment. So sweet, even then, were her baby tones, that there had been tears in her mother's eyes when she lifted her down from the platform. The child, frightened by the applause which followed her little song, had hidden her face in her mother's lap and refused to sing again.

Year after year, as she grew, Eleanor was always singing about the house, at her lessons, at her play—singing to her dolls, singing to her father as he sat before the oven door at night in the little farm kitchen.

"Nellie must have her voice trained. It's a gift," her father would say. And her mother, listening to the golden something in the child's song, would adore it silently and without telling anyone, go without a new dress that she might put the money away toward the training of their darling's voice.

Nellie was an only child. There had been a boy who died in infancy. His father could not bear to talk about him. Yet it was twenty-seven years since little John had been buried in the graveyard plot behind the village church.

Twenty-seven years!

Sometimes when John Dobbs sat for a long time looking into the blaze of the old cook stove on winter evenings, his wife, seeing the loneliness in his eyes, would put down her sewing or her knitting and place a gentle hand on his arm. "Our John would have been a man—" she would say, without finishing the sentence, or just hold his hand, helplessly silent, knowing that the same unspoken grief was in his heart as was in her own. For every man and every woman in the world yearns sooner or later for a man child—a boy grown tall. As age comes on, it is the ringing step of a man who is young and full of strength and courage that they want. And need.

"If Nellie would only come home and marry! If there could be the sound of children's footsteps in the old house." This was what Nellie's mother would breathe softly to herself. But, with a voice like Nellie's, would it be right? Did "prima donnas" marry? Mary Dobbs was not quite sure. Certain it was that little Nellie, "Eleanor" they called her in the newspapers that came from across the sea, was a prima donna. It seemed so wonderful to read her letters about seasons and engagements and concerts and recitals. The little-girl touch of terror at the sight of a mass of people, of stage fright, of fear that she would not sing well, had long since disappeared from her letters, every one of which was carefully hoarded to be read over and over again. There was assurance and confidence in those grown-up letters. And there was pride. Sometimes her mother wondered if there might not be a little vanity—it all seemed so greatly of the world, the talk of Nellie's about the gowns she had to buy for her last concerts, the parties, the friends, the dinner parties in strange cities that sounded so very very far away.

John Dobbs rustled his papers before the fire. The kettle was steaming. Setting it back, abstractedly, Mary Dobbs fried potatoes as she had done for thirty years, at supper time, cut bread and opened a can of jam, fried bacon and eggs, made coffee, took an apple pie from the oven and skimmed thick cream from a milk pan in the cellar that was very old-fashioned and very full of vegetables and coal and wood and apples and homemade pickles.

The lonely two sat down at their little white covered table in the spotless kitchen and smiled across the table at each other. It was Christmas Eve—the fifth since Nellie went abroad.

"Your coffee is the best in the world, Mother," said John Dobbs.

"Have another cup?" said Mary Dobbs, knowing that he would.

They were thinking of Nellie, of the letter that had not come. Mary was very sure that John was thinking of the baby son who slept under the evergreens. A mist of tears clouded her glasses. She wiped them away heroically. John, looking straight at her, did not see her tears, because his own eyes were full.

"I think I'll go down to the express office after supper, Mother, and take that card along," he said. "There might be something."

Just then the jangle of sleigh bells sounded in the yard. The old people sprang up, hope shining in their eyes, clutching at the very springs of their being. Nellie! Could it be possible that their little Nellie had come—? But it was only Jim Greggs from the next farm and Mary Dobbs' hands were cold as she tried to put a note of genuine cheer into the voice that responded to Jim's shout, "Christmas box for you!"

Jim was lifting a huge box from his sleigh which was loaded with groceries, a small pine tree, sundry lumpy parcels that bespoke the presents for the Sunday School Christmas Tree, of which, for many years, Jim had been Master of Ceremonies..

"This young piano was lying at the express office waiting for you, John," he said. "It came from Halifax and a deal of trouble they've gone to, packing it and painting your name on the outside of the box in capital letters. Look at that!"

"What can it be? Nellie must have sent it," said Mary Dobbs with shining eyes. "There isn't a soul in Halifax who would be sending things to us—unless Nellie."

"But Nellie is in Paris," said John. "This came from Halifax."

"Let's get it in the house," said practical Jim. Across the threshold, into the lamplit kitchen, they dragged it. Mary brought a hammer. John Dobbs attacked the case methodically, saving the nails as he drew them out.

It was a music box, the finest and the best that any of the trio had ever seen. The mahogany shone in the lamp light. Mary Dobbs touched it with hands that were tremulous and eagerly caressing. A card, bright with scarlet ribbons, was tied to the inside of the cover and in Nellie's writing were the words, "Merry Christmas to the best Mother and Father that ever lived, from their Nellie."

"I'm glad she mentioned your name first, Mother," said John Dobbs, shakily.

"Open her up! Let's have a tune. These must be the records," and Jim Greggs, with neighborly freedom, began to open a smaller box fastened with heavy cord. Jim took a record at random and put it in place. He wanted to hear the new "music box."

There was a moment's grating, whirring, then a woman's voice rang out—golden in its clarity—full of tenderness. Mary and John stared, speechless, the color of sweet surprise flushing their faces, a lovely light flooding their eyes.

"It's Nellie's voice!" Mary Dobbs was sobbing. She was on her knees beside the beautiful instrument, her arms clasping the shining wood. John Dobbs made no attempt to hide the tears that streamed down his face. Jim Greggs took his cap off and listened with wonder and incredulity on his face. He had known "Dobbs' girl" all her life.

"I love the dear silver that shines in her hair—" sang the voice.

"It's *you* she means, Mother," said John Dobbs huskily, and drew his wife into the tender curve of his arm until the golden voice was still. Jim Greggs approached the machine awkwardly, reverently.

"There's a song on the other side," he said softly and adjusted the needle and turned the little lever.

"Be it ever so humble, there's no place like home," sang the voice that was unbelievably full of golden notes that flooded the little room with melody and Love's divine message.

So "little" Nelly sang to her dear ones on Christmas Eve. Truly she had not forgotten "the old folks at home!"

There were other records. *Holy Night*, John's favorite Christmas song, and *O Little Town of Bethlehem*, the hymn that Nellie had sung first of all when she was a baby, lisping the words and singing them all to one tune, and songs they could not understand because the words were French and Italian. But the voice was Nellie's—come to them across the miles.

It was underneath the last record that they found the letter—a real Christmas letter, full of tenderness and plans for another Christmas when they should be together. Next they found a photograph—the last, best picture of their girl.

With shaking hands, they unwrapped the tissue paper, even tearing the bright little Christmas seals. Nellie! Their "little" Nellie!

"She's just like she used to be, only taller," her mother said.

"She favors you, Mother."

"But she has your eyes, John," said Mary Dobbs, reaching over to clasp his hand and then they placed the photo on the centre table, sat down and looked at it as if they would never tire of looking.

As the clock struck twelve, John put the first record on again, tenderly, and the notes of *Home Sweet Home* filled the room and their hearts.

"It's a wonderful Christmas morning," whispered Mary Dobbs when the last note had died away, sweet beyond compare.

Looking for Immigrants

Mrs. Horace Parsons, one of the ladies sent to England to select new citizens for Ontario.

Says Germany Seeks War

Andre Tardieu, a famous Frenchman, who says that Germany has been preparing men and armaments undisturbed for fourteen months, and charges United States citizens with financing the imports of cotton and copper, which amounted to twice the amounts imported by France.

Making Mothers Merry.

The oldest English name for Christmas is Moddra Niht, or Mothers' Night. In the early days, when our Saxon forefathers had just settled down in the country that was to be England, the day of December 25th was given up to games and feasting, but the night was dedicated to the special honor of mothers.

They occupied the seats of honor, and everyone brought them gifts. Sons and daughters who had gone out into the world strove to be at home on that one night in the year.

A little later the name Yule was given to Christmas, and the rejoicings of the day were prolonged into the night, when men sang and told stories sitting round the cheerful blaze of the Yule log.

The old customs of Mothers' Night gradually died out, though they still survive in a few remote parts of Britain. Its place has been taken to some extent by Mothering Sunday in the North of England. On that day everyone who can do so still makes a pilgrimage homewards, and the mother receives the homage of her family.

Christmas Candies

for good little boys and girls

Holiday time is the time for rich sweets and appetizing confections. Here are recipes that are as wholesome as they are good:

Quick Date Creams.—Beat two tablespoonfuls of butter until it is creamy. Add one cupful of confectioners' sugar a little at a time and beat the mixture well after every addition. Add one scant tablespoonful of cream, drop by drop, and flavor the whole with vanilla. Stone a pound of dates, fill the centres with the cream mixture and roll the candies in sugar.

Grape Caramels.—Place two cupfuls of milk and one cupful of sugar in a saucepan and stir the mixture until it reaches the boiling point. Add one cupful of grape-jam or marmalade and cook the whole until a little of it dropped into cold water will form a firm ball. Then add two tablespoonfuls of butter, cook the mixture until it reaches the "hard-ball" stage, add one cupful of nut meats and pour the whole into a greased pan. When it is cool cut it into squares.

Peanut Bars.—Shell one quart of roasted Spanish peanuts, remove the skins and chop the nuts fine. Beat the white of one egg until it is stiff, and while you beat add gradually one cupful of brown sugar, one quarter teaspoonful of salt and one-half teaspoonful of vanilla. Fold the peanut meats into the mixture, spread the whole in a square, shallow buttered tin pan and bake it in a slow oven. When the candy is done cut it into bars with a sharp knife.

The Christmas Spirit.

Hoo! Ray! Christmas is here again. How good it is that it comes every year. And the greatest thing about Christmas is the Christmas Spirit.

Oh, of course, there are the big dinners, the chicken, the potatoes, the cranberries. But what man is there with a healthy outlook on life who does not take delight in such things? And there are the numerous gifts, both going and coming, which are of especial significance to the young folks. (I wish here to suggest that this is an opportune time for all of us to be young folks). And there are the Christmas trees, and the Christmas holly, and the Christmas bells, red bells, green bells, white bells, and joyous decorations of all kinds and designs, all of which are but outward expressions of that divine spark of love and good will which we please to term "The Christmas Spirit."

We learn from Him Whose birth we commemorate that it is more pleasing to give than to receive. It is not necessarily the most expensive gifts that mean most. It is the spirit in which the gift is given that counts. The thoughtful word, the friendly deed, the kindly act, things that cost little, but carry with them a feeling of friendliness, and helpfulness, and good will, are the things that bring joy and are contagious.

Forget yourself and try these things on your family, your friends and your neighbors. Then note the peaceful pleasure that follows. The true spirit of good fellowship toward others never fails to come back to you. It is "The Christmas Spirit."

Christmas Eve.

Day flickers into dusk; the street lamps flower
Like saffron poppies in the heart of night;
The petals of the snow drop hour on hour
Until earth blossoms like a rose of white.
Midnight and silence; calm, cold hills look down
Upon a valley stretching still and far;
Low in the east beyond the little town
Glimmers the Christmas candle of a

There is a Star.

Once in the silent midnight skies there gleamed
A star that filled the earth with glorious light,
And shepherds on the hillsides were afraid
And wise men journeyed 'cross the land that night.

This Christmas eve there is a star that glows
Although across the night no radiance starts
And floods the world; hid in a little prayer
There is a star of faith within all hearts. —Gladys Bryant.

A Broken Man.

H. J. Daly, president of the Home Bank of Canada, who appeared recently in court to answer charges of conspiracy, as a weak and broken man, supported by a nurse. His appearance was followed on Friday by the seizure of Home Bank books and papers at the head offices, by officers of the Ontario Attorney-General's Department. The papers refer to loans made to companies in which directors of the bank were interested.

IN THE GIFT OF A GREAT BOOK YOU CONSPIRE WITH GENIUS

"What shall I give my friend for Christmas?"

"Do you mean *friend*, or is it only somebody you happen to know?"

"Friend!"

"Well, nothing is too good in that case. Give a skyscraper or one of the Thousand Islands or a Russian wolfhound or a grand piano or a grain of radium."

And with all the rest, books.

Or if you can't give anything else, give books. For in them is the magic that commands all the treasures of the universe.

Books draw the stars from the sky and the pearls from the deep.

Before wireless telegraphy was ever dreamed of books carried the greatest messages of mankind around the world and across the centuries.

Books anticipate all discoveries and keep the precious past from the hands of thieving Time.

Moving pictures of ancient civilization flash upon the silver screen of the reader's mind. We cannot go back and make phonograph records of dead singers, but in the old poets the rhythms of long ago sing to the inner ear.

All the arts and all the sciences transmit their treasures in print. So each new generation finds the stored material for a continual recreation of the world.

He who gives a book touches the spirit of life, plays upon the keys of an organ whose tones will sound perhaps in other lands and in other centuries.

The giver of books may be a conspirator with genius. Next to the great writer is the one who finds for him the right reader.

Books carry the seed of life. Scatter them widely in the hope of harvest. Plant them one by one in the most fertile soil you can find.

Books are at once the most exquisitely intimate and the most broadly universal means of expression. In them is restoration and repose. In them is the irresistible call to go on.

There are plenty of good books and there will be more. What the world needs is better use of them.

Business men declare that invention and production have outrun effective merchandising, that is, bringing the right thing to the right person. In no field is this so true as in literature.

The mass of people know by hearsay that there are such things as books.

In a population of 9,000,000 a sale of 900 copies is called good, 9,000 is amazing. Not the sale but the situation is amazing.

Part of it is the fault of authors, publishers and booksellers. But the greater lack is in the reader or in him who might be a reader, or in him who might create a reader by a well chosen gift.

Libraries are good, but what we need is more individual ownership and use of books—not as so much paper and ink and binding, but as means of life.

Books are food to eat, books are air to breathe, light for the eyes, a path for the feet and a hand to clasp in the dark.

Give books.

Give Canadian books!

ONE DARN THING AFTER ANOTHER

John Bull—"Step along, gentlemen, I'm getting used to it."

—From the News of the World.

How to Serve the Christmas Dinner

No matter how simple the Christmas dinner may be, some attempt should be made to give it a holiday air. An appropriate centrepiece can be made by arranging evergreens, berries, seed pods and other pretty things from the woods or the fields, in a low basket or in a pie plate, filled with moss.

Cover the table with a nicely laundered table-cloth laid over a silence cloth and, at each place or "cover," as it is called, arrange the necessary china, glass, silver and the napkin. At an informal dinner the large plate is not placed at the cover until the person is served. At a formal dinner, a cocktail of fruit or shell-fish, or clams or oysters on the half-shell may be placed at each cover just before the guests enter the dining-room.

If individual "salts" and "peppers" are not used, place larger ones at each end of the table. Bread, on plates or bread-trays, can also be placed on the table, with jelly, pickles or other relishes. A serving of butter is placed on each butter-plate, and the glasses are filled with water. The napkin can be left flat.

HOW TO PLACE THE SILVER.

Flat silver is placed one and one-half inches from the edge of the table, the sharp edges of knives toward the plate. The bowls of spoons and the tines of forks are turned up. The glass is placed just beyond the tip of the knife, the bread-and-butter plate a little beyond the forks. Sauce dishes should be placed at right of plate, but if the coffee-cup occupies that space push the sauce dish farther up. Place the necessary spoons beside the dinner knife, and the butter spreader upon the bread-and-butter plate.

NO DINNER COMPLETE WITHOUT THE HOSTESS.

By careful planning everything can be arranged in the kitchen before the dinner begins. Foods can be dished and placed in the warmer or in a very moderate oven. The happiness of guests and family depends largely upon having the hostess at the table and every one will be glad to help and make the serving as light as possible. The call to dinner should be obeyed at once. If guests are present, simple place-cards will enable both guests and family to be seated without confusion and will add to the table decorations.

If soup forms the first course, place the soup in hot soup plates or bouillon cups, either of which should be placed on other plates and placed before each person. One authority claims that everything except beverages should be handed and placed from the left. Another authority claims that soup should be handed from the right. They also disagree as to whether the plates should be removed from the left or right. The important thing is to have the food served and removed as easily and quietly as possible.

After removing the soup plates, place the main dish and the hot dinner plates before the person who is to carve (usually the head of the family). Vegetable dishes can be placed in front of other members of the family or obliging guests. The person who carves asks each person his preference as to light or dark meat, places it on the plate and passes the plate to those who are serving the vegetables, who pass each plate to the person for whom it is intended. When this course is finished, remove the plates, the bread, jelly and relishes and serve the salad.

Arrange the salad on plates and keep in a cool place until served. The crackers and cheese are placed on the table, then passed from one to another. Remove salad plates, crackers, cheese, pepper and salt, brush crumbs from the table with a folded napkin and a plate, refill the glasses and serve the dessert.

TEA-WAGON A GREAT HELP.

The dessert plates, nuts, raisins, and candy and certain desserts can be ready on a side table or a tea-wagon, which is a great help in serving dinner. Ice cream, hot puddings and pies must be brought in from the kitchen. The dessert and dessert plates are placed before the hostess who serves this course. Nuts, raisins and candy are also placed upon the table. Coffee is poured in the kitchen and served with the dessert, unless it is preferred with the dinner. Sugar and cream are either placed upon the table or passed when the coffee is served.