A "Different" Christmas

BY LYDIA LION ROBERTS.

"Well, my dear family," said Rosalie cheerfully, "Christmas is—" she paused.

"Coming!" groaned a chorus of voices around her.

"Therefore," continued Rosalie with a reproving glance at her family, "this Christmas which is coming must be different!"

It was a Sunday evening in December. The Benton family had been to church and was now gathered in the big living-room, talking and listening to Rosalie as she played dreamy, restful chords on the piano. The married sister, Alice, and her husband, Jack, had come over from their home on the next street, and Nan, the college girl, was spending the week-end at home. The fourteen-year-old son, Clarke, had just filled his hands and pockets with refreshments, and sprawled on the bearskin rug, was finishing an adventure yarn.

Father Benton leaned his shaggy gray head back in his old Morris chair, his blue eyes twinkling as he listened to his lively family. "Say on," he urged, surveying his youngest daughter with quiet pride as he watched her earnest brown eyes, and vivid, eager face.

Rosalie nodded gayly to him, sure of his understanding, and continued: "Just think; we groan because Christmas is coming, and shout relief when it is gone. Isn't that rather awful when you think of the meaning of Christmas?"

"Any remedy?" asked Jack, who was the kind of a brother-in-law that fitted snugly into the family circle.

"Yes," promptly replied Rosalie. "Christmas should be a satisfying of those little dear desires and fancies we all have tucked away in our hearts and are so ashamed to show. If we did that, it would make lots of fun and not be a burden either."

"I believe I know what Rosalie means," suddenly laughed Alice. "I like things in half-dozens. I would get a half-dozen at a time of almost everything I buy if I could afford it. It is silly, I realize, but it is true. I had rather have six medium quality handkerchiefs than one very nice one. That isn't a bit correct, but I have always felt that way."

"There," triumphantly cried her sister, "that is just what I mean."

"I'll give you six toothpicks," offered Jack.

"Here we are," laughed Rosalie, her cheeks flushed with the fun and banter and her dark hair rumpled above her shining eyes, "an average Canadian family, the bulwark of the nation, so the statesmen say—"

"Speech! Speech!" cried Father Benton waving a sandwich at her.

"And yet we are ashamed to show our desires and dreams that go to make up our most precious possession, our own individuality. Why shouldn't Alice have six hankies if she wants them? Let's all confess and then have some fun for Christmas, instead of wondering and worrying what on earth to give, thereby wrinkling our dispositions."

"Very good," approved Mother Benton who was rocking contentedly in front of the fireplace.

"All right, I dare you," briskly said Jack. "I don't like neckties for a Christmas present, but I would like the money to go on a real necktie spree all by myself. Also," and he sighed plaintively, "I adore chocolates—but who ever heard of such a silly man?"

His pathetic expression made them laugh and then Nan said thoughtfully: "If we had plenty of money we might buy such things for ourselves, but every one of us is saving for something bigger and better and so we have to count our pennies. I think it is a nice idea, Rose."

"Christmas certainly should be a time to help people realize their little dreams," smiled Alice.

"Very well," replied Rosalie, "we will have a Benton Box Benefit for Christmas."

"Sounds good, what is it?" smiled her father.

"Let's take each one's special likes and longings and make up a whole box of them, as fancy or jokey or pretty as possible. We will decide among ourselves on some one subject for each one when that one is absent, and then we will all know what to buy."

"I need a regular tool-box," announced Clarke raising his tousled head from the rug. "That kid one of mine is no good. Club together and get me some tools and a box and some wood, that's what I have to say!"

"Use your head, sonny," suggested Jack softly, and ducked the paper Clarke flung at him.

"Rosalie is the musical one, and Nan is the college one, and Alice is the half-dozen one," murmured mother, "and Clarke—"

"Stop, mother, you'll be giving all sorts of secrets away," warned Rosalie quickly. "What about yourself though?"

"Well," hesitated Mother Benton smoothing her white apron, "as long as we are talking about foolish things, and it isn't expensive—I really don't need it, but—well, there if you must know, I am very fond of Japanese things, only I never could indulge my whims. Your ideas are attractive, but you must remember that anything expensive is forbidden."

"That's fine," teased father, as he rose to say good-night, "I'll have two dozen books, an automobile, and some big leather chairs, please. Nothing expensive, you understand, just a trifle."

"Yes, we'll order them all right away and put them in your box," assured Rosalie in the same gay spirit. "You deserve every one of them. What do you really want, daddy? You're dreadfully hard to give presents to; you never seem to need anything."

"Yes I do," protested father, "I really do, girls. I need some shoe-strings badly. Give me a box of shoe-strings and save me biting my tongue every time mine break," and he went upstairs chuckling at their disgusted looks.

"Such a dad," smiled Rosalie, as the young folks settled for a last few minutes' chat. "He never gets a thing for himself, and he doesn't want us to spend anything on him. He never gets much for Christmas but a few handkerchiefs and some neckties. He will not tell us any of his dreams, and says his family is the best thing he could have."

"Yes," added Nan, waving her hand and mocking her father's jolly tone, "spend your money for your pretty trinkets, girls, don't waste it on an old codger like me.' "

"He's the best dad there ever was," said Alice. "He always tells Jack and me: 'Now you young nest builders save your money to make the nest cozy, and put away my gift money for the nestlings.' "

"It's about time we got even with him," frowned Rosalie as she thoughtfully gazed into the firelight.

At last, after days of whispered consultations, of hiding mysterious packages, of smothered giggles and happy plans, it was Christmas morning. The Benton family had filled a box for an unfortunate family, had made toys for some sick children, taken part in the church concert and had a Christmas tree for some little tots who lived near them. Therefore, they woke with that glad, thrilly feeling so indispensable to Christmas Day.

"Box Benefit after breakfast," Rosalie called as she hurried to the kitchen to help her mother.

A little later she drew back the curtains and let the family file into the living-room where the sunlight danced on the red and gold decorations and the tree sparkled and twinkled like a loving and joyous spirit all over. Across one corner was a big placard which read, "The Bright Benton's Boxed Christmas," and underneath was a pile of boxes big and small.

"Mother first," decided Rosalie, so Jack brought a large box to her wrapped in matting with labels of Japan over it. Mother actually blushed with delight as she found the kimono from father, the picture of the sacred mountain, the tray with iris decoration, Japanese silk for a waist, and a book of quaint stories about Japan.

"You bad children," she said softly with tears shining brightly in her happy eyes, "you shouldn't have done it, but it is very sweet."

Already Nan was exclaiming over her shirt-waist box which Jack and Clarke had made for her college room and had lined with the delft blue she liked best. A Dutch flower scene, odd Delft dishes for fudge parties and a table-cover, with quaint Dutch maidens strolling around the edge, showed that some of her fancies had been discovered and gratified.

A deep groan made them all turn hastily and look at Jack. He was curled up on the floor against a chair, hugging his brown collar-box in one arm and waving an envelope with his other hand. "I am overcome," he moaned in mock faintiness. "Think of a measly little envelope hiding such thrills. A bill that is big enough for a mighty necktie hunt and an order on a store for a scarf-pin."

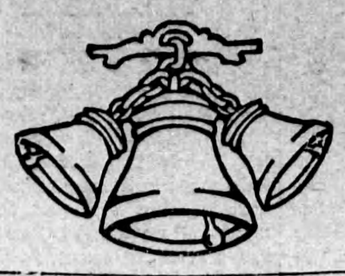
"What have you got behind you?" suddenly asked Clarke.

"Go away, little one," loftily replied Jack, shoving something out of sight, but the family gave him no peace until he sheepishly produced several boxes of fudge and chocolates. "Let's have Christmas every month," he beamingly suggested.

"O boy!" shouted Clarke a moment later. "Some tool-box this family has donated me, and plenty of good wood ready to work on. Hurry up with the other presents, I want to go down cellar."

Alice leaned against the piano and began to laugh so heartily that the others turned to look at her as she opened the long package that Father Benton handed her. Out came a set of six hollow building-blocks such as children use, and each held a package. There were six postagestamps, six iron-holders, six handkerchiefs, six bars of chocolate, and six bright half-dollars. The paper around the money read, "To be spent in answering advertisements," for Rosalie had discovered that Alice loved to get some of the things so attractively displayed in magazine pages, but would not indulge herself. In the biggest box she found an envelope from Jack which held money and said, "For my self-denying wifie to buy six pairs of gloves at one time." As she looked up, Jack smiled at her and whispered, "Let's go on our sprees together."

"Mine is a music-box," laughed Rosalie happily and held up a silk opera-bag, new pieces of music, and tickets for several concerts in the coming year. "What treats I have in store



for my music-loving ears. My lessons are costing so much I didn't suppose I could go to such wonderful concerts."

"I'm next, pass up forward please," called father, who had insisted on being the last.

"We got you just a little joke, daddy," Rosalie said, coming over to him with her hands behind her. "You never seem to want us to spend any money on you."

"I should say not," agreed father, taking the tiny box from her hand, "I like a good joke about as well as anything, and you girls need pretty things and must not spend any of your money on an old fellow like me. Well, well, that's pretty good," and chuckling and twinkling he pulled out of the small box an auto, several dozen books and two leather chairs—all little pictures cut from magazines.

"I got everything I asked for," he grinned broadly.

"Did you look under the tissue-paper?" asked Rosalie, "maybe the shoe-strings are under there."

"Is there another joke on me?" and father wonderingly took out a thin flat parcel from the bottom of the box. The family crowded around as he opened the paper. "What's this!"—and he stared in amazement at a cheque for a generaus amount and a slip which read, "For the Big, Bouncing Better Chair Father has dreamed of having, with enough left over for Bully Books."

For once Father Benton was speechless. He coughed, then he choked, then he blew a resounding blast into his handkerchief. Finally he cleared his throat and turned to mother. "You told," he said reproachfully.

"I did," mother placidly answered. "They kept coming to me and asking what you wanted, and I told them your Morris chair was all worn out and lumpy, and you had wanted a big leather chair ever since they were little tots. Rosalie said that when a man had wanted something for twenty years it was time he got it."

"Especially a man like our dad," murmured Rosalie.

"What's the matter with dad?" shouted Clarke who was grinning on the edge of the circle.

"He's all right!" shouted the family in unison and they gently and firmly led Father Benton to a chair and choked his protests with loving hands and bear hugs until he promised to go down town the next day on a shopping trip of his own.

Inspiration.

There is nothing too high to aspire to,
O woman, a-thrill with your dreams,
There is nothing too great to require you
To further creation, it seems.

The man may go faithless and fearful,
With doubts what the future may hold;
But woman is right to be cheerful,
Adventurous, hopeful and bold.

At Christmas turn over the pages
To the story so tenderly true—
The dear little Son of the Ages
Was born of a woman like you.

—Clare Shipman.

Christmas carols are really the oldest hymns of the Christian Church. "Carol" is from the Latin "cantare," to sing, and "rola," a joyful interjection.

Christmas Music Fills the Night.

A Christmas carol, to the tune "St. Kevin," by Sir Arthur Sullivan.

Christmas music fills the night,
Christmas stars are gleaming,
Souls in darkness hail the light
From a manger streaming.
Though the inn is full, the beast
Greets the world's sweet leaven;
Bethlehem, thou art not least,
Thine the Bread from Heaven.

Dark and silent was the land
Where the shepherds guarded,
Till there shone the Angel-band,
And their hearts rewarded.
Chant so lovely sang they then,
We too hear with gladness—
"Peace on earth, good will toward men,"
Jesus ends your sadness.

If the shepherds leave the sheep,
Who will watch and tend them?
Faithful guardians must not sleep,
Else the wolf will rend them!
Yet the angel bids them go,
Seek the sign so lowly;
He will keep their flocks, they know,
Shepherd bright and holy.

When they found the Child of God,
All that heard it wondered;
But these things, made known abroad,
Mary kept and pondered.
Babe of Christmas, grant us part
In their adoration,
And the grace that filled her heart—
Raptured contemplation.

Why shouldst Thou have blessed us so,
Sought the love of mortals,
Coming down to earth below,
Far from Heaven's portals?
Dost Thou know, O Saviour dear,
How this world will scorn Thee?
Men will hate Thee, though they fear,
Thy poor Mother mourn Thee!

Can it be Thou still wilt stay,
Shrinking not from danger?
Can we too see Thee this day,
In the holy Manger?
O for all Thy tender love,
Happy is our singing,
Hymns to poin the Hosts above,
Bells of Christmas ringing.

—Eliot White.

The Horse Factory.

Betty, taken to the country for Christmas, had been having a run round the village.

She saw many things that were strange to her, but a passing glimpse of the blacksmith's shop filled her with wonder.

When she got back to the cottage she burst into the parlor in a state of great excitement.

"Daddy," she said, "I've just seen a man who makes horses!"

"Nonsense," said daddy; "you've made a mistake."

"No, I haven't," she persisted. "I saw him. He had one nearly finished. He was just nailing on its back feet."

Interest in His Work.

It was Christmas Day, and six-year-old Bert received a Christmas box from farmer Bull. This was for driving a cow half a mile to pasture twice a day.

He was just as happy as a boy could be, for he could spend the money just as he pleased.

That night he came home cracking a whip, and his mother exclaimed:

"Bert, did you spend your Christmas box on that whip?"

"Yes, I bought it off one of the farm hands," Bert replied proudly. "You can't expect a fellow to work if he don't have the tools to work with."

People born on Christmas Day are, according to an old superstition, lucky all their lives.

Pictures of robins, holly, and so on came into use on Christmas cards in 1862.

THE SUNDAY SCHOOL LESSON

DECEMBER 23

The Universal Reign of Christ—Christmas Lesson—Isaiah 9: 6, 7; 11: 1-10; Psalm 2: 1-12. Golden Text—Ask of me, and I shall give thee the heathen for thine inheritance, and the uttermost parts of the earth for thy possession.—Psalm 2: 8.

LESSON SETTING—In the last few lessons we have been following the growth of the missionary spirit and the extension of missionary operations in the early Christian church. In principle it became universal, and in operation it became everywhere aggressive. In our lesson to-day we turn back to the pages of the Old Testament, where the prophet gives us a vivid picture of the Messiah and the manifest results of his reign.

I. THE CHARACTER OF THE MESSIAH, ISA. 11: 1-5.

Vs. 1, 2. *There shall come forth a rod.* When Assyria falls it falls like a cedar of Lebanon which sends no fresh sprout from its broken stump, but Judea is like an oak which, though hewn to the stump, sends forth new growth. A shoot shall spring from the stock, and a fruit-bearing branch shall grow from the root. When Christ was born we see how low the fortunes of God's people had fallen, and from what we know of the earthly circumstances of Joseph and Mary, we see how humble had become the circumstances of the family of Jesse and David. *The spirit of the Lord shall rest upon him.* The spiritual endowment of the Messiah is to be in marked contrast to his material circumstances. *The spirit of wisdom and understanding.* The fruit of the Spirit which rested upon the Messiah is now described in a threefold way. First, he has wisdom and understanding, or what we might call insight, and foresight. He sees through, and sees beneath, and sees beyond. *The spirit of counsel and might.* Second, he has the spirit of action. He acts with wisdom and power. He has "moral decision and heroic energy." *The spirit of knowledge and of the fear of the Lord.* His wisdom and action spring from a knowledge of, and reverence for, the will of God. It was a divine program for human need that he carried out.

Vs. 3-5. *Shall make him of quick understanding:* translate rather, "And he shall draw breath in the fear of the Lord." Love of God is to be the very atmosphere of his soul. Jesus expressed the same truth,—"My meat is to do the will of him that sent me, and to finish his work." There are no mixed motives in his heart. He has one supreme motive. *He shall not judge after the sight of his eyes.* The Messiah is to see the unseen fact and hear the unuttered reason that are all important in true judgment. *With righteousness . . the poor . . and smite the earth with the rod of his mouth.* For the poor he shall speak justice, but he shall smite the wicked of the earth with words as with a rod.

II. THE CHARACTER OF THE MESSIAH'S REIGN, ISA. 11: 6-10; PS. 2: 8. . .

Vs. 6, 7. *The wolf also shall dwell with the lamb.* The prophet's vision does not end with a regenerated society. He sees a new spirit in the animal kingdom, just as other prophets see nature itself at its best when man is at his best. There is first to be peace among the beasts themselves. The savage beast of prey that lives on the weaker, is a companion with the herb and grass-eating animal. *A little child shall lead them.* George Adam Smith calls attention to the dread of the ancient people in regard to the wild beast. They were a real menace. Nevertheless the prophet looks for reconciliation and not for extermination.

Vs. 8-10. *The lion shall eat straw with the ox.* Nature is to be no longer red in tooth and claw. The fierce spirit of man and beast is to pass away. Isaiah sees the possibility of co-operation of the whole of life. Peace and harmony is the deepest truth of life. *The suckling child shall play . . asp.* The spirit of peace extends even to the creeping things that sting and poison. We may interpret the dwelling of the wolf with the lamb in a figurative sense as applying to humanity. Then it means the subduing of all the fierce and selfish instincts between man and man. *The earth shall be full of the knowledge of the Lord.* Isaiah believes in the reformation or transformation of the world, not by organization, but by inspiration. A peace-filled earth comes in a God-filled earth. It is the advent of Christ to the human heart that alone will do this. *To it shall the Gentiles seek.* The prophet sees the Gentile world flocking to Christ.

An Ideal Christmas

By Katherine Beebe

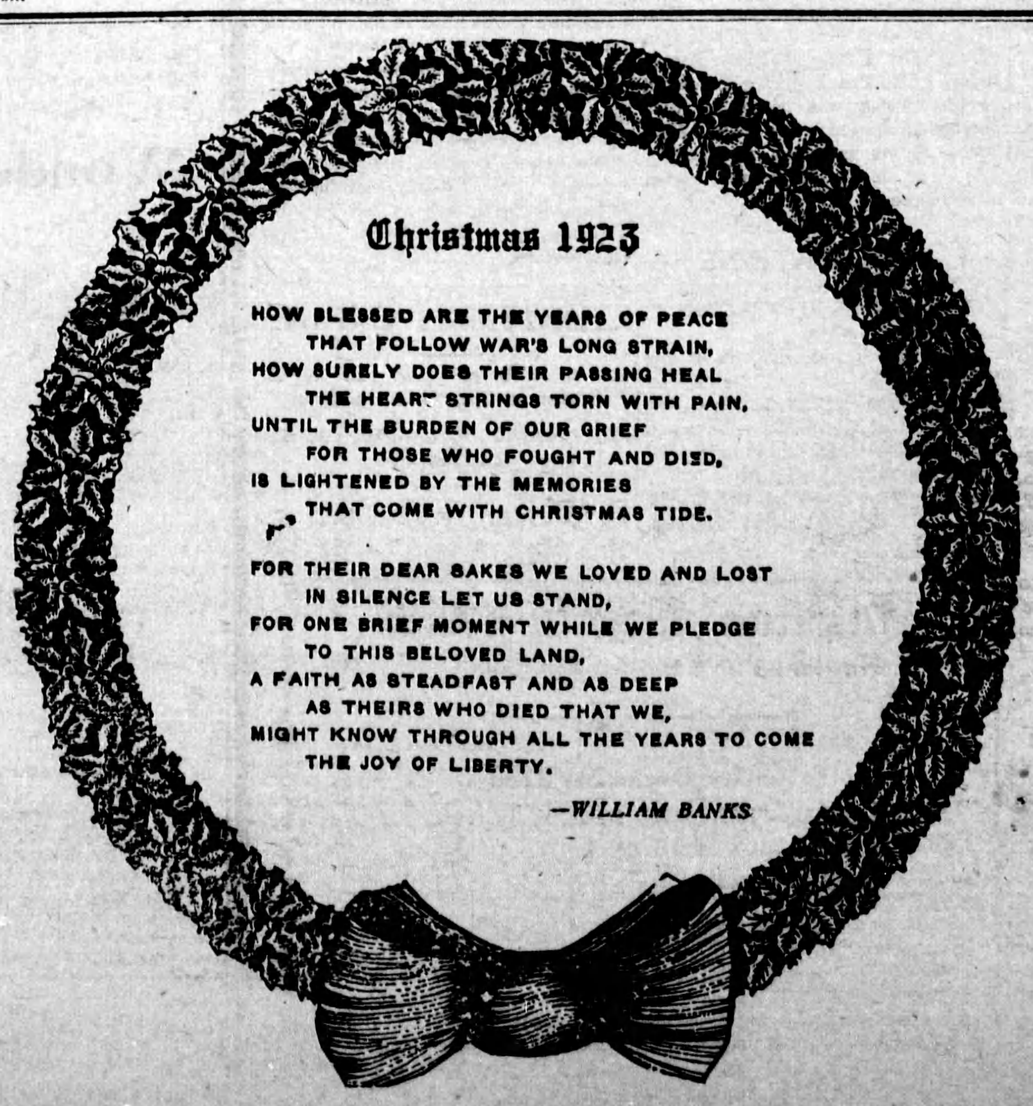
Just a year ago I was invited into a neighbor's house "to see the children's Christmas" and went under the mistaken impression that it would be a pleasurable experience. It wasn't. To see what should have been the crowning occasion of the year to this children turned into a confused complexity of excitement was a positive grief.

The room was small, the too large tree was decorated in a most haphazard and inartistic way; yards of cloth on which Santa Claus pictures had been printed for the Christmas trade were stretched along the walls; various paper bells, wreaths and festoons were hung on available pieces of furniture, and a profusion of gifts littered the floor, chairs and tables. I took stock of these as I gazed, supposedly spell-bound with interest and delight. I saw at once that quantity, not quality, had been the dominant idea and that a group of grown people had been enjoying themselves with little consideration of the children's real needs or desires.

There were breakable dolls in impracticable pinks and blues; there were numberless toys having neither play value nor educational content. Handkerchiefs, hair ribbons, dish towels, socks and neckties had all been given a part in the scheme of decorations. It was chaos come again and the children seemed fairly bewildered with excitement.

In contrast to this reckless festival it is a joy to recall the Christmas which stands out in my experience of many as the one most nearly approaching the ideal.

On the twenty-fourth a small tree had been beautifully trimmed in white and silver by mother and children together. Father was the one who was to receive the traditional shock of surprise in this case. The living room was made lovely and fragrant with boughs of Norway spruce and as five o'clock drew near all was in order and the tree lighted for a Christmas greeting to passer-by. Then the whole family went to a "Candlelight Service" in a nearby church, stopping on the way home to see a wonderful creche set up with loving thought and care by a friend and neighbor. After dinner there were Christmas stories, Christmas songs and Christmas music on the victrola, and then came bedtime with its excitements and anticipations and the hanging of the stockings.

In the early morning Father slipped quietly downstairs while the rest of us waited for the music which was the signal that all was ready. Then, not with a rush, but with deliberate intention not to lose a single thrill, we descended the staircase together. On the landing it burst upon us, and Oh, the beauty of it all! There was our tree, sparkling and beautiful in the firelight which filled the room! There were the stockings, bulging! There in the chosen places were the gifts! And what were these? For each child one special and long-desired treasure, an electric train, a sled, a tricycle, books, three games full of promise of future fun, and for the use of the children together a box of the biggest blocks that could be found. In each stocking was a lovely cornucopia full of goodies, candies, nuts and raisins, while under these were several little toys chosen as jokes or for the foolishness without which there can be no real Christmas in this family. The children's gifts to Father and Mother and theirs to each other were given at the breakfast table, a time-honored custom.

The aftermath of this Christmas was a matter of great interest to the fortunate guest. By four o'clock in the afternoon the neighborhood children began to drop in until there were at least a dozen of them, one of whom confided to me that "at Christmas time the B—— children always got presents you could do things with." Indeed for weeks afterwards the house of my friend was a rendezvous for that compelling reason. Surely this was an ideal Christmas.