The Acton Free Press

THURSDAY, DECEMBER 15, 1927

THE TEACHERS' CHRISTMAS GIFT

Two little smiling faces, two little bobbing heads,
Whispering softly together—I follow-ed to learn what they said.
Hither and thither they hurried, in front of a counter long,
Pausing to join in wonder through the jostling Christmas throng.

Nothing suited the fancy of these critics nothing at all,
Till they found that was so fragile, so shiny, so thin and tall.
Two little smiling faces, two little bobbing heads,
Quickly counting their coppers, as chatterings they said—

"The first bell it is dinging, so let's hurry out of here,
But it's just the finest present to give our teacher dear."
Across the street they hurried, two little bobbing heads,
And as the bell ceased tolling came to their school house red.

Again the smell of the pine tree, the smile on her loving face,
As she thanked them for the present of that wonderful china vase,
Again I felt the April, true gifts of the heart are they,
Yet only a child knows truly who walks in a heaven's way.

—Maude Pepper Todd.

GIFTS AND—GIFTS

"What," asked Alicia, "are you going to give Aunt Hester?"

"Oh, I never have to bother about her," Ethel answered. "I always give dozen and divide them up among the aunts. It's such a relief to have so much off my mind on Christmas."

"It must be a great surprise," Alicia commented dryly.

Ethel frowned; then her face dimpled.

"Don't you think," she suggested, "that there's a great deal more Christmas spirit in a gift that you don't worry over than in a gift that you trail round town to find, all the while hunting for something new and different? Sometimes you almost wish that there wasn't a Christmas. And I always give nice handkerchiefs—you can't deny that."

"I can't see much Christmas spirit in either," Alicia replied bluntly. "You work so hard to give something different to Stiff Hunter, who doesn't need it, and then don't give half a thought to Aunt Hester, who is old and shut in and would so love some little surprises."

"But you can't find things for old people," Ethel protested impatiently.

"Indeed you can, if you try. And it's such a joy to do it. Do try this year, perhaps," Ethel replied lightly.

"You're so funny, Alicia!"

To give Ethel credit, she did mean to try but there were so many things to buy that she did not have the time. So she sent Aunt Hester handkerchief as usual, trying to still a provoking memory by sending half a dozen and half a dozen handkerchiefs of real linen were indeed a gift this year, she said to herself. Perhaps it was that same provoking memory which made her find time to run in to see Aunt Hester on Christmas Day.

Aunt Hester greeted her warmly. Ethel realized with a stab of dismay that she looked startlingly frail; but her eyes were as keen as ever. The table beside her was covered with gifts. Among them were at least two dozen handkerchiefs.

"You handkerchiefs are lovely," Aunt Hester said. "You always do choose beautiful ones, child."

"But do you always have so many?" Ethel cried.

Aunt Hester's keen old eyes showed her amusement.

"Just about," she replied. "I often wonder whether people think that shut-ins have an extra allotment of noses. There, child, I'm ashamed. It is the thought that makes the gift, and I do appreciate them."

"What did Alicia give you?" asked Ethel.

Aunt Hester's face softened.

"Alicia." She gave me that little vase with the rose, and her note says that the gift is to be one rosebud a month. Isn't that exactly like Alicia a lovely thing to look forward to all the year! It isn't money value—it's love value in her gifts."

"I guess it is," Ethel answered slowly.

CHRISTMAS

Through all the ages the winter solstice has had its religious significance. Perhaps every religion has observed the passing of the old year, when the days cease to shorten and a new year and a new hope are born. The festival is universal, as also are the thoughts that its observance gives rise to. The time calls for a cleansing of the spirit, a will to let the old year take its soiled mantle and depart while we ourselves put on the new garment of resolution. Let us lift up our eyes and our hearts, let us cry out and be glad.

It is in that wonder time of the year that Jesus was born at Bethlehem. Christmas, Observing each year the time and the strange story of His birth, have associated the winter holiday with the happiest ideals of the Christian belief. The herald angels who appeared to the shepherds singing "Glory to God in the highest and on earth peace, good will toward men," sounded the challenge and the promise. The true followers of Jesus have ever since been trying to understand and to make manifest the two commandment of Jesus, Thou shalt love thy God with all thy heart and thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself. But how little the world yet follows that fundamental principle of Christianity! How little it even tries to follow it!

Once a year, Christmas! On that day in a lowly manger, watched over by the humblest and simplest people, was born the Light of the World. Who sees the gleam? Who in celebrating the end of the old year and the beginning of a new one can even for a day lay off the soiled mantle of selfishness and put on the new garment of Christ? Who can love his neighbor as himself? Who can go into the highways and gather together as many wayfarers as he finds, that the wedding is furnished with guests? Who really opens his heart?

Christmas! The holiday for all people not family not party not country but all humanity. If we would celebrate Christmas, we must reach out and touch another's life, perhaps the life of one of the neediest. Organized charity? Yes, let the poor be fed, but night each one of us on Christmas needs to spend the ugliest pulses of his Christian love. Awake, rejoice! And let your joy gladden the day for another. Merry Christmas!

THEY LOOK SO MUCH ALIKE

One morning, says the Argonaut, an old man was busy in the back yard with a saw and hatchet, when the next-door neighbor came to inquire after the health of his wife. The wife, it seems, had taken a severe cold.

"Good mornin', Mr. Smith!" said the neighbor. "How is Mrs. Smith this morning?"

"Jest about the same," answered old Mr. Smith. "She didn't sleep very well last night."

"Poor dear!" said the neighbor sympathetically. "I s'pose that's her coughin', ain't it?"

"No, it ain't her coffin," said Smith, keeping his eyes on his work. "It's a new henhouse."

AUNT HARRIET DOES HER SHOPPING EARLY

The town of Randall was well plastered last year with the slogan: "Do your Christmas shopping early." Indeed, two little boys died of it. Let Santas were seen parading the night street for a month before the holidays, sandwiched between "Christmas" shopping" signs.

Aunt Harriet was nothing if not tender-hearted and an indefatigable pursuer of reforms. All her sympathies were aroused as she pored over the heart-breaking accounts of shop girls who had fainted at their tasks on other Christmas eves, of worn and weary clerks and delivery boys whose own Christmas dinners had found them unable to eat for sheer exhaustion.

"Poor things," mourned Aunt Harriet, wiping her glasses. "It is a shame for them to have such a sad Christmas, when all the rest of the world is rejoicing. I, at least, shall do my shopping early."

And so she set out, people before the day of gladness and gift giving, armed with her check book and a smug sense of her own virtue, as well as an inviting set of smiles for the poor, downtrodden salesgirls I imagine they thought her the original Pollyanna in those early days. The first night she had acquired only a hand-painted bon-bon dish for Clara and a small furry dog with an unpleasant smirl for her nephew, Ralph. But, as she explained when asked how in the world she had occupied four hours selecting those simple trifles, it was all so unhurried, no crush, and the girls seemed positively to enjoy pulling down things for her to look at. In fact, she had looked at something like fifty dogs before finding the exact lifelike expression she really wanted. And, besides, she had been on the lookout for a certain pattern of cretonne, knowing that one of her nieces was going to re-cover her bedroom furniture with it, and that it would be a useful and beautiful Christmas present. She had looked at a hundred patterns, but the one she had in mind had eluded her. Well, thank goodness, she had started shopping early, and there would be plenty of time.

The following afternoon, after three hours of dawdling about the toy counters, she produced a toy gun for Ronald, a seven-old relative, and a vivid copy of "Jack, the Giant Killer" for the same lad. By the end of the week she had added to her collection a set of silver dessert spoons for Agnes, a parasol for Ella and the cretonne. She was overjoyed with the latter.

"It will be exactly the thing for Celeste's room," she rejoiced. "Delicate blue bird on a cream ground, with a faint clouding of pink in the background. It will reflect her dainty personality perfectly."

That first Sabbath, as after duty well done, she sat in church with an unusually healthy expression upon her countenance. Her mind, I never doubted, was not wholly on her devotions, and no one could have thought she was in a humble need. Her conscience was as clear as crystal and she held her head high, as one who could look without a tremor into the face of his brother-man.

It was on Tuesday, I think, that Aunt Helen remarked that she had bought a couple of hand-painted bon-bon dishes for Clara. Aunt Harriet gasped. She had a prejudice against duplicates in presents. "Well, I shall have to have something else for Clara. I can give the dish to Susan, I suppose."

That was the day she acquired the lavender-and-yellow hose and the fox scarf. That she was a fearful and wonderful creation. But, as Aunt Harriet sagely remarked, youth needed brightness—and it was evident that youth would be served in this instance!

A set of dishes in a popular blue-bird pattern called home a day or two later, neatly packed in a basket, and designed, as she told us with ill-concealed triumph, for Nettare, the newly wed member of the family. In addition she began at once on a set of tumbler doilies, each to have an elaborate bluebird embroidered in the centre. It was a lovely scheme, and received the unqualified approbation of the entire family. It was a long job to undertake at the time, but Aunt Harriet take nothing it not conscientious, and we knew she would finish the last one, or die. The rest of us did her share of the housework so that she could have the time required to do them in when not shopping. Everything went along serenely until the week before Christmas. Then it was that the tussle began.

Aunt Harriet had a long letter from Celeste, bubbling over with her plans, as usual. At the very tail of it, in a hurried postcript, was the bad news: "I've given up the idea of doing my room in cretonne. It is so common I bought some lovely lemon-colored drapery stuff for only twice as much, and it is so much more refined."

Aunt Harriet groaned. "The ungrateful piece! After my having bought it so long ago, too. And, of course, they won't give my money back after it has been cut. I shall just have to make it up into confections for the guestroom and spend more money on something else." Then began a hurried round of the shops because she couldn't offer the cretonne nor leave out one niece entirely, and Celeste had almost everything a girl could want. She finally compromised on a set of ivory, only remembering, after it was delivered, that Aunt Helen had given her a set for her birthday in October. She took them back and bought silk stockings, because no girl can have too many of them these days of short frocks.

But this was only the beginning of her troubles. Just as the last doily was embroidered and all crisply laundered and duly admired by the family a note came from the newly wed asking what we wanted for Christmas. She had decided, she added, to make fancy aprons with her own fair hands for each and every one of us. And the note ended, pleadingly: "Please don't any of you give me a single thing with a blueblird on it. I fell I should positively scream if I saw another one. They are on my bedroom drapery and bath mat and silk cushion. I have been presented with three sets of bluebird dishes, two or three bluebird lunch cloths with napkins to match, innumerable bluebird towels and doilies, and somebody has even embroidered a flight of them across the corner of a tea towel. I shall never dare to rise! Oh for something with a parrot or flamingo on it for a change!"

Poor Aunt Harriet. She shut her eyes for a long moment after receiving the fatal epistle. She was not praying.

I suppose I shall have to lay them away until somebody else marries," she sighed. And in the family I thought she looked at me rather accusingly. Aunt Harriet can't bear an old maid). "It will probably be quite some time!"

She had spent so much time and money on Nettie's pretentious gift that she had to content herself with hemming some dishcloths and a couple of kitchen aprons, which she did, I thought, a little viciously, and I know she deliberately or accidentally chose a hideous dull color. Between this belated work and running to the stores to exchange things she was worn to a frazzle.

For it kept right on. The mother of the baby for whom she had intended the furry dog made the remark one day that she was raising Willie sanitarily, and that for one thing, she would die a horrible death before she would allow him to handle one of those fuzzy, germ-laden toy animals everybody raved about. For her part she wanted to make a heap of all the teddy bears and fuzzy dogs in town and burn them all!

Well, Aunt Harriet managed to exchange the dog the day before Christmas. She said he had an awful time doing so, for the girls were terribly full, over and wanted to know what earthly use he'd brought it back to them for, and he had to tell at last one girl who Polly-anna wanted on a dozen other purchases. But what he then set out to do and he kind Aunt Harriet was on the rugged edge herself by Christmas. She had worked so late on getting those dozen doilies finished and stamped the streets so faithfully afternoons that she had lost 7½ pounds and had to get newer and stronger glasses. But she had finally got a china dog in exchange for pictures one. Coming home, hurrying to a shop, she dropped it and broke it.

Well, she said, it didn't matter, as she'd hatlessly slipping her feet. She had to go back downtown that night anyway, as she had just heard from a reliable source that Agnes had five sets of dessert spoons and needed a pair of shoes. And somebody had told, per James, never buy anything except black ties, as he was considering going for the ministry. And the parasol she had bought for Ella must be exchanged, as Ella was planning on a blue outfit for spring.

Well, she dragged in at 10 o'clock with her purchases under her arm, including a book for Jennie, whom she had forgotten. Jennie was fond and she had wanted "The Water Babies." Aunt Harriet remembered after she got out of the bookstore the exact title, but as she had already bought "Helen's Babies," she let it go because she couldn't, she said, have walked another step to save a human soul. As she piled her miscellaneous packages into the closet and took off her hat we heard her murmur: "Well, at least Ronald can't fail to be pleased with his gun and his book. Any normal boy would be, and giving things to grown-ups is nonsense, after all."

A couple of days after Christmas she received by messenger a bulky package, accompanied by a note from Ronald's mother couched in polite but regretful language.

"I'm sorry Aunt Harriet, to return these things after you have so kindly sent them. But Ronald has never been allowed to handle toy weapons of any sort no to read such bloodthirsty tales as 'Jack the Giant Killer.' I think it tends to make them grow up vicious, don't you? And we should always, whatever we do endeavor to teach the young to be gentle."

Aunt Harriet leaned back in her easy chair, which she had not quitted say Christmas eve, and deliberately tore the note in two.

"Give them to the garbage man's young ones," she directed, indicating the package. "And I shall never try to do my Christmas shopping early again, and that's that."

THE MASON REVOLUTION

"I'm so sorry Cousin Helen," said Marjory remarked plaintively as the family gathered at dinner-time.

"Why, dear?" Anna asked. "Do you mean her ice is too much?"

The child shook her head. "I don't mean that. I mean that we're so much politer when we have company."

Ta Mason looked at each other in consternation. "Out of the mouth of babes!" Portia murmured. Then she turned to Marjory. Portia had the kind of chin that says an emphatic "How are we politer?" she asked.

Marjory's grave eyes travelled round the table as she thought it all out.

"Why, papa talks," she said, slowly. "Papa's real interesting when he talks to company. And mother lives her hair prettier, and Jack passes things without being asked, and Anna laughs at the stories people tell, and you—"

"Yes?" Portia encouraged her resolutely. "What do I do, Marjory? What rare and elusive grace of mine appears only in the fostering atmosphere of company?"

"I don't know how to say it." Marjory replied wrinkling her forehead to the effort. "You seem nicer and softer and more loved and quick and happy the way you are sometimes."

It was too much for the family, and laughter relieved the tension. Portia's mouth had a funny quirk as she repeated gravely. "Nice and soft. Somehow the words do not present a particularly alluring ideal, but doubtless that is the fault of my diction of the terms employed, not of the ideal. I call upon the family collectively to clear this matter. Am I too 'soft' in the presence of company?"

The reply was a prompt and unanimous "No."

Portia drew a long breath. "Then" she declared "since I seem to be the greatest sufferer under this exceedingly clear and unprejudiced judgment, I move that hereafter the Masons amend their ways: that mother look her prettiest that father entertain his family, that Anna show her graceful company interest even in our old tales, splendid practice, Nan; that Jack extend company's solicitude in the matter of passing things. This is a people, that Portia will. I'll promise to wrestle with Portia. In short, that we wear our prettiest manners every day to each other. Are you ready for the question? All in favor say aye."

"Aye!" cried the Masons.

"Contrary minded?"

There was no response.

Ladies and gentlemen," Portia announced, "the resolution is on."

SOLUTION WAS CLEAR

"Now, my friends," said the political aspirant making another effort to arouse enthusiasm in his hearers, "what do we need in order to carry this constituency by the biggest majority in its history?"

The response was immediate and vigorous.

"A different candidate," shouted several in the rear of the hall.

CHRISTMAS OR "XMAS"?

Three white women went Xmas shopping. They were all well dressed and refined looking.

"I have a real cute card to send to Ella," said one.

"I have a card with a picture of the Nativity on it," said another.

The Xmas shopping is in full swing. Christmas is open season. Hail to the Xmas fray. Everyone is bewildered.

The first lady wanted a card with a picture on it. She wanted to send Ella a card that would help to remind her of the true meaning of Christmas.

The second lady wanted a card that would help to remind Ella of the Christ child.

The third lady wanted a card that would help to remind Ella of the Christ child.

But they got cards with pictures on them.

THE WHOLE AS GOOD AS A PART

THE FETISH OF THOROUGHNESS

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Best Wishes for A Merry Christmas

AND

A Happy and Prosperous New Year

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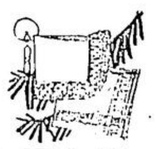

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