

Our Christmas Short Story

BY G. P. C.

Mrs. Henry Brower was obviously very much annoyed, or so one might gather from her terse remarks. "Really!" she exclaimed "shopping in this country is too ridiculous. I am quite sure a lot of these so-called shortages are quite preventable. Imagine a Christmas market without a turkey that is except for the ones marked 'sold'. Why just a few weeks ago, Henry, when you and I were driving through the country we saw lots of turkeys. You remember, don't you?"

Henry Brower looked up from his paper. "Yes, my dear, we saw plenty of turkeys, that's true. But I don't think we saw as many turkeys as people. And if fifty per cent of the people were on the market for turkeys..."

"Oh you men and your statistics," interrupted his wife, "I tell you Henry this is serious. Here we are with the King's and the Mackenzie's invited for turkey dinner on Christmas Day and no turkey to feed them. And it isn't as if that were all. I tell you most of the time yesterday I was shopping for things I couldn't get. And then to cap it all I dropped in to see Mrs. Char, who, as you know, always helps me out on special occasions, and Mrs. Char had the effrontery to tell me she couldn't come this time as she had promised to help at the hospital. Just imagine, after all the work I have given that woman to let me down like that. Ingratitude, that's what I call it."

"Perhaps she wanted more money, my dear," suggested Henry.

"That's what I thought, so I offered her more. But she said, no it was not that, she just felt she was needed more at the hospital. Really, I believe this war has gone to peoples' heads, you can't depend on anyone any more. Of course I know we have to do all we can and I am sure no one helps the Red Cross any more than I do, but after all this is Canada, not England or Russia, and I am quite sure there is plenty of things the storekeepers say they haven't got if they would only release them. For instance, Mrs. Court bought jelly-powders at the B and C store yesterday but today when I asked for some, oh no, they hadn't got any! I was quite sure they were holding back so I offered them twice the real price if they would let me have just two packets."

"You what?" asked Henry unbelievably.

"I offered to pay them more," stammered his wife somewhat taken aback by her husband's expression.

"But Alma, that was awful, why that's the very kind of thing that leads to inflation. For heaven's sake don't try anything like that again. Now look here, supposing we thresh this dinner business out. You have invited the King's and the Mackenzie's for Christmas dinner. You can't get turkey, so what? Well, all you have to do is look around for something else, that's all, chicken, goose, duck, or . . . or . . . pork or something," he concluded uncertainly. Then he brightened again. "And I'll tell you something else, you don't need to worry about getting Mrs. Char or anyone. If you just get a simple meal, you know, something you can prepare yourself, then Bill, Jim and I will wash the dishes. Now how's that for a solution to your vexatious problem?"

"Oh Henry," exclaimed his wife, "you are quite impossible. As if there were nothing more to getting dinner than putting it on the table and washing dishes afterwards. Really, I don't know what I am going to do, and I am quite sure I shall never sleep to-night."

Well, Alma Brower went to bed that night and Henry said she slept very well indeed. But Mrs. Brower said, no, she had not, and she didn't see what Henry could know about it anyway because every time she looked at him he was sleeping like a log. And she also claimed she hadn't been dreaming either. But she admitted what happened may have been a "visitation."

According to her account next morning, this is what actually took place. She was turning restlessly in bed and looking anxiously and resentfully at Henry sleeping as if he hadn't a care in the world while she was still worrying away trying to figure out how to give a really sumptuous dinner without turkey, or jellies, or hired help. Suddenly she heard a voice calling "Mrs. Brower. . . Mrs. Henry Brower. . . Mrs. Henry Brower."

"Yes," said Alma, "I am Mrs. Brower, but tell me, who is calling and what do you want? And where are you, for I cannot see you?"

"No, you cannot see me, Mrs. Brower, for I am a spirit, the Spirit of Understanding. And I have come to you and will take you to familiar places so that you may see them again but with different eyes."

Then there came a cold wind that made Alma Brower shiver with apprehension and it stayed with her until they reached the shelter of a modest home where the atmosphere suddenly changed and Alma felt as if something were warming her blood like old wine.

"Come," said the Spirit, "we will enter! But you must understand that the Kingdom of Understanding has no knowledge of time. It can look back to the past, forward to the future, or remain with the present. Here we look towards the immediate future. You will notice it is Christmas Day at Elwood's home."

"Elwood! why they live on our street, it was their son who was killed in a bombing raid last fall. My, but what a dreadful Christmas it will be for them."

"Will it?" said the Spirit, "look again, Mrs. Brower."

The younger Elwood children were sitting expectantly at the table as Daddy carved the inadequate chicken. Their eyes were glistening with excitement for after dinner they were going to unwrap the present under the tree, handmade present which they had made for each other so that the money they would have otherwise spent could be saved for War Savings stamps. Young Frank, who had just joined the Air Force, and his girl friend who sat beside him, had also agreed to the family pact. It was Mother and Dad's idea and was meant as a tribute to their Jimmy who had given his all.

Now the plates were amply served with the simple family fare. Then there was a pause, as if by common consent, each pair of eyes looked toward Jimmy's picture on the wall. Then proudly, but with a husky voice, Daddy spoke. "This is special prayer for this special occasion. 'God bless us, everyone,' he said. And a fervent 'Amen' was heard in unison from those seated around the table."

"Would you call that a 'dreadful' Christmas, Mrs. Brower?" asked the Spirit.

"No-o it isn't dreadful at all," said Alma wondering. "Why, they even looked happy."

"Yes," agreed the Spirit, "happy with an inward peace." And then he added, "Come, we will make another call."

"Oh, I know this place," said Mrs. Brower. "It is the home of Mrs. Char and I know she always makes so much of Christmas for her family. But what has happened, I don't understand. Where is Mrs. Char. And look at the children they are eating bread and jam! Surely that isn't their Christmas dinner?"

"It came here last night," replied the Spirit, "and Mrs. Char was explaining to her children how badly she was needed at the hospital. It seems the staff wanted to give the patients a special Christmas treat but without extra help they couldn't do it. The children, because they had so little, knew the value of an extra treat, and because they also knew that many of the patients were sick and suffering, they all agreed to post some of their simple celebrations until the day after Christmas."

"And I thought Mrs. Char was ungrateful," whispered Alma.

"Come," said the Spirit tersely, "we will make yet another visit."

"This time the house at which they stopped was an ornate dwelling indeed the home of the 'Joneses' of the district. A little ripple of excitement ran through Mrs. Brower. The whole neighbourhood was somewhat in awe of the Joneses. But they had always been respected. That is, until recently when rumour had gone the rounds that a country store could be pretty well stocked with provisions that were stocked away in the Joneses basement."

"Certainly the dining table today bore little evidence of a shortage of either rationed or unrationed goods. A maid, who was obviously nervous, was waiting on the table. When she withdrew a family argument was again resumed. Selective Service had caught up at last with Gilbert, the eldest son. Now mother and son were both urging Mr. Jones to use his influence to get his son transferred to a 'safe' job. But Mr. Jones was unexpectedly adamant, perhaps some inner shame, perhaps the memory of the sacrifice given by other promising young men had made him realize that his son, if only for the sake of his own self-respect, should at least take his chance along with the rest of the boys of his generation."

Norman, the second son, had his own personal grievance. He had just turned sixteen and had been confidently expecting a coupe for Christmas. But what had he got? A movie projector and a War Bond! Kid stuff!

"Well, he'd show them," he had a date tonight at the Casino. . . and by the lord Harry he wasn't going to hurry home either. . . He'd show them he wasn't any kid."

Mrs. Brower turned away from the unpleasant family scene. "Come," she said to the Spirit of Understanding, "I want to go home."

But there was no answer from the Spirit, and suddenly Mrs. Brower realized she was at home. Yes, and there was Henry, still sleeping. She looked at him happily, Henry was really rather a dear, and as if she wanted to make sure, she shook him vigorously.

"Henry. . . wake up."

"Huh. . . was 's'matter. . . it's early yet." And Henry rolled over

and attempted to resume his slumber. But his wife shook him again. "No, Henry, you really must wake up. I want you to do something for me on the way to your office."

"Well, what is it, and did you have to wake me up in the middle of the night to tell me?"

"Oh Henry, it isn't the middle of night, it's morning. And I want you to stop at the butchers and order me a leg of pork."

"A leg of pork?" exclaimed Henry, now thoroughly awake.

"Yes dear, a leg of pork, so I can put dressing in it and roast it for Christmas dinner when we have the King's and the Mackenzie's here. You know I have come to the conclusion that it is very poor taste these days to make any attempt at an elaborate spread and I am quite sure our guests will feel the same way."

Henry looked at his wife in stunned amazement.

"Well, I'll be darned," was all he found himself able to utter.

SNOW EQUIPMENT IS READY ON NATIONAL RAIL LINES

With the first swirl of snowflakes operating and mechanical forces on the Can. National Railways have a bit and cast a wary eye on the barometer. Prior to that a lot of inspection and preparation has been under way, the real battle of the railway against the winter snowstorms beginning in the spring and summer months when all snow-fighting equipment goes into the company's shops to receive complete overhaul.

"Old Man Winter may now offer his worst waxes," said G. E. McCoy, assistant chief of car equipment for the national system, who explained, "All auxiliary equipment consisting of nine types for a total of 271 snow-plows, usually has a lot of work to perform from December, to April in clearing the right of way of snow and sleet. During those five months of last winter train mileage operated over Canadian National Railways totaled 726,762, the far greater part of which was accounted for by snow-plows and work trains transporting crews to the battle with snow drifts."

WINTER CLOTHES STRICTLY PRACTICAL

Now is the time when inhabitants are changing into winter clothes. This does not only apply to the Indian and the trapper but to numerous wild creatures some of which, brown hares and weasels and mottled ptarmigan (Arctic grouse) will quickly acquire coats as white as the snow that will blanket their homeland. Specimens of these animals in the Royal Ontario Museum's study collections show various stages in this change. It is not accomplished by some mysterious transmutation of colour in the old coat as has been supposed by some people. It comes about by the replacement of hair or feathers, a doffing of the old and growing the new. Winter cloths, are not "designed" to be revealing. The style for this year, as every year, will be strictly practical.

FARM IMPLEMENTS SCARCE

LONDON (CP)—British farmers will pay almost anything for old articles. At an auction sale of old implements in Essex, a two-handed motor driven cultivator which the auctioneer expected to go for \$90.00 was bid up to nearly \$100.00 before it was sold.

SILVER FOX SHIPMENT TO WESTERN BREEDER

In pre-war days shipments of silver foxes provided considerable traffic for Canadian National Railways Express, according to Harry E. Whitman, the terminal agent, but these shipments diminished to such a rate that when a consignment of six silver beauties passed through the Central station either day, they attracted the attention of rare sight. These carefully created silver-fox came from farms in Prince Edward Island and the Lake St. John district of Quebec, and were being shipped to a breeder at Swift Current, Sask. They travelled in style on the express car of the "Continental Limited" provided with a plentiful supply of concentrated food tablets, and these with measured supplies of water, made up their rations for the journey.

MAY NEED WHEAT

The present situation in Sicily and Southern Italy carries with it considerable interest to North American agriculture. Durham wheat for macaroni or bread is the principal variety of wheat grown in Sicily and about one-third of the agricultural area of the island is used for wheat production. The pre-war acreage was close to 2,000,000 acres and produced about 32,000,000 bushels. However, neither Sicily nor southern Italy normally produce sufficient wheat to meet local demands, and, with the most of the 1943 crop probably lost through the war, there should be an outlet for North American wheat.

In the island of Crete, while grain is produced, heavy imports are required, because agriculture is confined largely to scattered plains, and only about one-third of the total area of the island is suitable for agricultural undertakings. The principal crops are olives, grapes and other citrus fruits.

The Sunday School Lesson

SUNDAY, DECEMBER 23rd

GOD'S GREAT LOVE AND HIS GIFTS

Golden Text.—For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth on him should not perish, but have eternal life. Jno. 3: 16.

Lesson Text.—Matt. 2: 1-2. Time, 4 P. C. Places.—Jerusalem and Bethlehem.

Exposition.—I. The Wise Men Seeking Jesus to Worship Him, 1, 2. The certainty and exact verbal accuracy of God's Word come out conclusively in this passage. Seven hundred years before Micah had prophesied that He who was "to be the Ruler in Israel, whose goings forth have been from of old, from everlasting" (Mic. 5: 2). But she who was chosen to be the mother of Jesus did not live in Bethlehem but in Nazareth. But men who were utterly unconscious of God's purposes and prophecies, by many decrees and in many ways worked together so that Mary was brought to Bethlehem at the time of our Lord's birth, and thus God's Word was fulfilled and His eternal plan carried out (Luke 2: 1-6; Pa. 76: 10). The same word of prophecy spoken over seven centuries before by a man who was "borne along by the Holy Spirit" was thus fulfilled to the very letter, in spite of all the cunning of great men. Through their very wickedness, God's purposes and words were fulfilled. These wise men from the East were the ancient magi.

We are sure that he that lives up to the light that he has, will get more full light, that of His revealed Word, and following that they find Him who is "the Light of the world" (Jno. 8: 12). In their earnestness to find the King, they took a long, weary journey, but their labor was abundantly rewarded.

II. Herod Seeking Jesus to Kill Him, 3-8.

The tidings that came to Herod that the King was come should have brought him joy but in reality they troubled him, for he wanted to be king himself. So many a heart today that ought to welcome Christ as King with joy is troubled at the declaration that Christ is King, for we wish to be king ourselves. But not only Herod was troubled, but all Jerusalem, as well. Jerusalem, the city of the great King, whose whole glory was to center in Him, whose will was to receive Him when He came; was troubled about His coming, instead of rejoicing at it (Jno. 1: 11). Herod thought the proper place to go for information about the Christ was to the Scriptures. In that he was right (Jno. 5: 39). If he had studied the Bible as he ought for himself it would not have been necessary for him to go to the chief priests and scribes to tell him; but many kings and many common people, instead of searching the Scriptures for themselves, depend upon the theologians for their information.

Herod was very thorough in his search to find out about the Christ; he "gathered all the chief priests and all the scribes"; he inquired diligently of the wise men, he told them to go and search diligently; he laid his plans with great skill; he was bound to make sure. But he had left God out of his calculations, so in spite of his thoroughness, they all came to nothing. The scribes were well instructed from the Scriptures and perfectly orthodox. They knew just where the Christ should be born, but they had no interest in His coming. There is much of that sort of Scripture knowledge and orthodoxy still. It did the scribes no good. Christ must be born in Bethlehem for thus it was written by the prophets, and whatever is written in God's Word must come to pass.

III. The Wise Men Finding Jesus, 9-12.

As soon as the wise men have received the desired information, they start immediately to find the King whom they sought. Again God leads them by star, and leads them to the very spot where the young child was. They were more accustomed to being led by stars than any other way, and God adapts His leading to our necessity. While Herod and Jerusalem had been troubled at the thought that Christ was come, the wise men of the East rejoiced with exceeding great joy to find Him.

Those who enjoy the largest privileges often-times least appreciate them, and those who have the least light are most eager for more (Matt. 8: 10, 11). There is an eagerness to hear about Christ to-day in heathen lands that is sometimes lacking in so-called Christian lands. There is no greater joy to the true heart than that of finding Jesus. When they entered the house, they fell down and worshipped Jesus. They saw Mary, His mother, but they did not worship

her. Worship may not have meant to them all that it means to us, but it is right to worship Jesus (Heb. 1: 6). When they had worshipped, they presented unto Him their gifts. That is the true order: first, worship, then giving. They gave Him their very best, gold and frankincense and myrrh (Pa. 72: 10, 11). Note the conduct of the wise men: 1. They sought Jesus. 2. They found Jesus. 3. They rejoiced over Jesus. 4. They worshipped Jesus. 5. They gave gifts to Jesus.

WINTER KEEPING OF HOUSE PLANTS

One common cause of failure with house-plants in the winter is that they are kept in rooms that are far too warm. Sixty to sixty-five degrees is the ideal temperature for house plants. A good rule to follow is to try to keep the room as cool as is consistent with personal comfort.

As a general rule, flowering plants need all the sunlight they can get, especially during the winter months. Ferns should be placed where there will be an abundance of light, but not direct sunlight. Foliage plants are more tolerant of insufficient light, but in winter time they may be placed in direct sunlight.

Windows should be tight to prevent direct draughts on the plants. A dry atmosphere is to be avoided because it not only stunts the plants but favors the increase of certain pests, such as red spider and thrips. Moisture in the air around the plants may be increased by standing the pots in shallow trays filled with pebbles, gravel, or moss and keeping this mixture moist.

A mixture of two parts good garden loam soil, one part rotted manure and one part sand, will generally fulfill the soil requirements for potted plants. This will allow both air and water to pass through the soil reasonably well. Further provision for drainage may be made by placing a layer of small stones or similar material on the bottom of the pots where the holes are to carry off the excess water.

DIFFICULT OPERATION

LONDON (CP)—An operation to open sections of a newly-born girl's head to allow normal expansion of the brain threatened by the bones of the skull closing up too soon, has been performed in Britain for the first time at Great Ormond Street Hospital here. The operation was a success.

TOLD AFTER THREE YEARS

CAMBRIDGE, England (CP)—The submarine Shark was bombed and machine-gunned for six hours after being sunk off Norway in July, 1940, said Torpedo-man Joseph Coleman, when he arrived here after being repatriated from Germany. How the submarine had been lost had previously been a mystery.

IMPORTANT CHANGES IN TRAIN SERVICE

There will be certain changes in train service between December 24th and January 2nd. Consult your local C. N. R. Agent for full information. CANADIAN NATIONAL RYS.



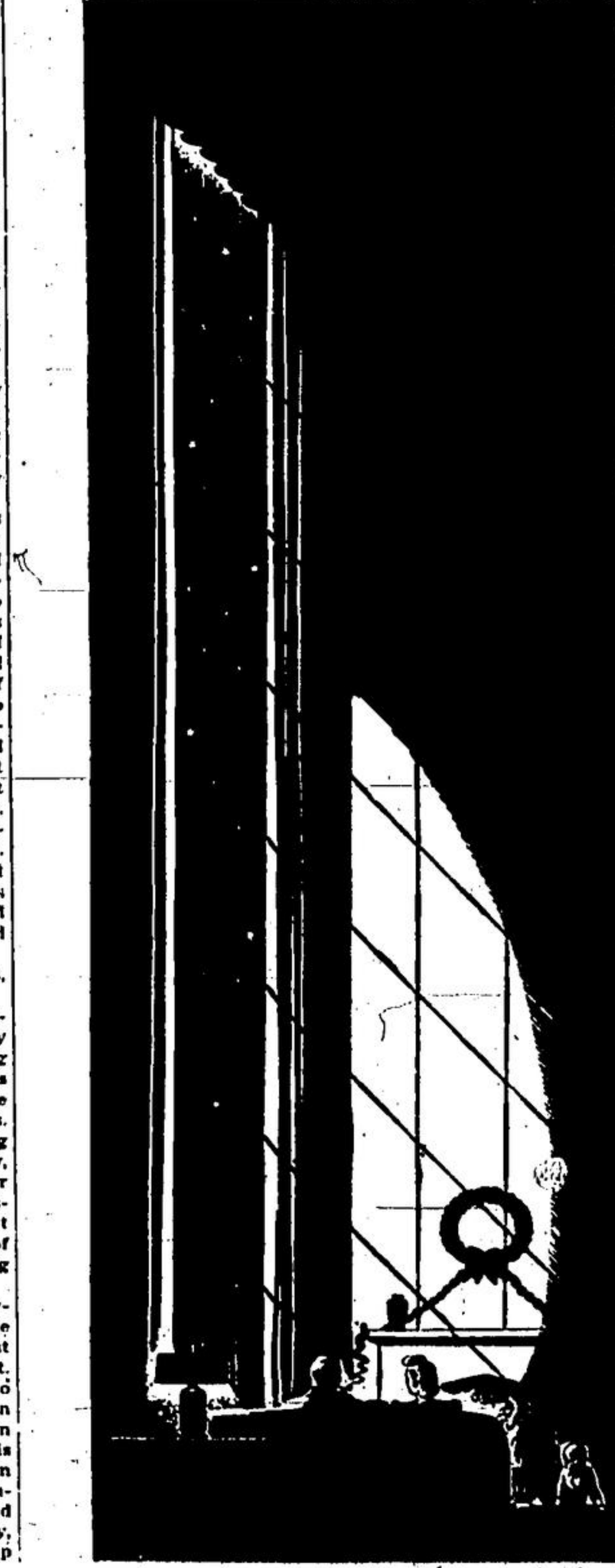
FOR him, that Long Distance call home at Christmas is the big event of the day. He's counting on it. Let's make sure that he, and thousands like him, won't be disappointed.

It means giving up our own Christmas telephoning, so that war-crowded lines will be freed to handle the flood of holiday greetings from naval, army and air force posts across the country. It means sending our Christmas messages by mail.

Should you find you must telephone out-of-town, try to do so as many days before the holiday as possible.

And especially avoid all non-essential calls to distant or war-busy centres. Winning the war is a non-stop job, and urgent messages must go through.

On Active Service Giving Ways to Words



STARDUST

"Our blessings are as the star-dust strewn by the hand of God."

★ Cluster of stars in a winter sky . . . shadows of dusk drifting into night . . . shimmer of snow in the starlight, on field and roadway and roof . . . glow of lighted windows patterning the darkness . . . and distant chimneys trembling through the stillness.

★ Christmastide . . . and the New Year beckoning . . . a fitting season for quiet thought and thankfulness.

★ For peaceful days and quiet nights . . . for homes secure and the laughter of little children . . . for food enough and to spare . . . for the right to live as free men live . . .

Let us be grateful.

★ For the bounty of the harvest gathered in . . . for the fertility of our fields . . . for the rich resources of mine and forest and waterway . . . for the glorious strength of this, our Canada . . .

Let us give thanks.

★ Of all we have endured . . . the sacrifices we have made . . . of unaccustomed task and sterner effort . . . and of our high resolve that freedom shall forever live . . .

Let us be proud.

★ In all we shall endeavour . . . in all we must achieve . . . in journey through the darker days that come before the dawn . . . in our unshaken faith in victory . . .

Let us be unafraid.

★ Nigh upon two thousand years ago, a Star led the Wise Men to the manger-throne at Bethlehem, there to hail the advent of the Prince of Peace. So may the steadfast stars inspire us to mightier effort and to greater sacrifice . . . that evil may be overthrown and that the day may swiftly dawn

"When war is not, and hate is dead, When nations shall in consort tread The quiet ways of peace . . ."

THE HYDRO-ELECTRIC POWER COMMISSION OF ONTARIO