

:-: The Uninvited Guest :-:

BY VIRGINIA STANARD.

When the long, lighted train pulled into Fairwood on Christmas Eve, Roderick Dale was there to meet the little guests who were coming to spend the holidays with him.

Mr. Dale swung the children to the platform. "Five—six—seven—eight," he counted. Then he hurried them out to a big sleigh and tucked all of them in under furry robes. The driver spoke to the horses, and away they went, shaking music from their silver bells across the snow.

When the sleigh reached the house ten minutes later the children swarmed up the broad steps.

Mrs. Dale met them at the top. "All eight of you here?" she asked. "All but Rick Payson!" they cried. "He couldn't come!"

Roderick's father stopped short. "But I counted eight," he declared.

The children did not know how that could be; they had thought he was counting Roderick in, they said.

"I'll count them again!" cried Roderick. So in the light that streamed from the hall he counted his guests carefully. Three Prestons, two Torreys, a Morton and a Ray—that made seven. Then he stopped short in front of a dark, silent little figure that stood apart from the rest.

"Who is this boy?" he asked. Sure enough, who was he? They hurried into the lighted hall, and all eyes were turned on the stranger. He was very small and was bundled up in a big overcoat. Between his coat collar and his funny peaked cap a pair of large black eyes stared solemnly out.

"What is your name?" asked Mrs. Dale.

The little boy replied briefly that it was Timothy.

"Timothy what?"

"Baxter. And I was going alone to visit my grandfather at Baywood. Where is my grandfather?"

Mrs. Dale turned to her husband. "O William, how did you get hold of this child? His people must be anxious!"

Mr. Dale looked worried. "The boy must have thought the conductor called 'Baywood,'" he said. "And then I scooped him up with the rest and didn't notice."

He hurried away to telephone to the other station, while the children took off their wraps and began to laugh and talk again, still casting curious glances at the odd little stranger.

"I've talked to his grandfather," Roderick's father said, coming back. "It's all right. There's no other train to-night, and so Timothy will stay here with us."

Timothy ate his supper slowly and afterwards withdrew to a corner, where he watched the other children's games with wondering eyes.

"We shouldn't dare play with him," they said. "He looks so solemn."

When it was nearly bedtime Roderick wandered into the sitting-room. There was a frown on his face.

"I wish that stupid little old Timothy didn't have to be here!" he complained. "He is so funny and big-eyed—like an owl. And mother says he's to sleep in my room. Nobody asked him here, and there's no place for him to stay."

Roderick's grandfather laid down his book.

"This little Timothy's having the same trouble another child had," he said. "Only in a whole town He couldn't find anywhere to stay."

"What child?" Roderick inquired, interested. "And what town? It must have been a pretty poor sort of place, I should think. Where did the boy sleep, grandfather?"

The old man picked up his book again. "In a stable, so the story runs," he said. "The name of the town was Bethlehem."

Roderick's cheeks grew scarlet. He walked over to the window and pressed his hot face to the frosty glass. A big gold star was shining just above the sky line. After a while he turned away without a word.

A few minutes later the household was startled to hear peals of laughter from the playroom. Timothy, wandering round alone, had found Roderick's hobbyhorse behind the door. It was plain that he had never seen such a thing in all his life. He stood in front of it and shouted with delight. Then some one put him on the horse's back, and he gathered up the reins, still shouting, and began to ride. He rode hard and fast until it was time to go to bed.

Early the next morning the children came creeping downstairs to get their stockings. They gathered in a joyful circle round the bright fire in the living room.

Suddenly the door opened softly. Timothy Baxter stood on the threshold. He was dressed in a suit of Roderick's night clothes, and his hair

been overlooked. They eyed one another in dismay.

"Perhaps mine fell on the floor," Timothy suggested gently.

At that Roderick scrambled to his feet. "See here, Timothy," he said. "You run back to bed for just five minutes, and then come down and get your stockings."

"Which is my stocking, please?" he asked in a clear, high little voice.

No one answered, and so he spoke again. "If you please," he repeated quietly but firmly.

The children looked uncomfortable. This was too bad. They realized what had happened: in the bustle and confusion the unexpected guest had minutes, and then come down and get your stockings."

As the door closed, he turned quickly to the others. "We'll have to make up a stocking for him," he said. "And there's no time to lose."

When Timothy appeared, five minutes later, he had his share with the rest.

Right after breakfast a big shabby sleigh drew up in the yard—Tim-

othy's grandparents had come to get him.

The family went to look for Timothy and found him riding the hobbyhorse. He was decked out in all his Christmas presents—a red toboggan cap, a drum, and a horn slung over his shoulders. When he heard that his grandfather was ready for him he dismounted briskly and pulled a pair of colored reins—another Christmas gift—from his pocket. He fastened the reins on the horse's shaggy neck. "Come along, Racer!" he cried.

Poor Timothy, he had made a terrible mistake! He had understood that the hobbyhorse, too, was to be his, to take home, and he believed that if he only pulled hard enough it would move forward as well as up and down. He had even given it a name. When he found out the truth, he bowed his head with its gay toboggan cap and hid his face in Racer's mane. He did not cry; he only stood in dumb despair. A bigger boy would not have made such a mistake, but Timothy was only five years old.

"Mother," said Roderick, "let him have the horse. He must have it. Don't you see?"

"Do you mean that, Roddy?" asked Mrs. Dale.

Roderick nodded. "I don't want it so very much," he said.

So they lifted the horse into the back of the big sleigh, while old Mr. and Mrs. Baxter looked on, smiling,

and the Dales and all the little guests stood by to watch.

Timothy would not stir until the horse was firmly tied in with its head toward the real horses' heads. Then, when Mr. Dale started to lift him into place between the old people, he squirmed out of his hands and scrambled over the side.

"I will ride Racer," he said in positive tones.

No one could stop him. He climbed to the hobbyhorse's back and sat there, clutching the reins.

As the sleigh drove slowly out of the gate, the hobbyhorse bounced up and down. Timothy sat erect, drum, horn and all. It was a strange sight; all the way down the road people turned round and looked. Roderick stood on the porch laughing. The last thing he saw, as the team turned a bend, was a spot of bright red bobbing gaily in the Christmas sunshine.

Christmas was abolished by Act of Parliament in the reign of Cromwell.

As many mince pies as you taste at Christmas, so many happy months will you have.—Old English Saying.

And the angel said unto them, Fear not; for, behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy, which shall be to all people.—St. Luke, ii., 10.

What constitutes the happiness of Christmas? The fact that for one day in the year at least, a larger proportion of mankind contrives to forget self, and give a thought to "the other fellow" than upon any other day. In other words, on one day of the year we consciously allow the principles and rules of Christian altruism to sway our conduct; for one day in the year we look on the world as the Master of Christmas looked upon it, with compassion, mercy, and love. We say: "It's Christmas," and we make a genuine effort to conform to the spirit of Christmas.

And what is that spirit? It is the spirit of peace on earth, which is the inevitable outcome of good-will among men.

Grandpa's Advice.

"Grandpa," said a small girl, "I need your advice. I have only seventy-five cents to spend on Cousin Ethel's wedding present, and I want to give something that looks twice as much as it is. What do you suggest?"

"Well," he replied, "in consideration of the high cost of living, I should buy seventy-five cents' worth of rice and boil it."



A Country Carol

Where the patient oxen were, by the ass's stall,
Watching my Lord's manger knelt the waking
cattle all;

'Twas a little country maid vigil by Him kept—
All among the country things my good Lord slept.
Fair was Rome the city on that early Christmas
morn,

Yet among the country folk was my Lord born!

Country lads that followed Him, blithe they were
and kind,
It was only city folk were hard on Him and blind:

Ay, he told of lilies, and of grain and grass that
grew,
Fair things of the summer fields my good Lord
knew,

By the hedgerows flowering there He laid His
head—
It was in the country that my Lord was bred.

Where the jewelled minsters are, where the censers sway,
There they kneel to Christ the Lord in this bearing-day:
But I shall stay to greet Him where the bonny fields begin,
Like the fields that once my good Lord wandered in,
Where His thorn-tree flowered once, where His sparrows soared,
In the open country-land of my good Lord!

When the cross weighed down on Him, on the
grievous road,
'Twas a kindly countryman raised my good Lord's
load;

Peasant girls of Galilee, folk of Nazareth,
These were fain to follow Him down the ways
of death—

Yea, beyond a city wall, underneath the sky,
Out in open country did my good Lord die.

When he rose to Heaven on that white Ascension
day,
Last from open country did my good Lord pass
away;

Rows of golden seraphim watched where He
should dwell,
Yet it was the country folk had my Lord's
farewell;

Out above the flowered hill, from the mossy grass,
Up from open country did my good Lord pass.

Queer Christmas Customs of Other Lands.

Throughout the Christian world the Christmas season is celebrated in much the same spirit, though customs differ greatly, and in some lands church-going is more general than in Canada. In Italy, particularly, there is much church-going, and the Christmas tree is little known, though gifts are exchanged, and each family has a great dinner, the feature of which is a capon, which takes the same rank as the Canadian goose.

The Russian working people have always seized upon Christmas as an excuse for ceasing all work for a somewhat lengthy period—sometimes for a month. Before the recent revolution "Kolenda" was the celebration on Christmas Eve, when the peasants

gathered about the houses of the nobles, sang carols and scrambled for the coins tossed to them from the windows. Then came a great masquerade, when peasants of all ages dressed themselves to represent animals, the idea being to perpetuate the memory of the lowliness of the Saviour's birth in the stable.

In Rumania it is the custom to bless the Danube on Christmas, and a procession of priests and people dressed to represent biblical characters moves through the streets singing chants and so to the bank of the river. The ice is broken, and a small wooden cross is thrown into the water. Any one who can recover this cross is regarded as extremely fortunate and sure of good luck for the year to come.

A quaint ceremonial is observed in Holland on Christmas Eve. At midnight the men of the towns and villages, dressed in varied costumes, meet in the public squares. One is selected and into his charge is given a large illuminated star mounted upon a pole, and with this star is a guide—as the Wise men were guided to Bethlehem—a procession winds through the streets, the men chanting the "Gloria in Excelsis." After the parade a great supper is served, and the Christmas Day has begun.

In Norway they have a pretty custom. Above every ridge pole is hung a sheaf of wheat, a Christmas feast for the birds.

The Mexican Christmas is a strangely mixed week of sports, revels and religious observances. The "Passion Play" never fails to attract great crowds, nor do the bull fights. In the Philippines grand masses are held in the churches in the morning, the buildings being elaborately

decorated with palms and flowers. Great chains of flowers are carried to the churches by the children, who parade through the streets singing Christmas songs, bands preceding them. In the afternoon there is dancing and merrymaking. In Spain the religious note is predominant at Christmas and there are curious performances of mystery plays. In France the Christmas celebration lasts three days, and is the occasion for much charity. In the south of France there is a quaint custom of blessing the Yule log, not unlike that of England, and on December 25 there is a great family supper.

With all good wishes for a
Merry Christmas
and a
Happy New Year.