

THE CHRISTMAS SPIRIT

By Mary Graham Bonner

ELLEN had been feeling that there was no such thing in the world as a Christmas spirit.

During the summer, for example, she had taken a trip. Everyone seemed to enjoy it. Everyone seemed to be glad to get away from the world with its scandals and its spoilt civilization. That was what everyone said as they took the trip through the simple wilds, remote and picturesque and old.

This seemed to be the life everyone longed for and then some one mentioned a scandal which had taken place nearby some months before.

With a dash everyone made for the scene—so they could tell the people back home that they had seen the locality of the scandal and Ellen had been disgusted. Was it such a sordid world after all?

Then she had taken some poor children to a big store to see the Christmas display and they had been refused admittance. The customers had objected to such crowds of children—they wanted to see the display themselves—why should poor children see the toys when they could only look? And all about the outside of the store were eager little faces peering into the windows and hoping that perhaps they could get in when the one who watched at the door was not looking. Once in a while one did and the children from outside waited for the news.

"What did you see? What did you see?" they shouted as the lucky one came out again.

Other stores had been different. Other stores had not had their rich



customers complain. But it had saddened Ellen. And one of these very complainers had bought six copies of "The Christmas Carol" by Dickens to give away to friends. Ellen heard that later. It had not improved matters.

And on this same Christmas trip another she had met had said to her that these children had such shamefully poor coats and had reproved Ellen.

"I wish," the woman who had spoken so sharply to Ellen had said, "that they had some of the nice warm things belonging to my children," but when Ellen suggested that she should do something for these children she had gone off angrily.

And another person had patted her as she had seen her walking with these children and had said:

"A fine work, my dear."

And Ellen knew that the woman felt she had showed Christmas duty and Christmas service and Christmas love by making that speech.

But when Ellen began to see the trees which were sent to the city for Christmas she felt better. The smell of the trees gave her some of the Christmas spirit. Oh, yes, it was all right after all, she had been seeing only what was disagreeable and everything else had passed her by.

And then one day in the crowded section of the city she saw a small crippled newboy go up to a Salvation Army bucket and put in his donation. Helping others to have a Christmas dinner when he was none too sure of his own!

As she saw it she involuntarily smiled and a smile answered hers. A strange man was smiling at her.

Was some one going to be impertinent to her? Was the incident of the

little boy only going to serve as an excuse for a man to smile at her?

But in another moment he was apologizing.

"I'm so sorry," he said. "I was trying to place you in my mind. I was so sure I knew you. And then I remembered that you were the picture of the girl on the cover of a magazine last Christmas which I saved all the year and so which is naturally very familiar to me. I am so sorry!"

And then Ellen laughed. For last year she had posed for one of her artist friends.

"I don't suppose you've any idea," the man continued, "how much good that picture did. I've heard so many speak of it and of the Christmas spirit it expressed. You fairly breathed it—then."

"And now I'm different!" she asked. "You don't look just as—just as Christmas," he faltered.

And Ellen felt ashamed. For she had been critical of others and in worrying about the world's shortcomings she had lost her own Christmas spirit. But it had been merely wandering—it was not utterly lost—and the man? The man who had found it again for her?

They became friends and then they became sweethearts and they made of their love a permanent thing and were married.

And he always called Ellen his beautiful Christmas picture. And Ellen was glad that he did. It kept contently in mind the Christmas spirit that had once almost left her for good and all!

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BRENT had grown away from his family. Brent was a successful man. He played a violin in a big city orchestra. He belonged to the union and the union backed him up and he never played a minute more than he had to play. It had become such a business with him that he never played now when he came home.

He came home once a year. Something handed down to Brent from his parents made him do this, although when he was home he often was cross. On the last home-coming he remembered his mother had talked to him about the costliness of a home and had spoken of the attractive house she had seen in a picture in the paper. She wished Brent would marry and have a nice home like that instead of an

apartment which was so far from being a home. He had explained to his mother that such a "home" was beyond the incomes of ordinary city people and that if she wanted him to be as cozy as that she'd have to get him the costliness of millions.

For it took a millionaire to own a real "home" in a city.

How foolish his mother had been not to have realized all that. She knew so little of city life, of business, of anything outside her own small groove.

But Brent was coming home for Christmas and that was happiness for the parents. Only they did wish Brent was more like the boy he had promised to be. There was something so hard about him. He had told them the time before of a friend of his who was getting a divorce from his wife.

"But my friend is so honorable," Brent had said. "He wants the divorce as he's bored with his wife, though still she loves him, but he is paying all the expenses, for it is only fair to a divorcee to have the divorce secured by her. He really never wanted to marry her. He became tired of her soon after they were engaged. But it was his high sense of honor which kept him from telling her—to have a man break the engagement would have been dishonorable."

And Brent scorned their opinions. He regarded them as old-fashioned.

There was a man in a town some little distance away who wanted to see Brent's father on business and it was arranged that a meeting should take place at the man's house. Brent's father was going to sell much of the land, which had become a burden since Brent had gone away.

And he arranged the meeting so that he would be able to meet Brent on his way home for Christmas.

Brent greeted his father with reserved affection. "So you've brought the fiddle," Brent's father exclaimed. Brent never brought his violin with him any more because he would be asked to play by old friends who didn't realize that music was his business.

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The Left-Over Doll

WHAT was the left-over doll thinking about as she hung on the topmost twig of the Christmas tree all alone? Perhaps about all the other gifts that had been taken off by loving hands and given to the boys and girls. Maybe she was wondering whether there would be a Christmas tree every winter, bearing such nice fruit in such a strange season, if there had not been such a great gift from God as come on Jesus' birthday. More than all, however, she must have been asking herself why she was left over, why nobody wanted her, why the name that was pinned on her dress had not been called.

She was as good a doll as ever was made. Her eyes would open and shut, she always had a smile upon her face, her cheeks were rosy, she did not have a pug nose, and her dress was beautiful. When they put her on the tree she thought her name would be the very first one. She could hardly wait to hear it, and she wondered if they would never get through singing

carols. Now it was all over and she wasn't wanted at all, not by anybody, not even by Sally Wiggins, who had no doll—no even one. She wasn't wanted! Oh, it was too bad, and her eyes tried to wink out two tears.

So they put her in the basket with the other unwanted things, and there the minister found her the next Sunday. She was lying there fast asleep, with a little carpet sweeper near her, and a box of candy close by, and looking glass by her side. At her feet there was a spruce cone that had fallen off of the tree, and the bit of paper that had told who she was meant for, but her eyes were shut—

she had retired from the world, no one wanted her.

There she was still when the minister came into the room the next Sunday morning. But now her eyes were wide open, only she wasn't looking at the presents in the basket. She was awake, but turned away, and still trying to squeeze out some tears because she was left over. And every time the minister took her up she would shut her eyes and go to sleep again, unless he held her up pretty straight, and then she seemed to be sad, and to be dreaming about being left over, even while she was awake.

She wasn't awake even on children's day until little baby Mover came in to get ready to be baptized, but as soon as he held her up she opened her eyes, and when she saw what a pleasant little boy he was she looked pleased and hopeful again. Then he put her down, and she went to sleep and slept until Christmas came again!

With a new Christmas there she was upon a tree once more, and getting ready to call off the names. This time she was sure that somebody would want her, for she had been patient a whole year, and she hadn't made any fuss even though she had felt so sorry. Besides, this was the very best tree they had ever had, and so many had come to see it. It was full of gifts—like the little tree that the minister saw in the corner of a house parlor—the mother said, "It's most all tree and paper, but it's a tree"—there were two carts, and everything, and an Indian tomahawk to go with a boy's warwhoop, and some fringed pants to be put on with them, and a picture of a little girl in red, under a big umbrella, in a snowstorm, and "Ain't this a nice snowy day?" written under the picture, and lots of things, and the left-over doll, looking so friendly and nice—nicer than ever.

Well, they began to call the names, and almost the first thing somebody took down the left-over doll and gave her to Polly Rankin! Polly is just the dearest child I know. It was Polly who had said that she wished she had a doll to pet and bring up right. I am sure that Polly will do it. She will make the left-over doll feel very much wanted. She will teach her to be always cheerful. She will find her very obedient, and even nicer than she looks, and she will be kind to her. I hope that when the left-over doll is grown up she will be just like Polly!

"Santa Claus!"

"Santa Claus" is a corruption which originated apparently in Flanders or possibly among the Dutch, of the name St. Nicholas, a saint noted for his love of children and his boundless charity. His "day" was perhaps December 8, originally, but since the displacement of Old Father Christmas, the British representation of the Christmas spirit, he is celebrated almost universally as the Christmas saint.

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