

SOME CHRISTMAS REFLECTIONS

By MOTHER MACHREE.



IT IS impossible to write anything, at this season of the year, from letters to cooking recipes, which does not contain something of the Christmas spirit. And our little house is overflowing with it.

From the "big chest" in the attic, where the Christmas parcels are stowed away as fast as they come in, to the basement, where the "goodies" are in cold storage for the Christmas dinner, the spirit of Christmas hovers like a household fairy, or a guardian angel.

Buddy, the eight-year-old boy of the household, and I have been having some very earnest conversations behind closed doors—with the result that three pasteboard boxes have been converted into residences for three ultra-fashionable paper-doll families. These marvelous people have grown tired of living between the pages of magazines, so Buddy obligingly armed himself with my embroidery scissors and behold! Martha and Mary and Baby Sister will have things which Brother made all by himself.

Baby Sister's ideas as to Christmas-giving are rather vague. But of one thing she is placidly certain—Santa Clause will never forget her, because she has learned to lace her own shoes. (Alas! She has also learned to unlace them, at all hours of the day) and comb her own hair somewhat in a style of her own.

All this has been duly recorded in a letter to Santa, as well as to Daddy Boy and Uncle Rob, because this is proof positive that she is no longer "just a baby." She told me quite confidentially, however, as I was tucking her into bed, that she was going to give us all dollies "wiv curly hair" for Christmas.

"N' I could have your dollies to play wiv, couldn't I, gramma, an' muver's dolly, cause she's got baby bruvver, an' Buddy's dolly, cause he's a boy. I could take care of all your dollies, gramma, I could!" From which I infer that baby sister will in due time give her husband lace curtains and piano scarfs, according to the time-honored joksmiths of another generation. But, after all, she's a bit more generous than some grownups I have known. She's willing to give the things she wants the most herself.

For my own part, I never gave away a book in my life that I didn't buy a duplicate for myself—if I could afford it, and it has always happened that I couldn't so far. But that's my creed; that's the only way in which I can appease the ugly, selfish streak in my makeup which makes me greedy for books—and incidentally flowers. The twins are fashioning marvelous gifts for mother and Baby Sister, and they add, mysteriously, "everybody."

We haven't talked much about "the things we want for Christmas," even the children are more or less subdued about it. About all we really want is to see prices tumble a little more while wages keep up, but we feel that the level has about been reached for this year, at least.

Last year, I remember, there was a glorious Christmas dinner because so many of our boys were home again after the war, and then an evening of firelight and candlelight in so many different homes.

Incidentally, our little house was all abloom with holly and mistletoe—and girls! For the house on our side of the street "belongs" to other folk as well as our own.

Two brave little bride's spent a part of their honeymoon there—just before their "boys" went overseas—and under the fragrant wisteria blossoms the last farewells have been whispered between husbands and wives, mothers and sons. And always as long as the little house stands—or my eyes can see, I shall see the dear brave smiles of the men who have waved goodbye from the front gate.

The white road winding down the hill became "The long, long trail."

The children are already singing Christmas songs—old and new. The little mother is teaching them one with a wistful little melody:

"What will the Christmas bring to you?
Love and joy and kindly mirth—
Hopes fulfilled and friendship true
And to all men, God's "peace on earth."

Perhaps they don't understand it now. I am sure they appreciate the mangle song more, but in the coming years, if they can only have the half of these blessings, their lives will be rich indeed.

It was said so many times that last Christmas was the happiest one the world has ever known, because the boys who lived through the war were all home again. It may have been so in America, where our losses were comparatively small. It seems superfluous to repeat it, but to my imagination this Christmas will be just as happy though perhaps for a different cause. There are now so many more links in the chain—links of golden hair, shining eyes and little hands—links that bind the heart and soul.

This year they will all share the happiness—the boys and their girl wives and the "links." That is one of the gifts this Christmas has brought to us—to clasp hands once more across the sea. We have been taking too much for granted, but we are more and more learning how to appreciate one another, and how to express the appreciation in words and deeds.

Once upon a time, just before another Christmas, two of my "boys" dropped in when no preparations had been made for guests. To be quite truthful, there never were many "preparations" made for any of them, but that was a particularly "Hoo-verish" day at our little house. We made sandwiches and evolved a salad from the odds and ends in the pantry, made tea, opened a glass of jelly, and that was all.

One of the boys asked haltingly: "Will you do something I want you to do, Mother Machree?" Would I? Is there anything any mother would not have done for those boys of ours?

He reached across the table. "Please I want you to butter my bread for me, and put some jelly on it."

And then, when I handed it back to him, he said quite simply: "Mother has always done that ever since I was a little chap—and I guess I just imagine it—but it always seems to taste different."

That sparse little meal will be a precious memory to me, after the menus of more pretentious feasts have long since faded. It became by that one thought of that boy, a sacrament—the very epitome of all the meals ever prepared and served by mothers. "Better a dinner of herbs," and better by far, the simple, beautiful act of mother service which this boy's mother had always performed for him, than all the gorgeous Christmas meals ever served by paid lackeys.

It was not that he wanted to be "waited upon." Nobody was ever more thoughtful about sharing burdens than he was, but it's just that our men folk (God bless them,) are "youngsters under the skin." The quotation marks are a tribute to an American boy who made that remark to me.

There is a bit of Christmas verse which I picked up somewhere, possibly out of the cluttered-up workshop which answers for a mind in my makeup—and which I have sent forth before.

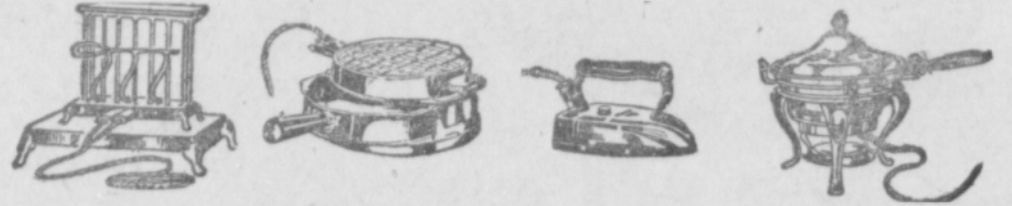
In fact there has not been Christmas for years when I didn't know of someone, somewhere, to whom I could send it. Here it is—my Christmas wish for your boy and my boy—wherever he may be:

The tenderest light of that silvery star
Which blesses the homelike, is shining above you,
For still it is Christmas wherever you are,
And those you hold dear remember and love you.

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