



TRING, Christmas bells, across the snowy wastes;
Peal from your steeples high;
Spread the glad tidings of the Heavenly choir's
Celestial melody!—*Jessie Freeland.*

The Christmas Spirit

(O. A. C. Review)

IT was the beginning of Christmas week—and a cold, raw Christmas it promised to be. The snow was not deep, but the cold had been too intense. The east wind whipped across the fields upon the little village of Verchyle mercifully. The pale smoke melted into dull leaden skies and trees cracked as little Bobby and Mary Williams started to school. Poor, little kiddies, it seemed terribly cold to them that morning. Their mother was a widow, almost worn out with the effort to support herself and two children by washing clothes for the more prosperous of the village, and such miscellaneous work as the small village offered. The home was cheerless, enough, but her mother-love never wavered and she continued the hard struggle. She lived in a poor old house a mile to the west of the village just where the highway turned, leading to the town of Albert.

So the children on this morning started for school, running at intervals to keep warm as the keen wind blew through their clothing.

"Wot's to eat today, Mary?" asked the eight-year-old boy.

"Just bread-an'-butter," said Mary, two years his senior, and upon whom already the cares of the world had begun to rest.

"Got very much rest," asked Bobby.

"Three slices each." Bobby trotted on. He was used to small meals. Insufficiently fed and clothed he had become accustomed to hardship, so he ceased to comment upon the meagre meal.

As they passed through the village they stopped at the one and only store to warm their feet. A large table placed directly in the centre of the store now held the place of honor. On it were displayed toys of many kinds and of various prices. Bobby's eyes opened widely as he saw a repeating air rifle—the very kind he'd longed for and dreamed over. But never a chance, it seemed, had he of ever securing one. He touched it cautiously and lovingly with a world of longing in his eyes, cold toes forgotten. Meanwhile Mary had discovered a doll, black-haired, ruddy-checked, beautiful in her eyes beyond description. Forgetful of school they lingered, caressing the treasures until the clock struck nine.

"Oh, Bobby, we'll be late again. We are most every day and teacher said as how we had to stay in after four next time."

The school house was situated some half mile south of the village owing to the densely populated farming

community in this district, so they hastened for it, but alas! accidents were fated to happen that day. Mr. Thompson, a wealthy farmer, lived between the village and the school. He had just purchased a large good natured collie pup, which happened to see the children running. With thick woolly hair and laughing jaws he gambled up to meet them for of course they wanted to play. He caught Mary's dress playfully, giving



Two Mail Boxes Used by Four Farmers

Where farmers do not live on the mail routes and therefore have to place their boxes at the cross roads, they sometimes join in using the same boxes and in carrying their mail for each other to and from the boxes. The boxes here shown are on the mail route from Picton to Demorestville, Ont., and are owned by Messrs. A. Fraser, A. Hefferman, A. S. Brown and G. L. Cook.

—Photo by an editor of Farm and Dairy.

a quick, happy bark. But to Mary he was a huge, murderous beast bent on mischief. With a scream she ran dropping their dinner as she went. The pup was not averse to bread, and quickly making a small lunch, he scampered after the crying kiddies. Quite unnoticed by the frightened children, Mr. Thompson stood at his gate. As he approached he stepped out and shouted at the pup, which immediately stopped with front feet spread wide and ears pointed forward, ready at a moment's notice to leap sideways or forward in pure joyful frolic.

The children ran to his side, and he looked down at them kindly.

"So the pup scared you, eh? Well, don't cry; he won't hurt you. You lost your dinner, too. At noon come up here and we'll see what we can do for you. I guess you'd better hurry now; it's past nine."

"Mighty little clothes those youngsters have for this weather," said the farmer to himself, shivering in his heavy flannels.

Contrary to their belief no unpleasant results followed their lateness. The teacher, perhaps, thought the severity of the weather sufficient excuse. Perhaps the Christmas Spirit stirred in her heart.

At noon the children walked, cold and shivering, to Mr. Thompson's door, and Mary timidly knocked. Mrs. Thompson opened the door, and her motherly heart warmed to the forlorn looking pair.

"Come in, dears," she said heartily, and ushered them in to the warm range. Dinner was ready in a few minutes.

"Gee Whiz!" gasped Bobby under his breath.

Mary simply stared. It was seldom they could secure sufficient food to quite satisfy them, even of the plainest character, and here was abundance and more.

Mr. and Mrs. Thompson exchanged glances as the children hungrily ate. It was near Christmas, and the spirit of it was in the air.

"Well, dear," said Mrs. Thompson to Bobby, with a crafty look, as she gave him his third generous helping of juicy beef, potatoes and brown gravy, "so Carlo stole your pie today."

"Wasn't no pie," said Bobby, with a mouth full of potatoes; Mary briefly supplementing, "six slices of bread-an'-butter."

His interest was centred chiefly on Bobby and Mary. He noted the sorrowful longing with which Bobby touched the gun. He watched Mary tenderly turn the doll on its back to see the eyes close. His gaze wandered out into the cold, dark winter twilight. A tender smile played around his mouth, which gradually grew sad,—almost bitter. He saw a tiny face, out in the cold dusk, that was new under the snow.

"Hello, Hank," said a lusty voice, as the heavy hand of a brawny friend smote his shoulder. "Merry Christmas, my man. If I don't see you again."

"Hello, Billy, and a Happy New Year, when it gets here." And Mr. Thompson looked again at the children, with the pleasant smile coming back. He moved toward them, thought a moment, and then turned his basket of groceries on the counter.

"Night, Hank," said the owner in a pleasant voice.

"Good night, Ned," replied Mr. Thompson, as he departed. As he opened the door he shivered and turned up his heavy collar, then passing out was lost to view.

"Bobby," whispered Mary, "see, it's getting dark. Let's go home. So together they started out, cold and shivering, but having at least feasted their eyes on great treasures.

It was the day before Christmas; the intense cold of the last two weeks had abated, and great, many-shaped snowflakes were falling softly.

The house of the widow was cold and desolate. She was away that afternoon scrubbing the floors of the sickly wife of a rich farmer a couple of miles' distant. The children had gone away to once more be near the treasures that they almost felt were theirs; but to their sorrow they found them gone. They were too bashful and too heart-broken to inquire for them, but spent their time miserably looking over others they had hardly seen before.

The store-keeper noticed them. His heart was aglow with good cheer—everyone's was, for the morrow was Christmas. So from his largeness of heart, and with the exultation that comes with giving he called, "Here kids." So saying, he handed Bobby a warm pair of woolen-lined leather mitts and gave Mary a thick muffler. Their eyes danced with delight and in the joy of receiving this badly needed clothing, they forgot for the moment their disappointment over the gun and doll.

As they ate their scanty supper Bobby suddenly remarked, "Say, Mary, I heard the kids say they wrote to Santa Claus and turned the letter. Then he brought what they wanted. Why don't he ever stop here?" and a puzzled frown spread over his forehead.

"Mebbe he will," said Mary, rather doubtfully, "if we write." So the letter was duly written and burned in the fire in the old cracked cook stove supported by bricks.

(Continued next week)

There should be a high stool and a low rocker in the kitchen, and a comfortable lounge in the living-room.

Boil the raisins and currants for the fruit cake. They are guaranteed then not to sink, and they will not extract moisture from the cake as they would if rolled in flour.

