

A Touch of Brotherhood

Written for The Western Home Monthly By H. Mortimer Batten

DOCTOR FORD pushed his account books from him and looked up smilingly at his wife.

"Not so bad," he meditated, half to her and half in soliloquy, "two thousand six hundred dollars in one year can't be complained at, considering it's our first year, and considering how scattered our patients are."

His voice bore the tone of happy anticipation, as well as that of satisfaction, and, as Kitty laid down her sewing, he drew from his note-book a new fifty dollar bill, and handed it to her.

"That's your little bonus, or rather commission, Kitty," said he, "goodness knows you've earned it, dear girl, and you can spend it as your fancy dictates. This spring we will buy an automobile, bearing my own name, so that I can give you a little more diversion. Don't thank me—please!"

Kitty took the note, her cheeks—slightly faded after years of toil as a struggling practitioner's helpmeet, with little to break the monotony of each day—glowing with pleasure.

"Dear boy," she replied, "I can't say how happy it makes me to think that we have succeeded in this new country. As for the present, I appreciate it fully. There are two things I would like to do with it. If I had my choice we would take train to Vancouver, put up at a good hotel, go to two theatres and a concert, and return here at the end of four days. That being impossible, since you cannot leave your precious patients, I would like to give a children's party, a good, old-fashioned, children's party."

The doctor regarded his wife almost incredulously. He himself could not have defined just what was lacking in his life. They had been married five years, and no event of paramount importance had punctuated that period of partnership.

"A children's party?" he echoed. "How like your dear heart. I thought you would plump for new clothes. But then,"—the doctor smiled on her blandly, "perhaps you do not need them, you had a good wardrobe when we left England a year ago, and fortunately you look beautiful in just anything!"

Kitty laughed. How blind men were! Goodness knew she needed the clothes badly enough, for a wardrobe, fifteen months old, is not much for a girl, accustomed to every luxury, to work upon.

"I can do without the new things till next year quite easily," said the woman. "A children's party it shall be, and, as it wants only three weeks to Christmas, we had better get to work right away. I would love to invite every child within a day's sled ride, but let us make a rough draft of the 'possibles,' so as to see where we stand. You take all residents north of the baseline and I'll take the south; then we can revise each other's lists."

Each with pencil and paper, they made out their rough drafts, then exchanged lists.

Ford glanced his wife's paper with the quick eye he brought to bear on prescriptions. "I see you have included them all," he observed gravely. "These two Dale children, a boy and a girl, do you mean the children at the sawmill, Howard Dale's children?"

Kitty nodded. "Yes," she said. Then, touching his hand, she added, "This is not a professional affair. We are giving the party to please the children, not their parents. It is my party, Dan."

The doctor busily polished his glasses. He had given the money to Kitty for her to do what she pleased with it, but now he was in a dilemma.

"I do not think it is very wise, dearest," he said. "Not that I myself care, it is the parents of the other children who will care. Why, that man has been in prison twice for peddling whisky into the mining camps. He is suspected of beachcombing and remarking timber, and he is the most notorious drunkard this side of Telegraph Creek. His wife is a—"

"I know all that," said Kitty with a little shudder, "but why should the sins of the parents be visited on the children? The poor little half-starved things have fasted few enough pleasures, goodness knows, and it is just that kind I want to see happy this Christmas."

But the doctor persisted. "Dearest, you do not understand the people of

these pioneer districts as I do," he argued. "Their non-conformity and narrowness of outlook, coupled with a sense of self-righteousness, passes all belief. Why, if you invite those children, half the mothers in the district will be horrified, and the whole thing will prove a hopeless fiasco. Take my advice, and cut it out. The children live a long way off, and even if you invite them they will never get here."

For a moment Kitty was silent, then she said, "It's my party, and I'm going to invite the two little Dales. As for getting them here, well, we can send our own sled for them, and it will be an example to the other mothers that we, at any rate, are not bigoted or narrow."

And so the doctor was compelled to subside, and the next three weeks were a time of bustle and happy anticipation for Kitty. She had no shops from which to

"Mrs. Ford, it is kind of you, madam, to invite Joe and Betty to your party and to offer to send your sled for them, but I am afraid they can't come because they haven't any party close, their father he drinking that heavy and me without money for food, hoping it find you as it leaves me at present. Yours respectfully,

Annie Dale."

"You see you were right," said Kitty with a sigh. "It would have been better had I not invited them. It would be no kindness to bring them here unless they were dressed like the others, for children are very sensitive."

But to her surprise her husband began to argue the point. "I don't see why that should stand in the way," said he. "A little frock and a suit are not very expensive items. You get the children here in good time, and we will see what can be done."

In the early morning of Christmas



General Sir Henry Sinclair Horn, the brilliant leader of one of the British Army Corps on the Western front, which distinguished itself in the British advances. The General is a Scot—and a Cathness man.

purchase the necessities for the party. The cakes and sweets she had to make herself, with the assistance of an extremely green servant girl. The Christmas tree she cut from the second growth spruce grove at the back of the house, the Japanese lanterns were of cardboard and red photographic paper stolen from the doctor's dark room. Thus the bulk of the \$50 note was saved for the presents which were to adorn the tree, a present for each child.

Strange to relate, Kitty's announcement of her decision had none of the regrettable results the doctor had prophesied. It was quite possible that the foolish womenfolk of the district, recognizing the doctor's wife as a person of education and "learning," would have fallen in with her views to even greater extremes, for only a few turned up their noses, and refused to allow their children to participate in such a cosmopolitan gathering. Kitty received a characteristic note from the mother of the little outcasts. She read it aloud to the doctor at the breakfast table:

Eve a sled, driven by a half-breed, drew up outside the little forest-marooned sawmill, where the two Dale children lived. This was the opening of an event such as the little boy and girl had never before dreamt of, a children's party, such as their mother had described in weak and garrulous moments as existing in her childhood's days, an event to brighten darker hours, perhaps by happy memory. The half-breed, having imbibed of the spirit of Christmas, cheered the two children throughout the morning with his quaint little songs, but, as the long white afternoon dragged on wearily, he developed a headache, and, when finally they arrived, both children were tired out. A hot bath and a comfortable feather bed awaited them, and Kitty, appropriating their poor little garments, made a bundle of them and packed them in the bottom of the sled in readiness for their return trip.

Next morning the two Dale children made their appearance in their party clothes, purchased by the doctor at the village store.

"Just as well to give them a little time to overcome their self-consciousness," Kitty explained. "Now don't you think they look as nice as any of the other children will look?"

But somehow a lump had risen in the doctor's throat. He felt himself a brute for the prejudice he had maintained towards these two small and innocent people. He himself would have robbed them of what was undoubtedly to be a holiday of many memories, and now the sight of them seated at his own table, pink and clean and modest, stirred an entirely new sensation within him. He had long lived a bachelor, partaking of bachelor habits, and, to-day, he had surrounded himself with animals on which he bestowed unbounded affection.

"I am glad you insisted, Kitty, dear," he said. "As for Joe and Betty, they must enjoy themselves thoroughly, because we are very pleased to have them." "Pop is coming on Boxing Day for us," chirped Joe, gaining confidence. "He said I was to tell you that he would come to drive us home, then bring the sled back next morning."

"That's decent of the fellow," observed the doctor, "since he is ready to give up two working days, it shows he appreciates it."

Kitty's party was an unqualified success. They kicked off with supper—or high tea, as it would be called in England—according to the usual western custom. Many of the little visitors at first held themselves aloof from the two Dale children, having evidently been instructed to do so by their parents, but Betty was so pretty in her pink finery, and Joe so much of a little Britisher, while Kitty's attentions to the pair of them were so marked, that, by the time crackers were placed on the table, all suggestion of conservatism had vanished. Then, after the crackers, the curtains were drawn aside by the half-breed, decked in the full glory of the tribal garments of his mother's side, and there, in the centre of the drawing-room, stood the Christmas Tree.

A cry of delight went round, while the doctor and Kitty looked on in silent pleasure. As for the Dale children, they simply stared and stared in speechless bewilderment, till the doctor tossed Betty on to his shoulder, and made a triumphant entry into the enchanted chamber.

It marked a new era in the children's parties of that locality. Hitherto the parents had been too afraid of their offspring forgetting their manners, too afraid of their party clothing, to let things rip; but now, led by the doctor and Kitty, all formality was sacrificed on the altar of enjoyment.

It was late when the sleds began to draw away their loads of happy children. Joe and Betty, the specially favored, remaining behind to see off the guests, thereby acquiring unto themselves additional prestige, and an hour later the childless man and woman stood by the large bed in which the two small people were sleeping. Joe's head was pillowed on his arm, one pink cheek visible, and Betty's hand held a wisp of her brother's hair as though to ensure his constant proximity.

"You made a wise choice, little girl," said the doctor, drawing his wife to him. Kitty smiled up at him. "You are glad?" she asked, simply.

"More glad than I can say," the man answered, "but—I think we shall miss them when they are gone."

The girl bit her lips and nodded. "It sets you longing?" she said at length. "I, too, dear heart!"

Next morning, true to his promise, Howard Dale arrived to take his children home. He wore a rough Canadian parka, made from an old woollen blanket, his feet were shod in shabby moccasins, his beaver cap sat at a rakish angle over one black eye. The doctor went forth to greet him, and saw at a glance that the man was the worse for liquor, not merely a stray dose, but long imbibement.

"Doctor," said Dale, with tipsy dignity, coughing as he spoke. "I'm much obliged to ye for the kindness ye've shown. I tell ye, I think a whole heap of my children, and if their mother was anything like the woman she ought to be, things would be different. Aye, different with me and my kids, I tell ye—"

In spite of all the circumstances, there was a ring of sincerity in the man's faltering voice, and the doctor took the big hand offered him.