

OLDER THAN CHRISTMAS ITSELF

FAR be it from me to lead any man from the path of his Christmas resolutions. In times past I have made them myself, and even kept a few—just to show what I dared. But in the matter of a "sane Christmas," as I have heard it called, I have never been able to keep even a mildly good resolution, and neither have my friends and relatives. Don't take this as a confession of generosity. No man is ever as generous as he'd like to be, or ought to be. On the generosity count I plead "not guilty." On the charge of being generally indiscreet and under the influence of—of Christmas, I take, if I may be permitted to change the figure, "the count."

I am in excellent company. Some of the best and wisest people I know have been guilty of unbelievable extravagance in the matter of Christmas presents. I use the word extravagance in the sense that the "sane Christmas" people use it. One can't help wishing these people well. If they would rent an old house and start some sort of a gold cure treatment for the Christmas present habit, I'd apply for admission at once. For I have the habit both ways—both receiving and giving, and I can't get out of it. Last Christmas I must have spent as much as a dollar and a half in a regular debauch of Christmas shopping. Naturally it would be hard on my young nieces and nephews if I did take the cure. But they aren't in much danger. The Christmas habit is older than Christmas itself, and it will take many generations of pamphleteering to put an end to it. The opponents of Christmas giving are mostly sensible people. But who wants to be sensible three hundred and sixty-five days in the year? It is the touch of the fool in a man that makes him tolerable. One wet Christmas I was caught in a rainstorm and had to take refuge on the verandah of the house of a man I hated. I hated him because he was so unfailingly sensible and successful. But I was cured of it that day because he invited me in—which was in itself nothing—and I saw him blowing up a collapsible elephant for his grandchildren and hitching himself to a tin waggon for the amusement of a two-year-old. You can't hate a man who loves a child—and you can't love a child unless you're a bit of a child yourself. Hence—Christmas.

There is one way one could get rid of being a child at Christmas. That would be to be a child—or more or less of a child—all year round. If mankind was sensible it would admit this and put a stop to the habit of frowning down on childish things in adults. But so soon as the human animal reaches a certain age it feels self-conscious. It is impressed with the dignity and the general importance of its

Is Man's Perennial Hanking to be Generous

By JAMES GRANT

position in this life, and it proceeds to act accordingly. Most people never get any older than twenty-one, and the Saints know twenty-one is the real childhood of life when all the world is a toy and life more or less of a ball-game on a corner lot. But the twenty-one-year-old takes elaborate precautions against showing his child-like nature. He pulls on long trousers and a long face and spends his days and nights trying to hide the fact that he is a child, and pretend that he is a man. That is the childishness of it. Now at twenty-one you are never deeply affected by the presents you get. It would be infra dig to show it if you were. The sooner you can look blase the better, and one way of making sure to seem blase is to deny Christmas its usual dole of childish pleasures. You mustn't over-eat. You mustn't over-buy.

Our fathers had a very hard time of it before Christmas came to make them a safety valve. Take, for example, a crusty old cave-dweller who hung out up round the Caledon Mountain. I don't know that there are any caves up there now-a-days, but if there aren't there ought to be, and certainly there must have been some once upon a time. At all events, this old fellow was a pretty shrewd man. He was a great fisherman and clever at shying a stone axe at a deer. He got to be so quick and expert that the rest of the community found it handy to let him do the fishing and hunting, with a certain number of young men to help him, while they made golf sticks and fig leaves out of fur for trade with the tribes that lived down Toronto way by the Orangeville road. The result of all this was that the expert hunter became rich and owned nearly all the best six-room caves and two family dug-outs in the district. His rents were fabulous, almost as fabulous as the lies his debtors told when they tried to get out of paying any rent at all. He became so bored with listening to lies and packing his money away so that it wouldn't spoil, that his face got long and hard and his eyes looked always as though he was sneering even before you told him your story. So they called him crusty and other pretty names.

Now, deep down in the old cave-dweller's heart there was the queerest passion you could imagine. It was before the time of the distillery down at Brampton, else no doubt the gentleman would have

dissipated some of his surplus earnings in jug-lifting contests. There were no horse races on account of the religious objections of the early Canadian druids. Card games were unpopular, because sleeves had not then been invented, and everybody's reputation was so bad anyhow that there was no zest in the game of scandal-mongering. If the fellow in the end cave next the blasted pine beat up his wife—why everybody knew it the moment she went down to the banks of the Credit to brush her teeth in the cool river water. Smoking was taboo on account of the danger of bush-fires. So the chief landlord of the Caledon region was thrown back upon the ancient game of bully-and-grouch for a living. And he hated it. That is the thing I started to tell at the beginning of this paragraph. Having acquired a reputation he had to live up to it. If he had started giving away his money or being lenient with people they would have whispered among themselves that he lost his mind, or had ulterior motives such as trying to get a stand-in with the local rabbi. Like as not they'd have stoned him or made schemes to rob him of all his money.

That, may it please you ladies and gentlemen, is how the potlach system once so popular even among the Pacific Coast politicians, came to be invented. A potlach, as you know, is a Siwash festival marked by the giving of prodigious gifts. It is a regular orgy of generosity, and it was invented by the disgruntled cave-dweller I mentioned. He had to get away from his grouch. He had to get an excuse for getting back to sociable relationships with his fellow men, or he'd have died of jaundice. The Potlach let him play the fool without appearing to be a fool at all. It provided the safety valve by which the old gentleman could blow off his excess "side" and show that he was human and a brother once more. I don't know who it was took the potlach idea to the west coast of this continent—probably some poor devil who was driven out of the Caledon region and walked to Burrard Inlet over the C. P. R. right-of-way. It is quite possible that he started it there so as to make some of the tightwads loosen up with a little for him. That I can't say, but it survived on the Pacific Coast, while here in the East it was wiped out by the early arrival of the Christians, who combined religion and utilitarianism and diverted the generosity outbreak into a fete in the honour of a Great Event in their religion.

Now, if I were you, generous reader, I wouldn't give away a penny's worth—or if I did I'd make them strictly sensible gifts. Your position is different from mine. I can't escape. On the last pay-

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DAMMING FOR LOVE'S SAKE

ARTHUR LIMERICK paced moodily from the battered roll top desk to the slender stack of book cases that contained his little law library, and frankly admitted to himself "without any equivocation or mental reservation whatsoever"—to quote a well worn legal phrase—that he was deeply and decidedly in love.

"I suppose it had to happen sooner or later," he told himself, whimsically; "but I never expected to lose my heart to a girl I just met last week."

He glanced across the narrow street and caught sight of the tall, ungainly figure of Albert Bradley—commonly called "Bogus"—evidently headed for Arthur's office.

"Of course the old miser's coming here," he growled, as he heard the familiar step on the stair. Bradley entered and glanced around furtively.

"All alone, Mr. Limerick?" he queried.

"Quite alone. What can I do for you?"

"I've a matter of very important business I want you to look after for me," began Bradley.

"Explain the details and I'll see what I can do," said Arthur, absently.

Bradley pulverized a "cud" of "Napoleon" in a gnarled palm, hitched his chair up to the desk, and drew a rude plan on the back of a used envelope with quick, nervous strokes.

"It's like this," he explained. "Here's my land where I live on that I bought from Brown, 5,000 acres, just south of the international boundary line between Dakota and Manitoba. You wrote the deed, you recollect. Now, just about a mile east on the south of the boundary line, too, they's another 5,000-acre

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By MARVIN LESLIE HAYWARD

block that I bought from Blackburn the other day, as he'd had a lot a sickness lately and couldn't make the ripple on his payments to the Mortgage Corporation."

"And you paid him how much?" asked Arthur, carelessly.

"\$7,000."

"What's it worth?"

"About \$15,000 on a careful valuation," replied Bradley, virtuously.

"That makes you quite a 'landed proprietor,' as the English say," remarked Arthur.

"Yes," was the disappointed reply, "but I'm not much better off the way things is. You see, in here between the two blocks that I own they's a 2,000-acre lot owned by a young girl who's livin' on it now, so I'm badly hampered getting from one to the other."

"How does a woman happen to be owning land up that way?"

"Her father moved there from Vermont some years ago, and died and left the land to the girl. Her folks tried to get her to go back East, but she's a gritty little body, I must say. Declares she'll run the place the same as her father usta, and she's making quite a fist at it, blamed if she isn't."

"Do you want the land? If so, why don't you try to buy it from her for a big price, the same as you

paid Blackburn?" queried the young lawyer with latent sarcasm.

"No," replied Bradley, evidently pleased at Arthur's estimate of his ability. "The land isn't worth a great deal. The south part in Dakota is the best and it is only fair; but it slopes

down on a level strip of about a thousand acres that's covered with surface water from the high land more or less the year round. Then the north part that runs over into Manitoba's just a regular bog and fit for nothing."

"Then what do you want it for?" snapped Arthur.

"Because if I had the thousand acres, say, I could build a road across it close to the Canadian boundary line between my two places and make it mighty handy, for it's just a long, narrow strip. As it is, she won't let me set foot on it, so I have to drive around the high land to the south or up through Manitoba around the swamp—about twenty miles. If I could travel straight across it would make the Blackburn place worth at least \$5,000 more to me than it is the way things stand."

"Why don't you try to buy a right of way from her?"

"Wouldn't sell for love or money," replied Bradley, with a reminiscent grimace. "Her father and me never pulled very well, and she's mighty unneighbourly, and last year my boy Harry, from some accountable reason—he don't take after the Bradleys you know—fell in love with the girl, and, would you believe it, she turned him down quicker'n scat."

"But she wouldn't hold any hardness over that," declared Arthur, "when it comes to a matter of business."