



Christmas in England a Year Ago.

Once more upon Canadian soil, and hoping to spend my Christmas amongst old friends and familiar surroundings, it seems almost like a dream to recall the significant happenings of a year ago, when the coming of Christmas found the Motherland in what was well called "a veritable welter of political conflict," bitter partizanship, threatening to take the sweetness out of everything, stirring up class jealousy, and tainting even family affections. And then came that one bright spot in the midst of the turmoil. "Let us call a truce," said both parties alike. "Let us lay aside our weapons and cease our strife." Perhaps never before in the history of the British nation was the spirit of Christmas more sorely needed or more beneficent in its influence upon the minds of men. And now that we are in the midst of another such struggle, let us hope and pray that the memory of that same blessed influence may not be without its calming and restraining power.

And now let me offer some minor reminiscences. Sitting in my armchair, and in a retrospective mood, some of what I might term the minor incidents of the Christmas of a year ago, of which I did not probably take very especial notice at the time, marshal themselves before my mind's eye. To begin with, there was that overburdened but most indispensable man—

THE CHRISTMAS POSTMAN.

Surely, I thought, as I saw one after another of those hard-worked men, weighted down with the Christmas messages and gifts they had to convey from house to house, if ever anyone had earned a right to a good Christmas dinner, it was the letter-carriers of the nation; but "one man's meat is often another man's fast," and so, probably, after such strenuous days as those preceding Christmas, as well as upon the special morning itself, these faithful messengers of the British public had no appetite left to enjoy the roast beef and plum pudding awaiting them in their homes.

But it is not the postmen only whose mental and physical powers are so sorely overtaxed at Christmas. There are the postal officials, who have to grapple with the enormous increase of letters and parcels which the season brings, some of which are of unconscionable dimensions and of no small weight, for the English postal conveniences for an often somewhat unappreciative public, are liberal to a degree.

HARD WORK AT MOUNT PLEASANT.

Which is another and almost sarcastically euphonious name for London's general post office. At this wonderful distribution center there are not only millions of post cards, pictorial or otherwise, and letters, to be sorted and despatched daily, but it has a special department for the bulkier tokens, which are but too often carelessly and insufficiently packed, as "parcels." If you live east of England, and you receive a plum pudding from your friends in the Old Country, it is pretty sure to have come by way of Mount Pleasant. If you are a country cousin in England, and your London relatives send you something from the world's great shopping center, it is pretty sure to come through

Mount Pleasant. As I cannot trust my memory, I will quote my figures from a reliable source.

MILLIONS OF PARCELS.

In the ordinary way they deal here with 14,500,000 of letters and 750,000 parcels per week. In Christmas week the letters increase by 75 per cent., but the addition of the parcels is infinitely greater, for they are swollen, on an average, to the total of 2,295,000. No trade fluctuations can quite compare with this sudden and enormous increase of work at the post office. Mount Pleasant's normal staff of 4,100 employees is increased by 2,000 in the second half of December. Of these extra hands, 700 are required for the letters, and 1,300 for the parcels. Last midnight, 2,431 men were toiling their hardest to tidy up the appalling litter of Christmas packets and other posted things, which a thundering procession of vans showered remorselessly upon them. On Christmas eve, at the same hour, 2,600 men will be doing the same thing.

Every one of the parcels have to be handled, examined, noted, stamped, sorted, and made ready for instant departure at the precise moment that the service of successive van, train and boat must receive it.

At Mount Pleasant they have a department known to them as "the hospital," which is piled high with postal failures, the "breakdowns" of parcel life, not one of which can be trusted to arrive safely at its journey's end without a patching up in hospital. The following description is not my own, but it is from the pen of one who knew all about it from the inside point of view of the Mount Pleasant hospital for parcels at Christmas, 1909:

"The person who yesterday or on Tuesday sent a Christmas present of a white shawl and some other more intimate matters to a distant friend must not complain if she does not receive a letter of thanks as soon as she expected. The packing was atrocious. Half the shawl was protruding from the solitary and wretchedly thin sheet of brown paper, and the loosely-tied string was no sort of protection. With a fatherly care the superintendent of the parcels picks out this poor weakling from the society of its stouter brethren, and places it with the other invalids, guarding it from contact with that unpleasant-looking package which jam and pickles escaping, have united to destroy. In the 'hospital,' one sees experienced surgeons busily at work on the 'accidents' that came in last night. Here is a college cap lying bare amid the ruins of a hat-box. It is not part of their business, but they will find a new box for that dull gift, and the young man who receives it to-day will express surprised admiration of his sister's (?) packing, for all this charitable attention is given anonymously. One feels more sorry for the cock pheasant with the lost label. He is doubly dead, and will be sent on to the mortuary, known to the public as the 'Dead Letter Office,' where, if the body is not claimed by his friends in the course of a few days, it will (we are informed) be sold for post-mortem purposes and for the benefit of the nation. One of the commonest forms of treatment, where the casualty is superficial crushing of the cardboard, is the application of wooden splints. These are nailed across the length and breadth of the parcel, and should, say the opera-

tors, in all cases of structural weakness, be put on before the parcel goes to the post. They keep an illustrated journal recording the stranger cases that come into their hands. One such was a naked shillelagh, addressed some years ago, at an interesting period of politics, to the Speaker of the House of Commons. Why treatment was required before delivery, is not clear. A dilapidated brown-paper parcel, consigned to King Edward II., Westminster Abbey, Ingland, was also at one time an inmate of the wards.

GIFTS FOR THE CONTINENT.

To return to the parcels which are whole and need no repacking, some idea of the immensity of the influx and efflux of Christmas presents is to be gathered from the fact that the entire basement of the building, which is normally used for storage purposes, has been given up to 'the parcels,' and is replete with them. They are mostly 'foreign,' the Continental outgoings having risen from an average of 2,000 to 7,000 or 8,000 daily. The Christmas mail to India included 10,000 parcels, as against the average 3,000. One sees stocks of cricket bats, which form one of the more familiar articles of export to India through the medium of the post.

Of course, by appeals and notices, the public are urged to "post early" to avert this overwhelming congestion in the sorting-rooms. They might mark their packages "for delivery on Christmas day," but few do so, considering, maybe, that it would be a breach of sentiment to anticipate the date.

TOYLAND ON THE KERB.

Perhaps there could be no sight more touching, or more interesting, than that of the number of vendors of homemade penny toys, standing wherever possible along the kerblines of the London streets. Amongst these were many of the unemployed, endeavoring to earn a crust for their almost starving wives and children. I can see them mentally as I write, and can almost fancy I hear their voices as they thrust forward one ingenious toy after another, with, "Only a penny, lady! only a penny!"

Here an array of ducks are stretching out trembling necks. Heads are merely held on by a stitch, but who sees that when the row of necks are stretched in the half dusk? A penny aeroplane flies up and down on its slender thread, and fancy loads it with a gay company of aspirants towards the clouds. The smallest motor in London is spinning along at a rate unchecked by the authorities. It is a model of the City of London police ambulance, with a couple of officers in charge. For a penny you may buy a bank in the form of a native African, who shoots out a very red tongue when the coin falls into his hand. A watch and chain are tempting, particularly as the watch is a hunter in shape, and a big cigar makes the expectant smoker laugh when a fan springs out of it at a touch. Figures of mice run here and there, beetles are crawling in all directions, and goliwogs of the most forbidding aspect meet the eyes of the purchaser at every turn.

Girls' toys lend themselves remarkably well to this form of cheap production. Fairylake china dolls, with every limb movable, and with lovely golden tresses, are but a penny each, and on a tray there is a gilded tea-set; also a pedestal mirror with

triple glasses, that would adorn any doll's residence. A small toilet set in gilded metal is very neatly put together, and coal-scuttles, pots, kettles, fish-kettles, and so on, are all provided at a penny apiece. Novelties of the season are boxes fitted as work companions, with reels of cotton, thimble, scissors, and so on, quite satisfactory for small people who like to play at housekeeping, school-teaching, and other peaceful games of the kind. A mouse which pumps out of a matchbox is an ingenious creature, and there are one or two surprises of a similarly disconcerting nature.

All together, even as one of the experiences of Christmas, "In Toyland with a Penny," is not without its interests. An English shilling spent on behalf of the little ones amongst whom toys are rare, can provide them with a rich treat. Moreover, if a dozen children of varied classes are put together to play with a collection of penny toys, the chances are that the rich ones, provided they are unspoiled, forgetting the Teddy Bears of costly furs, the waxen beauties asleep on their nursery shelves, the models of quite large aeroplanes, etc., given them by rich bachelor uncles and relations to whom "money is no object," will get as much fun out of the assortment as youngsters who have never seen anything better.

In these brief reminiscences I have only made allusions to one short year ago, but doubtless the season which is now so near brings, especially to the old amongst us, many memories of Christmas happenings in the old land before they crossed the ocean and cast in their lot as sons and daughters of the Dominion. Can we not see the boys and girls sliding (not skating), ourselves amongst them, on the village pond, the wind shaking the rushes and frosted water-lilies on the brink? The bright fire, with its laughing sparks, of the blacksmith's forge; the tiny footprints of the red-breasted robin, or the heavier imprints of the fleet-footed hare on the occasional carpet of newly-fallen snow? Perhaps we should like to see again the real red-berried holly and mistletoe of our youth, and hear the sound of familiar voices, many now long passed away, joining as one in the Christmas Anthem of our old gray-towered village church; but, to all God's children, wherever they may find themselves at this holy season, the promise still stands as unalterably sure as when it was given in the stable at Bethlehem, that the birth of the Child Jesus was to bring with it "Peace on earth and goodwill to man." It surely rests with ourselves, wherever we may be, to make of the coming anniversary a holy and a happy day, even if circumstances preclude its being what is generally understood as "A Merry Christmas."

H. A. B.

The Windrow.

A trackless trolley is now being operated in Los Angeles.

The novelist, Mrs. Maxwell, better known as "Miss Braddon," although 73 years of age, is now working on a novel, the sixty-seventh of her literary career.

According to latest reports on going to press, the Tories have been hopelessly beaten in the British elections.

A substitute for steel, with the