

JUST BETWEEN OURSELVES

A Corner for Mother and the Girls.

A very happy and a very merry Christmas to you all!

"There's a song in the air!

There's a star in the sky!

There's a mother's deep prayer

And a baby's low cry!

And the star rains its fire while the beautiful sing,

For the manger of Bethlehem cradles a King."

—J. G. Holland.

Let's make this Christmas a truly happy and a sanely merry one. Truly happy; we are in danger of losing the true Christmas spirit, the spirit of joyful giving. To the children it is becoming more and more the "time when Santa comes and gives us toys." I know a little girl of eight or so who, from the earliest spring begins to talk of what she will get when Santa comes, never a word of what she will give. Poor child! what joy she is missing! In this age of "child worship" we are truly in danger of depriving the little ones of the purest and sweetest joy that should be theirs: the joy of giving.

Happiness is, after all, a state of mind, and if we grown-ups would achieve happiness this Christmas season we must first of all have "hearts at leisure." And how difficult that is! But one of the ways is, I think, to do all we can in efficient but unhurried fashion, and not fret about what we can't do. Also, not worry about what others can't, won't or at any rate don't do! After all, what does it matter? a happy face and restful manner, a gentle voice and sympathetic ear mean so much more than mere perfection of housekeeping or Christmas dinner, now don't they?

Let us be sanely merry too. Why do we all, or, well, nearly all (for of course you and I don't) overeat at the Christmas season? I heard of one family where the children were allowed to eat anything and everything they pleased on Christmas Day, then in the evening mother brought out a large bottle of castor oil, and every one, from father to the baby, had a generous dose! Well, that's one way of doing it, but one could imagine better ways of saving tempers and tummies on the 26th of December. Some of us, very wise perhaps with our own, still make things difficult for our friends by giving their little ones more than they should have when they come in to see the Christmas tree. Remember, they have probably had more than is good for them already—the other woman's children always have! Don't you think it ought to be the twelfth commandment: THOU SHALT NOT FEED THY NEIGHBOUR'S CHILDREN.

Christmas is a great time for story-telling, and there are so many beautiful stories that may be told! The best time is the evening, the best place around the fireside, and the best story-teller mother, of course, though father probably has undeveloped talents in that direction too. No other story can compare for simplicity and beauty with the story of the Nativity as recorded by the Evangelist Luke: "And there were in the same country shepherds, abiding in the field, keeping watch over their flock by night. . . ." Read it to the children, or, better still, tell it in just the way Luke tells it; you can't improve upon it, and you don't need to simplify it.

Next might come the story of "The Three Wise Men," as told by Matthew. Again the original is beyond the need for improvement or simplification. Outside of the sacred narratives Van Dyke's story of "The Other Wise Man" is one of the most beautiful Christmas stories ever written, and of course "The Christmas Carol," by Dickens, is the heritage of every English-speaking child. Besides these there are numerous stories published every year in the November or December numbers of the magazines which are suitable for telling aloud, and among them all you are almost sure to find

one or two at least that are of rare and unusual beauty. These deserve to be preserved and to "belong" specially to your Christmas celebration year after year.

How much of the joy of Christmas lies in happy memories! How well I remember the happy celebration on Christmas Eve when I was a child in Switzerland. It was at a boarding school, and in the evening, after the festive dinner, we all waited in the large hall upstairs while mother and the teachers of the school put the finishing touches to the large school-room that had been kept locked all day. The tinkling of a little bell was the signal. At last we heard it, and, formed in a procession of twos, we walked down the stairs. What an effort it was not to run! The school-room was ablaze with lights. Down at the far end was a noble Christmas tree that reached to the ceiling, and was trimmed with gilded cones and nuts, and draped from top to bottom with fine threads of silver and gold that shone in the light of a myriad candles. All around the room were little tables, labelled with the name of the person whose presents were there displayed. What twistings and turnings of heads to see where one's own table was! But present-time was not yet. We all stood in a group facing the tree, the servants on one side of us, the teachers and my own dear mother facing us at the foot of the tree, while the Head of the school read the Gospel account of the Nativity. Then we sang carols specially prepared for the occasion, and said our "pieces." How long the ceremony seemed then, how sweet it is in remembrance. At last it was over and we were free to look for our places in the row of presents. You may be sure we were enabled by previous surreptitious but searching glances, to make a bee-line for our own corner! There were mishaps sometimes, witness the time when my small brother received (among many other more frivolous and festive gifts) a bottle of cod-liver oil and an iron money-pig, and the two collided in the basket on the way home, with disastrous results to the rest of his presents—and ours!

How we've wandered on! Quite over our own column, I'm sure, but I must give you, in closing, this dear, whimsical little poem by Mary Carolyn Davies:

The Stars.

"The stars are lighted candles
Upon a Christmas tree;
(The branches that they hang upon
We can not ever see):
On Christmas Eve the angels stand
About it after tea.

And if an angel's very good,
He gets a present, as he should."

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