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For an Improved
Christmas
by **GRACE ARNOLD**



HE woman with brown eyes was gazing meditatively out of the window at the people hurrying through the falling snow with their Christmas bundles.

"You are thinking?" her husband suggested.

"About Christmas, that's all."

"We have left undone the things that we..."

"Not this time, my dear. Merely about everybody in the world."

"No one could call you narrow minded!"

"People have the right spirit about it," she explained. "They are so full of good will toward men that they try to do too much—that's the trouble! You see, most of us and our good intentions are hampered by average salaries and moderate strength."

"I've noticed it."

"We want to give to everybody. We want our homes supercruculously tidy. We plan festivities which require new party clothes for the whole family, extra special cooking and preparation for guests."

"Then we set about doing these things. At first it goes well and we enthrall and complicate matters."

"At the beginning of Christmas week—with many frills deleted—we find ourselves growing tired, awfully tired. But we see that it's impossible then to stop and rest. That's where the strain begins. We feel compelled to finish what we've started and to carry the program through to the last item of buying, making, packing and shipping."

"Unexpected demands interrupt. Then the strain begins to tell on our nerves. Perhaps we don't say anything for fear of spoiling Christmas for the others, but in our hearts we wish mankind had kept Christmas free from this sort of thing."

"When Christmas day comes we are too weary to bother about the true meaning of it all or to take very keen

pleasure in the results of our back-breaking work, much less to go out and hear beautiful music and uplifting sermons."

"I've always wondered why women attempt so much."

"Because everybody does. And if one poor, lone, sensible woman sits down and flatly refuses to kill herself working for Christmas, her family and friends will think she is a quitter—a social slacker."

"Well," suggested her husband, "why not let the rich people have all the fuss and feathers, and let those in medium circumstances realize they can't keep up that pace?"

"You don't understand," said the woman with the brown eyes; "as long as rich folks do it, those less able will strain to do likewise. That's why the wealthy people will have to see the trend and institute a change."

"In place of so many mere presents we must give such things as love, courage, kindness and generous impulses—things which our present physical and mental strain forbids. Throughout the rest of the year, if any one felt inclined to send a regular gift to a friend or relative, that could be done very easily and the recipient would know it was a voluntary, not a compulsory, remembrance."

"It's a great idea," said the brown-eyed woman's husband, cheerfully. "A bit of real affection in place of some of the monstrosities now exchanged would be a great improvement."

"You can make fun if you want to," she replied, "but when the world wakes up to the real meaning of Christmas—and the war I believe has helped to wake it up—you'll see the effect spread over the entire year. Then the first of January won't be associated with bills and pills, but with the genuine eagerness to live the next 12 months better than those preceding."

"In the meantime," sighed her husband dramatically, "I hope you haven't bought me another smoking jacket."

"That reminds me!" said the woman with the brown eyes. "I haven't time to be sitting here talking. And it won't be any of your affair until tomorrow morning, anyway." — Chicago Daily News.

A Quietude
Romance
By **T. B. ALPERSON**



POVERTY and pathos, gentility and blighted hopes, aspirations and hidden emotions—all these played a part in the dull experience of the odd ten people who had lived year in and year out at Mrs. Rhoda Markham's city boarding house.

Its proprietress was a good-hearted woman, but the constant grind had worn her out.

As Christmas approached, however, the faded, but faithful old eyes brightened, for, though poor and humble, her little coterie were generous souls and a special purse was her reward when the Christmas tree gave up its treasure.

Miss Myrtle Deane had occupied the best room in the house for over three years. She lived on an annuity of limited value, and although twenty-eight, retained much of the freshness and charm of girlhood.

Reuben Willis, thirty, and a bachelor, a silent, retiring man, filled a subordinate position in a bank, and, it was said, came of a once wealthy family and his actions showed his good breeding.

"It's bound to be a match," prophesied Mrs. Mayhew, a widow boarder.

"If they only weren't too poor to think of it," suggested Mr. Bascom, who was coarse and practical.

Everybody in the boarding house took part in the preparations for and the celebration of Christmas.

The tree was trimmed and the packages of mutual presents piled about its base. Then Bascom started a vigorous propaganda in favor of each person hanging their stocking in front of the fire-place.

Miss Deane grew rosy at the suggestion and Willis tried to escape to his room, but it was of no avail.

There was vast chattering and jollity as after breakfast next morning there was an adjournment to the sitting room. The master of ceremonies, Bascom's eyes twinkled.

Whether the stockings were apportioned, for he was a practical joker, Willis noted that his stocking was bulging and heavy. He peered within it, then showed a lump of coal and a raw potato.

Somehow his heart was chilled. Trivial as was the incident, it came like a direct blow in the face. Was the erratic, donation a slurring reminder of his poverty? All at once the barrenness of his lonely life overcame him in full force. He went up to his room gloomily.

A servant knocked at the door and handed him a letter. Mechanically he opened it and then sprang to his feet, white to the lips and quivering all over. He stood like one in a maze. There was a second timid summons at the door. Willis opened it to face Mrs. Deane, a parcel in her hand.

"Will you please step into the hall," she fluttered, and he thought how lovely she looked in her fresh, dainty morning dress.

"Mr. Willis, I hope the practical jokes of Mr. Bascom have not been taken by you as an affront. He did the same thoughtless thing with all of us. And you ran away before we could give out the presents. Here is yours, a trifling gift, but I hope it will please you, because I made it myself."

Willis parted the tissue paper to disclose a pair of knit house slippers.

His heart warmed toward this modest, lonely gentlewoman, who had devoted so many hours to show her friendly esteem.

"I cannot express how I appreciate them," he said, and then a quick impulse swayed him. The letter in his pocket reminded him of a vast change in circumstances and fortune. "They make me think of home," he added in a tone of pathetic reminiscence. "Miss Deane, we would know how to appreciate a home, you and I, wouldn't we now?"

The fair lady sighed. A dim blur of tears crossed her eyes.

"If I had one," continued Willis, coming closer to her, "would you share it with me?"

There was a sob and Miss Deane wavered. Willis tenderly clasped her waist. He knew she had given assent to her shrinking way.

"I have just received a letter from the lawyer of a near relative apprising me of the fact that I have been made his legatee," announced Willis. "It is a fine present, isn't it? But the best gift Christmas can give me is your own dear self."



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Gazing Meditatively Out of the Window.

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REBELS DRIVEN FROM MUZQUIZ

Villa Troops who Captured Town Driven Out and Have Fled to Mountains.

Eagle Pass, Texas, Dec. 12.—The Villaistas who captured Muzquiz, Coahuila, Tuesday were driven out of the town today and have fled to the mountains, according to Mexican Consul G. M. Sequin, tonight. Francisco Villa was in command of the forces, the consul announced, following a visit to military headquarters in Piedras

pected to reach Muzquiz Saturday morning, while one thousand government troops under General Truñeda are moving from Chihuahua with the intention of intercepting the fleeing Villa forces, according to Consul Sequin. The federals are now in complete possession of Muzquiz, he added.

No official report as to casualties and prisoners in the fighting between federals and Villaists had been received in Piedras Negras tonight and de Negras, opposite Eagle Pass.

Gen. Francisco Murguía with nine train loads of federal troops is expected to reach Muzquiz Saturday morning, while one thousand government troops under General Truñeda are moving from Chihuahua with the intention of intercepting the fleeing Villa forces, according to Consul Sequin. The federals are now in complete possession of Muzquiz, he added.

Unconfirmed reports received today said fighting had taken place at three points in the vicinity of Muzquiz. Further unverified reports said Villaists had blown up two federal troop trains and that Villa followers were approaching Piedras Negras.

Consul Sequin's statement that Francisco Villa commanded the troops operating around Muzquiz was the first intimation here that the bandit chieftain was in that section. Previous reports said Hipolito Villa commanded these forces.