

fierce and blue, a New Zealand dog, wilful and shaggy. That dog almost lolls a red tongue at us. It is as vivid as that. She saw keener for being away from us. Memory held up a clearer glass than sight. It would be hard to read those things in a strange country. It is to the docks one would turn to see the ships that would go by Pencarrow.

Christmas in the Country.

Christmas is for all a time of memories. It is odd that mortals never realise at the time that they are happy. It is when they look back that they know it, only when they look back, and just as in our journey the land we leave behind grows dimmer, sweeter, bluer, the hours we leave behind grow richer too. Is it the distance that makes those Christmases of childhood seem less flurried and more gracious than the Christmases of now? There were fewer pleasures in the country, but the simple pleasures are the best. There are no pictures in the country places, and the child is forced to invent its own joys. It turns to the creek, with its eels, the lagoon with its tadpoles, the trees with their cones, their berries, and their nests. Many a good game of hockey is played in the winter with manuka sticks, crooked roots wrenched from the bush, and the balls, very often, are the round small cones from the fir trees. In summer there were the long days by the water, with the fierce bitter smell of the wild parsley and the fennel, and the cool, sharp scent of the willow-weed as you trod it under foot. And the dragonflies, as bright as mica with their thin wings flashing as they flew! You kept away from them. Demoiselles, the French call them delicately. "Horsestingers," said Young New Zealand with a timorous eye upon their slender keels. They were always thick on the river at Christmas, the dragonflies, blue, and dreamy, and light.

The Countryside.

The countryside was deep in summer. The fruit was golden. One young apricot-tree with small bright fruit never cheated the countryfolk at Christmas. It ripened first of the year. And the cherries went before it, and with it, the wild red sour cherries, dripping juice where the birds had torn them, and the great black ones after that were veiled from the birds. And in the fields there was a white glimmer, the glimmer of corn that grows heavy for the reaping. In the small gardens, and every house in the country has its garden, there would be beanflowers climbing up the wall at the back, red flowers and white flowers, by great currant bushes with berries deeply streaked with black and with red. The skin off the black berries always looked tough and thick, but the skin on the red berries was clear as a pane. Lower down sometimes there were strawberries half hidden in green leaves, and sometimes too there would be a mulberry tree with its long berries glowing like old wine. In the flower gardens there was usually a walk of tall lilies. They grow them in lines down the garden paths there, and they stand up straight as high as one's shoulder with the little bees creeping out of them covered with gold. When I forget

thee, O Jerusalem! says the psalmist. When we forget thee, Aotea Roa!

There were poppies in those gardens, full-lipped and blowing red. The passion fruit with its crossed flower crept up along the fence and hung there till it was itself a flowery wall. And the sun beat down on the lilies till the very air became lilled. Nothing brings up the Christmas sense more sharply than the scent of those tall lilies.

The bushlands were cool always. The sun never got his way there, and the bees were quiet too. Only the smell of fern and of moist earth, the smell of earth, that never changes, and is the freshest scent of all, rose up there. The glossy myrtle and the rangiora and the snowberry bushes were as green as if the sun had no power over them. It was cool in the bush at noon.

The Preparations.

But when the week of Christmas comes there is little time for dreaming in gardens or by the river or among the rangiora in the bushlands. Every child is kept running by its elders. There are constant errands to the little village store for raisins and for spices. There are peas to be shelled in the cool kitchens, or cream to be brought in from the dairy. The little hands are kept busy, but it is a time of great expectations and murmurings are few. Sometimes a child is allowed to assist in the rites. Shredding raisins has a certain sacredness in connection with Christmas, and the child who has never cleaned currants or sliced peel has missed something out of life. An injustice has been done it, a wrong that should be righted, for the child has a sense for great mysteries and an instinct for service, particularly associated service. No child loves to work alone. Childhood makes its own guilds. Even the boys entered into those mysteries of preparation, sometimes in the kitchen, sometimes in the yards. Huckleberry Finns are still to be seen whitewashing long fences for the Christmas hour when mankind feels that soul, body, raiment, lodging, all should be cleaned and scoured against the coming of a Child. What is whiter than a child? Hence the sweeping, the scouring within and the whitewashing without. And the eggs are brought in from the paddocks; a lamb is killed for the feast. In the city these things come from shop counters. In the country they come straight from the fields. There is mint in its stalks from the garden, the green tender tops of the mint, cool lettuce, and sun-rounded fruit. What a day for the kitchens in the country!

Small Town Christmases.

We all know the Christmas in the city. The shop windows are as bright almost as a country garden, and down the hot streets a sea wind blows from the south. The shoppers hasten, and hasten. So much to do, and so small the time! Will it ever be done? Is it all remembered? Anything, anything to get out of the throng! But the small town Christmas is a different affair. The children and the mothers go to town in the daytime. For them it is an event of the year. It is a time of meetings. You meet your friends in town on Christmas Eve in

the provinces. The children meet and compare the toys that their savings have yielded them. The money that they earned for going for the cows, for gathering the eggs, for stringing birds' eggs, for cutting cocksfoot, is poured out now, recklessly, royally. The mother that used skim milk all the year is buying the biggest doll in the shop for her small one. It is truly a time of heedlessness. The sun beats down, the arms are burdened, but the feet do not drag, and the eyes do not tire of gazing.

All along the white sleepy roads with their hem of poplars and bluegums go the cars and the carts and the waggons. The country is going to town. And home they return at the sunset or in the long dewy twilight, laden and glad.

That is childhood's day, but youth goes forth at night into the small streets where the roofs are not too high to hide the Christmas stars.

And at the End.

However long we live, we who were born of the country, can we forget those Christmases of childhood? Advent will bring us always a hot scent of the heavy stalks of lilies, a shimmer of dragonflies' wings, a vista of country roads, white with dust winding into the blue distance where lay the magic town, and above all a heightening of the heart, a strange heightening that made the world seem almost too good in the sun, a sense of waiting for a better thing than even all the fruits and all meats piled on the board. It was that heightening of the heart that troubled shepherds on the hills above the town of Bethlehem.

NOEL.

On a winter's night long time ago  
*(The bells ring loud and the bells ring low),*  
 When high howled wind, and down fell snow  
*(Carillon, Carilla).*  
 Saint Joseph he and Notre Dame,  
 Riding on an ass, full weary came  
 From Nazareth into Bethlehem.  
 And the small child Jesus smile on you.

And Bethlehem inn they stood before  
*(The bells ring less and the bells ring more),*  
 The landlord bade them begone from his door  
*(Carillon, Carilla).*  
 "Poor folk" (says he) "must lie where they may,  
 For the Duke of Jewry comes this way,  
 With all his train on a Christmas Day."  
 And the small child Jesus smile on you.

Poor folk that may my carol hear  
*(The bells ring single and the bells ring clear).*  
 See! God's one child had hardest cheer!  
*(Carillon, Carilla).*  
 Men grown hard on a Christmas morn;  
 The dumb beast by and a babe forlorn.  
 It was very, very cold when our Lord was born.  
 And the small child Jesus smile on you.  
 —From Verses by H. BALLOO.

**Simpson's Wholesome Bread** WE SPECIALISE IN OAT CAKE 6d a packet  CARROLL STREET **Dunedin**