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The Quest of Christmas

The Catholic Mind

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Suite 4847, Grand Central Terminal New York, N. Y.

The Catholic Instruction League

JOHN M. LYONS, S.J.

General Director, Chicago, Illinois.

THE Catholic Instruction League in general makes an earnest plea for greater lay activity—especially along certain lines—in the vineyard of the Divine Master. In particular it appeals for lay-workers to engage in the highly spiritual, sorely needed task of aiding in the religious instruction of the age. There is at all times a world of religious instruction work needed and, for its accomplishment we require a vast army of trained and zealous teachers. One of the chief purposes of the Catholic Instruction League is and must be the promotion of *extensive* religious instruction.

That there is a widespread, crying need for religious instruction is evident from the fact that about 2,000,000 Catholic children in the United States alone are being educated out of Catholic schools and, as a consequence, large numbers are growing up without a knowledge of their faith. Considerable groups, too, in certain localities, though far into, or even past their "teens," have never been prepared for their first confession and Holy Communion.

The religious instruction problem, too, it may be observed, is not confined to the United States. It is, as we may learn from the hundreds of thousands of alien home-seekers who come each year from various nations to our shores, as wide as the great world we live in.

The subjoined comment on the religious instruction problem in France applies with equal force to a score of other countries that are predominantly Catholic. It is from the pen of a French missionary who is enthusiastic over the plan of the League. He writes:

"America is not the only country where there is scope for the work of your catechists. France loses annually thousands of her children to the Faith, because they are out of reach of the usual channels of religious instruction. I have a brother, who was a military chaplain during the great war. He had to deal with thousands of dying soldiers. He was struck above all by the ignorance of most

of them. He told me repeatedly that his aim in life hereafter would be to try to teach catechism to the children who do not attend Catholic schools." Hence, extensive catechetical work, "Catechism Centers" by the hundreds, must, for many a year, be the slogan of the League.

Another purpose of the League is the promotion of religious study clubs. Ever so many of the faithful are now anxious to gain a more thorough knowledge of the doctrines and practices of the Church. They keenly realize their deficiency in the knowledge of their religion and earnestly desire an opportunity to improve. They wish to understand and be able to give—especially to non-Catholic inquirers—a reason for the precious heritage of the faith they possess. They are disposed—even anxious—to assemble regularly and apply themselves—under the guidance of their pastors—to the study of their religion. This age of aircraft and radio marvels might with proper encouragement become in its spiritual strivings the age of religious study clubs.

A third purpose of the League is to stress the all importance of character formation in all educational work. Christian educators admit that the youth should go forth from his or her grade or high school, college or university—with a firm grasp of Christian ideals and principles and with the moral courage and steadfastness to live up to them. And what is this but an imperative demand for sterling Christian character? Unfortunately, however, many a teacher, in practice, altogether loses sight of this great essential.

The Catholic Instruction League pleads persistently—mainly by citing expert authorities—for this proper formation of character in all school work.

The League likewise earnestly concerns itself with the solution of what is becoming more and more clearly recognized as a most serious problem, namely the giving of religious instruction to Catholic children and young people in the rural districts. Forty-eight per cent of our American people, it is said, live in the country, and in many places are in sore need of religious instruction.

A problem in whose solution the Catholic Instruction League is deeply interested, is that of the spiritual care of state, county and city institutions for the

victims of bodily and mental ailments. The vastness and the importance of this problem from the standpoint of the Church is not, I think, generally understood and as a consequence the spiritual possibilities of public institutions of this character are not realized.

Each large State of the Union has its several insane asylums, hundreds of county and city hospitals, poor-houses, reformatories and detention homes. Almost all, too, have their institutions for what is known as high, middle and low grade feeble-minded.

In these various types of institutions are considerable numbers of Catholic men, women and children whose spiritual care is often overlooked. The Catholic Instruction League is doing and means to continue its humble efforts in behalf of the spiritual welfare of the inmates of such public Institutions.

On the last day of May, 1925, at St. Boniface Church, Noble and Cornell Streets, Chicago, some three hundred and twenty public school boys and girls received for the first time their Sacramental Lord. A week later, on Trinity Sunday, a similar class of over three hundred received their First Holy Communion in the Annunciation Church, a few blocks distant. In both of these parishes, too, in which for several years the Catholic Instruction League has been doing successful work it may be noted that there are excellent well attended parochial schools. As the class at St. Boniface is unusually large, typical of many others and is drawn from an extensive territory, including many public schools, it seems worthy of a special study. The first fact that may claim our consideration is that these 320 youngsters, as also the 308 of the Annunciation class, are from public schools—grade and high. Most of them had grown up, year after year, with practically no knowledge of God and His law, the saving and consoling truths of our holy religion being unknown to them. The highly efficacious and sorely needed means of grace, prayer and the sacraments of Penance and the Holy Eucharist were likewise not within their reach.

It may further be noted in this study that these children are types of tens, I may say scores, of thousands of Catholic children not attending our schools throughout the length and breadth of this great Christian land. About

one-half of our Catholic children, two million approximately, are not attending parochial schools and large numbers are not reached and given religious instruction. There is even a type of pastor who practically does not believe in giving religious instruction to our public school children. That this is altogether at variance with the expressed mind of the Church, on this point, is shown from these pronouncements. In an Instruction of the Holy Office to the Bishops of Switzerland in 1886, the Holy See declares that "pastors, by virtue of their office, must put forth every effort to have such children instructed in the truths of faith and the practices of religion and that no excuse—neither the lack of success, nor the hope of keeping others from non-religious schools by abandoning to eternal death those children that frequent them, nor the fear that the faithful might thence conclude that it was lawful to attend such schools—would justify either Bishop or pastors in neglecting these children."

And more recently our illustrious Pius X of happy memory, in his encyclical on "The Teaching of Christian Doctrine," declares, "We do decree and strictly command that in all dioceses throughout the world the following regulations be observed and enforced: Where there are public academies, colleges and universities, let religious doctrine classes be established for the purpose of teaching the truths of our faith and the precepts of Christian morality to the youths who attend such public institutions wherein no mention whatsoever is made of religion."

The mind of our present illustrious Pontiff Pius XI, in regard to the religious instruction of such children and others is impressively set forth in the Brief in favor of the work of the Catholic Instruction League. We may justly say that this question is no longer debatable.

As regards the ages of these children, they range from eight to eighteen. The average age of the entire class has been carefully worked out and found to be over twelve years. Almost 100 of the class have passed the age of 13 years.

You naturally ask: How were these children gathered and by whom were they instructed? In answer I cannot do better than repeat the rules for the organizing and carrying on of League classes, of which there are scores

in various localities, including large cities, small towns and the rural districts. These districts are taken from "Leading Features of the Practical Plan of the Catholic Instruction League" and are proving helpful in such varied cities as: Chicago, Milwaukee, Omaha, St. Louis, Springfield, Ill.; Albuquerque, N. M.; Tampa, Fla.; Pine Bluff, Ark.; Tulsa and Oklahoma City, Okla. In some small towns and rural districts, too, of Illinois, Mississippi, Oklahoma and New Mexico, these same directions are proving serviceable.

The plan of the Catholic Instruction League, in brief, is to reach those neglected children by means of the public schools and mainly through the Catholic, and often even non-Catholic ladies, who are teaching those children in the public schools. It is a plan whose practical worth has been proved by several years' test. Those ladies, in fact, are the only ones who can reach such children, for it is the common complaint of pastors that large numbers of Catholic public school children cannot be made to attend the "Sunday Catechism Class," nor even to go to Mass. The public school teachers, and this is the strongest point in our League, have been able, for the past dozen years, without any violation of any public school rule or law—in a perfectly legitimate way—to encourage large numbers to do both the one and the other. All such encouragement, however, must be given outside of school hours and away from the school premises. There must absolutely, of course, be no proselytizing.

The Origin of the League

JOANNA LYONS, B.S., M.D.

THE plan of the League was the outgrowth of long consideration of the problem of securing religious instruction for Catholic children who do not attend the parochial schools—perhaps the greatest problem which confronts the Church in this country.

Seven years of observation and experience on Chicago's West Side, where the incursion of a mixed foreign population had profoundly altered the character of many a

strong old parish, as well as seven years of ministering to the cosmopolitan tide of humanity which surges through the County Hospital—the city's great public hospital—had impressed upon Father Lyons the sad truth that very great numbers of the children of Catholic parents in this country grow up with little or no knowledge of religion and so are lost to the Church.

With the Catholic schools provided where means were forthcoming and crowded to the doors, with the resources of the clergy and of the teaching orders already taxed to the limit, half or more than half of our Catholic children were left outside the pale of steady, systematic religious education and dependent upon what irregular crumbs of instruction might come their way. The problem of providing for these was an immense one; material resources were far from adequate to procure necessary school buildings and equipment. But the greatest difficulty of all lay in the fact that those to whom Catholics look to care for their schools were, even employing every effort, physically unable to cope with the vast numbers of Catholic children to be educated religiously. The situation was depressing, difficult, but not hopeless. It called for the employment of some new force.

If the clergy and the sisters were not enough to care for so many, to whom must recourse be had? Obviously to zealous lay Catholics who should gather these children when and where they could, teach them the catechism and prepare them to receive the sacraments. While schools were being built and teachers being procured, a whole generation was growing up with little religious training and passing almost wholly from the influence of the Church. This would be an emergency measure; not an ideal system, indeed; a half loaf; a makeshift, if you will, but some beginning, some point of attack upon the problem. It was to be a guerilla warfare, or, better still, mobile, light-armed forces were to be formed to precede the solid ranks of the well established parish and the fully equipped parochial school.

The employment of lay catechists was no new thing, but the potentialities of their use had never been fully tested. There were those who questioned whether lay Catholics would respond to a call for their services and

whether work carried on so informally, as it were, would be productive of solid and lasting good. The League, looking back upon an experience of thirteen years, does not hesitate to answer both questions with an emphatic "Yes."

In the spring of 1912 the Catholic Instruction League had its modest beginning. At Father Lyons' suggestion, Mrs. Lillian Kubic influenced eight or ten little girls, who were attending the public schools and were sadly in need of instruction, to come regularly to her home for a sewing class with a catechism lesson added. The class went on for some weeks until, on May 20th, six of these children were confirmed at the Church of Our Lady of Pompeii. Archbishop Quigley administered the sacrament. Father Lyons, as well as the zealous lady who had done the instructing, were present. It was on this occasion that Father Lyons, in a private interview with the Archbishop, unfolded to him his plan of assisting pastors in catechetical instruction by means of lay catechists. He asked approbation of the plan, provided the pastors did not object. Archbishop Quigley thought highly of the idea and willingly gave his approval. This was the first approval of the work taken up by the yet unnamed and unorganized Catholic Instruction League. These six little girls were the vanguard of an army of several scores of thousands of children who have been instructed by the League in the ten years of its existence.

This slender beginning was followed the next month by the opening of the first regular class, or center, as the classes afterwards came to be called. It was in a store building at 20th and Loomis Streets, a building which housed a branch of the parochial school of St. Procopius' (Bohemian) parish. Seven teachers, who had been interested in the work by individual appeals on the part of Father Lyons, taught in small groups the children who came in response to an announcement of the pastor that catechism classes for children who did not attend the Catholic school were being opened. These classes were held after school hours twice a week. Twenty-nine children appeared the first day. Some time later this number had grown to ninety-six. Considerable hostility to the work was shown in this neighborhood. Annoyance was experienced from children who would beat upon the

door, throw pebbles and shout in at the windows.

This, however, was a small matter and the work went on. It presently began to show fruits. On August 7th, seven children, ranging in age from thirteen years to six months, were baptized. The same summer or autumn a class of eleven made their first Confession, and on December 7th twelve children received their first Holy Communion. The following May, about a year after the opening of the Center, a class of thirty-six children prepared by the Catholic Instruction League, received their first Holy Communion. These were not spectacular results, but in the opinion of Father Lyons and his workers they were well worth all the work and effort expended.

The first marked success of the movement was made in another Bohemian parish, that of St. Agnes, 2651 S. Central Park Avenue, where the second center was opened, also in June, 1912. Its beginning was not auspicious. On the day appointed for the opening the teachers assembled, but not a child appeared! This was in spite of the fact that the pastor had given the matter publicity at the Masses of the preceding Sunday. The situation was disconcerting, but after a conference between the teachers, and Father Lyons it was decided that, the mountain having failed to put in an appearance, Mahomet should go out and look it up. Accordingly, Father Lyons went about the neighborhood doing a little personal canvassing. He met children in the streets, or went to the houses. After varying introductory remarks, the conversation usually took some such turn as this:

"Are you a Catholic?"

"Yes."

"Where do you go to school?"

"I go to the public school."

"Would you like to come to the Bohemian church next Tuesday after school to a catechism class?"

"I don't know Bohemian."

Upon explanation that the class would be conducted in English and with, perhaps, the parting gift of a medal or a holy picture, the prospective pupil was left with an urgent invitation to come and bring others, if possible, to the next class.

Sometimes the question, "Are you a Catholic?" brought

the reply: "No, I am an American," uttered quite in good faith, for upon explanation of "Catholic" the youngster readily declared he was one.

At the next meeting of the class, sixteen or eighteen Bohemian children attended. A small number, but one which quickly grew to eighty. These were carefully instructed all summer by the devoted women who gave their services as teachers, and on October 6, 1912, a class of seventy-six received their first Holy Communion. The parents turned out enthusiastically and the event was made a great occasion in the parish.

Meanwhile more children were being added to the classes at this center. Evening classes had for some time been a feature of the work.

Classes went on in the center under the Catholic Instruction League teachers, with some interruptions, until 1920, when the work was taken over by the sisters, who still conduct it. During the time the classes were in charge of the League, about one thousand children in this center were instructed and received first Holy Communion.

HOW TO ESTABLISH A CATECHISM CENTER

1. Obtain the permission of the Pastor in whose parish the "Center" is to be established, and afterwards make no arrangements without consulting him.

2. Arrange for a meeting of the ladies and gentlemen who are to act as teachers for the "Center." At this meeting decide, if possible, upon the days, hours, and place of instruction. A superintendent to direct the classes might be either appointed by the Reverend Director or elected by the catechists themselves. This appointment or election should take place annually.

3. Request the Pastor to announce on Sunday the opening of the instruction class. It is desirable so to arrange the Sunday class as best to secure the attendance of the children at Mass. Wherever possible, conduct a Sunday, in addition to the week-day class.

4. Let the teachers meet the children at the "Catechism Center" at the appointed times. The number at first may be small, but urge those who attend to bring others for the next class. Rewards may be given to those who do

so. The teacher, too, or the quasi truant officer of the "Center," might, as occasion demands, send out notices, visit homes, etc.

5. Arrange the children in groups of eight or ten in different parts of the church, hall, or private residence, and assign a teacher to each class. Classes may, of course, be larger, even twice as large, if necessary.

6. Let each instructor ordinarily begin with a short rehearsing of the common prayers, such as the Our Father, the Hail Mary, the Creed and an Act of Contrition.

7. In the teaching of the regular lesson, effort should be made that the children grasp the meaning of the lesson rather than recite it word for word. Learning by heart, however, is to be commended, and with some classes may be insisted upon. The catechists should, as far as possible, try to make these religious instructions as concrete and practical as can be. Charts, pictures, appropriate examples and stories may, if circumstances permit, be made use of. Insistence upon daily prayer, Sunday Mass, etc., should find a place in every lesson.

8. A Bible History and Christian Doctrine class should be provided for those who have already made their First Communion, and special efforts made to have them continue their instruction as long as possible, and above all to go frequently to Holy Communion.

9. At the close of the instruction, the children should be reminded by their respective teachers to return for the next lesson, to study at home—to tell others of the class, etc.

10. Before the dismissal of the various classes all the children should be assembled in one place for the singing of hymns and for a short general instruction, to be given by the Reverend Pastor or by some one appointed by him. Play, too—games of some sort, when possible, is advisable.

11. The superintendent of the entire "Center" should take care to carry out the wishes of the local Director—that is, of the priest in whose parish the "Catechism Center" is located.

12. A book containing a record of matters pertaining to the "Center," such as the names and addresses of both teachers and pupils, etc., should be kept by the superin-

tendent or by some one appointed by her. Each teacher, however, should keep a record of his or her own class and take a list each day of the "absentees." Should it be impossible at any time for a teacher to attend, let a substitute be procured, or at least let the superintendent receive timely notification.

13. A few words announcing the opening of a new "Center" and an occasional word concerning its progress should be sent to the Diocesan Director. The officers at the headquarters of the Instruction League, although, of course, not assuming any direction over distant "centers," would appreciate a similar account. Address this letter to Catholic Instruction League, 1076 W. Roosevelt Road, Chicago, Ill.

14. Catechists are urged to teach the children in their charge proper respect for all lawful authority, insisting that they be obedient to their teachers, to their parents, and to their pastor. They should, too, as opportunity offers, implant in their tender minds and hearts a high esteem and loyal love of their country, its ideals and institutions. Patriotism, love of country, the children should be made to realize, is a noble virtue that is demanded of all.

15. Every "Catechism Center" should, as far as circumstances permit, have its vacation school. Sewing and basket weaving classes, games and occasional outings, as well as special religious instructions, should be provided during the summer for the children and young people of each "Center."

16. Catechists are exhorted often to pray, especially to the Sacred Heart of Our Divine Lord, and to have others pray for the success of their pupils.

FERTILE FIELDS FOR THE CATHOLIC INSTRUCTION LEAGUE

A type of parish often met with in the United States, and one in which the Catholic Instruction League might be of help, is the following: (1) An English-speaking parish, into which a large, or at least a considerable number of foreign-born Poles, Italians, Lithuanians, Bohemians, Hungarians have settled. No priest of their own nationality being obtainable, these are often practically

neglected for years, waiting till a priest, church and school can be supplied for them. In the meantime their children are attending the public schools and growing up without instruction. Large numbers of them never receive their First Holy Communion; in a few years they are hopelessly indifferent, or have married out of the Church—are among the ranks of "Ought to be Catholics." Is it surprising that it is so? Is it not the logical and only to be expected result?

But suppose a band of zealous Catechists from the nearby English parish had arranged, under the direction of the pastor, to go to that little colony and instruct their children once or twice a week—that they had prepared them for Confession and Holy Communion, encouraged them, even brought them to the English Church to Mass, etc., how many sad spiritual tragedies would have been averted. They would have been saved, as a body, to their religion; saved from the socialists and proselytizers, or from joining the so-called 'Big Church.'

Another common enough type of parish is that which is made up almost entirely of some foreign-born nationality. Their school is large in numbers, but still does not contain more than two-thirds or three-fourths, perhaps, of the children of the parish. The other third, for one reason or another (certainly not on account of any fault of the children), attend the public school. And where and how are they instructed? Sometimes they receive a little—a very little instruction—often they are not reached at all. The result is, after a few years, a plentiful crop of those who have never made their First Communion, who seldom go to Mass and are quite willing to marry out of the Church; finally they are in the ranks of the 'Ought to be Catholics'—they are a part of the 'Leakage.'

Suppose the pastors, in addition to their excellent parochial schools, had had a thorough, all-year-round Catechism class, taught in English by a select body of Catechists—would not matters have a different standing there today? My reason for saying that this class should be taught in English is that "no other tongue can successfully be used in teaching public school children."

The third type is the common example of an English-

speaking parish whose parochial school only reaches one-half or two-thirds of its children. This is, unfortunately, a very common type.

Lastly, there is the "No Catholic School Parish" which is to be met with in certain districts, in large cities and in country districts, where the little "red school house" is much in evidence. The League of course is most needed, and has its best field, in this type of parish.

Pius XI Pope for a Perpetual Remembrance

IN the city of Chicago, at the Loyola University of the Society of Jesus, exists the principal center of a certain pious Society for Catholic instruction, named "The Catholic Instruction League." In the year 1912, John Lyons, a priest of the aforesaid Society of Jesus, with the approbation of the Archbishop of that Archdiocese, founded this society, the principal object of which was the religious instruction of Catholic boys and girls, who attend the public schools. But other ends were also proposed to this fruitful Union; namely, to devote itself to the preparation of children and adults for Confession and the reception of First Holy Communion; to the erection of well-equipped, suitable schools for the Negroes, the Chinese and others whose religious instruction so many in the United States of North America neglect; to the promotion of the parochial schools; and finally to offering suitable and opportune instruction to Catholics and non-Catholics of good will who desire instruction concerning the Church's dogmas and morals.

Perceiving the abundant fruits which this praiseworthy Pious Union has from its beginning to this present day garnered in many places, many Bishops and parish priests have desired that centers of this Union be established in their midst. Consequently, it has grown beyond the Archdiocese of Chicago and has been established not only in twenty different dioceses of the United States, but also in other countries.

Wherefore, since the Procurator General of the Society of Jesus has besought us with earnest prayers that We of Our Apostolic liberality deign to raise the center of

this same Union, which as noted above, is established at the Loyola University of Chicago, to the dignity of a Primary, We, to whom in accordance with the established custom of the Roman Pontiffs it is pleasing that fruitful sodalities, which, as auxiliary cohorts of the Church Militant, aid the clergy in the exercise of the sacred ministry, be enriched by titles and privileges, have judged that we should most gladly accede to these entreaties.

Wherefore, after taking counsel with the Cardinal Prefect of the Congregation of the Council, We, of Our Apostolic authority, by virtue of these present Letters, elevate for all time this Pious Union called "The Catholic Instruction League" to the dignity of a PRIMARY UNION with the accustomed added privileges.

To this Pious Union, thus raised by us to a Primary do we grant by the patent of these present Letters a lasting permission to rightly aggregate to themselves any other Unions of the same title and institute, canonically erected in any part of the world, and they can licitly communicate to them all the Indulgences conceded to this Pious Union of Chicago, or any others which may be granted by the Holy See, provided these same can be communicated to others.

Intending to perpetually enrich this Pious Union with special indulgences, after having conferred with the Cardinal Major Penitentiary, We, confiding in the mercy of the Omnipotent God and the authority of his Apostles Blessed Peter and Paul, grant to each and every one of the Faithful, who shall in future enter this Pious Union, on the day of their entrance, provided they have contritely confessed and received the Most Blessed Sacrament of the Eucharist, a plenary indulgence.

And to those members now enrolled, as well as to those who in future will be enrolled in this aforementioned Union, at the moment of their death, provided they have contritely confessed and received Holy Communion, or if they have been unable to do so, they pronounce the name of Jesus with their lips if possible, or if not, at least they devoutly invoke Him in their heart, patiently accepting death as the wages of sin, a plenary indulgence.

Moreover, to those members now or in future enrolled

in this Union, after Confession and Holy Communion, on the feasts of the Blessed Virgin Mary the Mediatrix of all graces, of Saint Joseph the Spouse of the Virgin Mother of God, of the Holy Innocents, of Saint Agnes Virgin and Martyr, provided that once a week and at least for four months they teach catechism, We, mercifully in the Lord concede under the accustomed conditions, a plenary indulgence and remission of all their sins.

To each and every boy and girl, who attend the classes of this same Union, on the day when they first approach the Holy Table, and to the Catechists on the same day, provided they refresh themselves at the Sacred Banquet with the children, We mercifully bestow under the accustomed conditions a plenary indulgence and remission of all their sins.

To each and every one of the present and future members of this Pious Primary Union, provided they teach the children the Christian Doctrine at least twice in the month, We grant in the accustomed form of the Church a partial indulgence of seven years, to be gained once in the month.

This We ordain, decreeing the present Letters to be of force, valid and efficacious, now and in the future, and to have and obtain their plenary and integral effects, and to most fully approve that Union, named "The Catholic Instruction League," thus raised by Us to the dignity of a Primary; and any attempt against these made by anybody or any authority, either knowingly or unknowingly, shall be judged and defined as null and void.

Lastly, We wish that the same faith be placed in printed copies of these Letters, provided they be subscribed to by a Notary Public or sealed with the seal of a person of ecclesiastical dignity or office, as would be in these present Letters, were they exhibited or shown.

Given at Rome at St. Peter's under the Ring of the Fisherman, the 9th of August, the year, 1925, the fourth of our Pontificate.

Pius XI. Pont. Max.

P. CARDINAL GASPARRI.

The Quest of Christmas

JOSEPHINE MACDONALD

Reprinted from "Columbia"

THERE is scarcely a feast of Christianity that has not its wealth of legend and story, and Christmas is richest of all in these colorful little glimpses of unwritten history. They are quaintly beautiful flowers from the seeds of truth, these legends, colored, sometimes vividly, sometimes delicately, with the imagination of generations, but in their significance as strong and as assertive as fact. In this Christmas month we might recall the legend of old Befana, the woman who was too busy to catch the spirit of the first wondrous Christmas season.

Befana lived in a town through which the three Wise Men passed on their way to Bethlehem. For the whole length of their journey, these men were greeted by all who could flock to the roadside either to join them in their search for the Holy Child or to give them gifts to bring to Him. And when they came to Befana's town, there too, they were hailed by all the townspeople, who gathered to accompany them or to send messages and gifts to the Infant King. All but Befana.

"Fain would I go with them," Befana said, "or see them, at least, that I might send gifts to the Child; but I am too busy now with the work of the house. I have many things to do. I shall see the good men on their return and shall hear the news of the Christ. Then shall I find Him and pay Him homage." And she continued with her household tasks.

But the Wise Men returned by another route while Befana waited in vain for news of the King. Finally, despairing of seeing the Wise Men again, she set out to find the Christ Child. And to this day she wanders, old and infirm, about the earth, seeking Him that she may offer Him her late gifts and praise.

That is the legend, the story of poor old Befana with her distorted sense of what was really worth while, and has it not more truth in it than many an historic fact?

For even today there are Befanas who are too busy to find Christ at Christmas. They are the ones who trim the Christmas tree and forget the Crib, who accept their

gifts and forget the Giver, and who light the candles and forget the Star and where it is leading. They have old Befana's lack of balance. Their concern for the little things of life is so absorbing that they will not stop to learn what the big things are; or their pursuit of happiness is so eager that they will not pause to learn first what happiness is. And by the time they realize their inconsistency, it is too late. Life is spent, and there is only the melancholy searching for something that passed them long long ago and they neglected to notice.

Don't be too busy to catch the spirit of Christmas. And don't be too old. One hears, "Oh, Christmas is only for children." It is, indeed, but hearts, not years, are the passports to the childhood that feels Christmas cheer. Christmas is only for children — for children of God, whether their heads are tousled and golden or crowned with snowy white. They alone can know the fulness of its joy.

We are a strange and inconsistent race. If you don't believe it, look at our Christmas cards. As an old Irishman once said, "Shure an' we moight as well be celebratin' a stockin' makers' day or a turkey growers' union, for all we'd learn o' the Lord in the manger from thim things."

Cards are small things, but how significant they could be if we would select them with a little more thought of the day. The trouble is that, as a class, we are very much inclined to take things as we find them. If enough of us would ask for what we want and show some hesitation at taking what we do not want, the dealers would be only too glad to try to accommodate us. More requests for Christmas cards that reflect the feast will soon create a demand that will bring out a supply. Let us be logical and request them.

"Christmas is Christmas all the world o'er." Christmas Eve is Christmas Eve, too, with all its expectancy and the children's eagerness. It is a delight to read of the customs of many lands on this eve of the birth of Christianity,—their differences in detail with their similarity in spirit.

In Belgium the little ones are polishing their shoes and filling them with hay, oats, and carrots for Santa Klaus'

white horse. Mantels in France are ranged with rich little slippers or poor little sabots, waiting for the Christ Child who will fill them with bonbons. Spanish shoes are out too, but under the bushes near the house, not too well hidden for fear that Little Jesus might overlook them.

Father Christmas is back in England again, hale and hearty after his banishment by Cromwell, hauling in the Yule log as in days gone by. In Mexico, laughing crowds throng the streets in revelry until the Cathedral bell recalls their dignity and they throng to Midnight Mass.

In Northern Germany, candles are burning tonight in the windows and little tables are spread with good things to eat, that the Virgin and the little Christ, passing in the cold and darkness, may find the welcome they were denied many centuries ago.

In Nicaragua, all roads lead to the cathedral for Midnight Mass, and in each home a cradle is waiting for the image of the Infant Jesus, to be borne from the church to one of the houses. Perhaps it will go to the richest home, perhaps to the poorest; or it may go to a mother lately bereft of a child, to comfort and gladden her.

While in Ireland, you must know that:

“Not a cabin in the Glen shuts the door till day,
Lest the heavenly travellers come, knock again in vain.
All the night the dulcimers, flutes, and hautboys play,
And the angels walk with them.”—Katharine Tynan.

Christmas should be a day of joy. It should be a day of homecomings and welcomes, of wide-eyed wonder for the children, and greetings more hearty than usual for the neighbors and friends. It should be a day of home and cheer and peace and love. And it is all this for most of us.

But Christmas is very close to the human heart, and the human heart is sensitive. It yearns for these natural joys then, though it may throw off the yearning through all the rest of the year. And so Christmas may be a bitter-sweet day, a lonesome, homesick day for some. This is something we must not forget.

It is for those of us who have been blessed with family and home to share them on that day with the lonesome ones, or who have something beyond bare necessities to share with those who are desolate. None should be poor at Christmas, either in friends or in gifts. We can help

to make Christmas the day it should be by opening our homes to friends who are homeless or far from home, and by giving to the poor.

To invite friends means only an expenditure of a little courtesy. To visit the houses that Santa forgets means only a little time and no more money than one usually spends at Christmas. We need only suggest to those with whom we usually exchange gifts that we "pool" the expected costs and buy something for the needy. Everyone is only too glad to agree with the suggestion, for who would not prefer to give a dinner to a poor family rather than a stupid boudoir cap to Jane, or a doll or drum to a little one who prayed for it at a discouraged mother's knee rather than an unwearable necktie to Tom? Happily, this custom of giving to the poor rather than exchanging gifts is growing every year, particularly among our Catholic people.

If you do not happen to know of a needy family, your priest or the St. Vincent de Paul Society of your parish can tell you of many whose Christmas Day you can brighten with a good dinner or a few gifts. If you prefer, you can turn the money over to such a parish society or a diocesan charity bureau, thus relieving yourself of the necessity of planning and buying gifts, and assuring yourself that the money will be disposed of to good advantage.

When you were a child—and since then, too, if you have kept your romance—you wished that you had been in Bethlehem on that first desolate Christmas Eve, so that you might have given room to the Virgin Mother or some dainty little garments that her mother heart must have wanted for her baby. You felt a little disappointed at being born too late to help.

But Mary is the Mother of Men too, and in her love she shares her children's sorrows. She understands their desolation, their loneliness on Christmas Eve, oh so well! She will understand, too, your relieving it, as your compensation to her for that first Christmas Eve. You see, you were not born too late to help, after all.

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