

# A CHRISTMAS TABLE

By Mary Graham Bonner

Drawings by Ray Walters

THE snow glistened in the sparkling sunlight. The flakes of snow kept falling, falling. Some stopped to rest on the branches of the pine trees and the little leafless bushes. Some fell straight to the ground and made the snow grow deeper and whiter and softer.

In the center of the woods was a high throne upon which sat a King dressed in red, with fur of soft white which looked like snow, and on his head was a crown of gleaming jewels. Around the King sat the Royal Family. There were Princes and Princesses, the Queen and hundreds of pages. The King arose from his throne and spoke: "This is the greatest festival in the year,"

he said, "and its name is Christmas. It is the day of love and cheer and happiness. We give presents and we are given presents. We think of others and others think of us. It is the day to give! And I, your King, will now begin the celebrations."

The Queen was smiling. Her eyes were full of gladness and the Princes and Princesses were merry and gay.

"The day of giving," they were all saying. "The most glorious day in the year!"

The pages rushed about this way and that, and from all came the sound of music. The music grew louder and the voices seemed to come from everywhere. From all corners of the world it came as if there must be singing, and the King and Royal Family joined in the song. No one quite knew what was the name of the song, but everyone knew what the tune might be, but no one knew how everyone was singing it—for the song was the song of joy and the tune was happiness. And all knew that song, all knew its tune and throughout the world that day there was singing. Some did not know how to sing the words, some did not know how to make the sounds with their voices, but for these there was the music in their hearts—the love in their hearts for all the people under the sun.

But the pages had emptied before the throne packs with many different sorts of presents. And the King was presenting them to the Princes and Princesses. Then, came more and more presents, and more and more of the Royal Family appeared. For they were all arriving for the Great Festival. There were hundreds and thousands and they received presents and they gave presents. The singing went on, the music was mingled with laughter and the happy voices of children were heard.

Soon the children came trooping by. They passed before the throne and the King did not seem to frighten them. He did not seem to be a King of whom to be afraid. All his subjects seemed to love him and he seemed to rule with a sceptre of wonderful kindness. And as the children paused before the throne they said in whispers to each other:

"Look! On the throne is carved the words, 'Merry Christmas to all in the world this day!' And on the sceptre is written, 'Love—this is the guide to happiness.'"

And then on a mighty pine tree lights appeared and the snow flakes on the branches changed and drooped down heavily laden with presents.

And the tree spoke too:

"I am the Christmas tree. For years and years I have gone into homes each Christmas Day.

There are many trees but we all have the one name—the Christmas tree—and our

King bids us go to many a Christmas festival. Our branches hold gifts and candles of different colors to give the bright light of good cheer."

And from all around the children are opening stockings that they had found hanging on low branches, filled with oranges and candies, nuts and toys. While they were dancing and laughing as they opened many

mysterious little packages, the King spoke again:

"Good-bye to all," he said. "I will be back for the festival next year. Come my fine animals! Come my gorgeous chariot!"

Jingling of bells was heard—they were the Christmas bells on the Reindeers and up they pranced to take the King to his home far away. For the King was none other than Santa Claus!

And all of a sudden the scene changed and instead of one great throne many homes could be seen—big homes and little homes, but in all there was a Queen—the mother of the children whom on Christmas Day Santa Claus calls his Royal Family.

Instead of Princes and Princesses they were all children. Instead of one great tree there were many trees. And in place of the sparkling snow and the woods there were fireplaces and green decorations and bright red berries.

For once a year Santa Claus dreams this dream—this Christmas fable. He sees not the hundreds of homes he has visited. He does not see the different mothers. He does not see the children scattered over the earth. He has been to many homes but to him it is all as one. And it is a true dream, too!

For every Christmas Queen is a mother with love in her heart, and there are the fathers who sit on the throne of Santa Claus on Christmas Day with "A Merry Christmas" inscribed in letters which only the children of Santa's dream can see, but which all the children of the world can feel. And the Royal Family—the Princes and the Princesses—they are all children. Not unusual

children, but usual children. They are the children who give joy just because they are children, and they are given pleasure because they too can give.

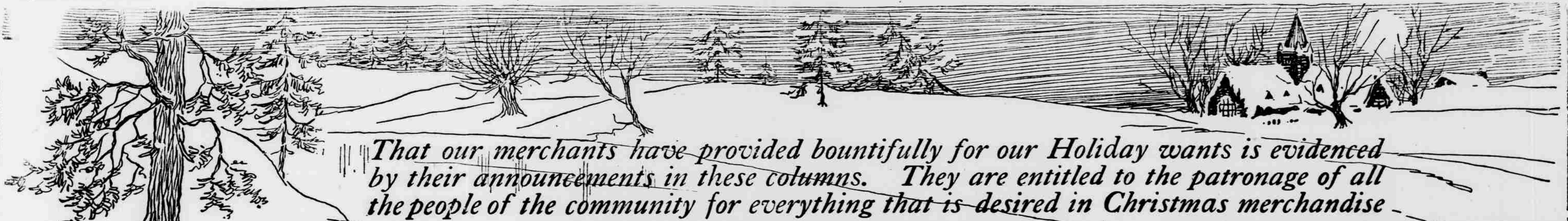
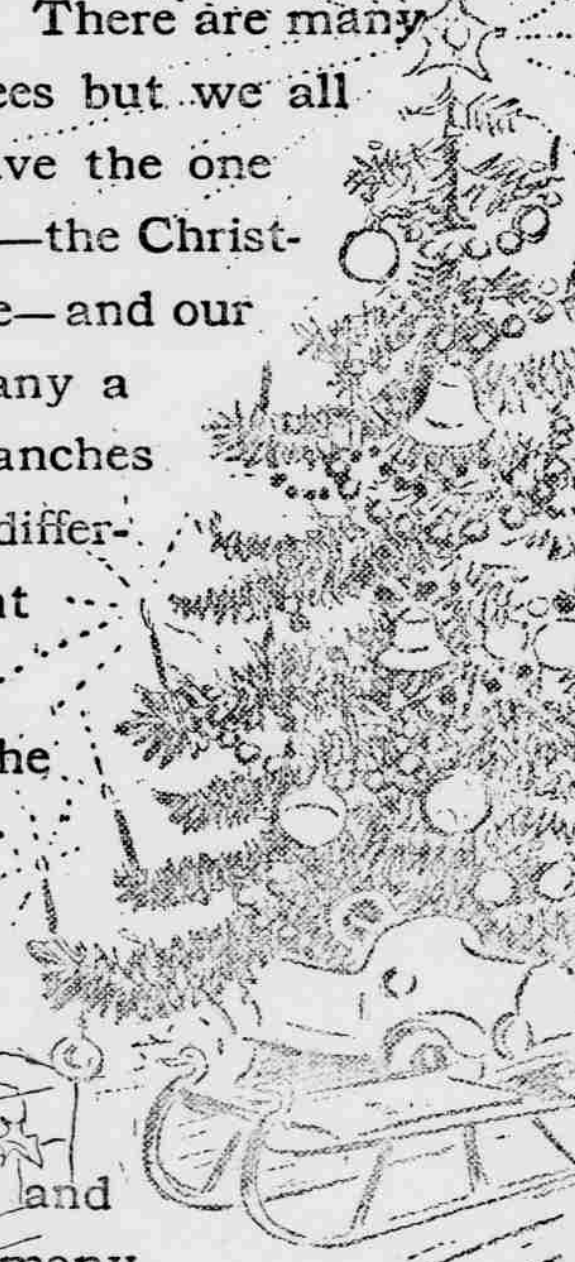
Yes, all over the world, in hundreds of homes after the visit of Santa Claus there is happiness. And because it is Christmas Day there is cheer and good will. And the gifts that Santa Claus receives are the smiling eyes and the merry

voices of children as they shout their delight over the Christmas festival.

He is the King—not of a country, nor of a land—but of a Day, Christmas Day, and his subjects are the Children of the World. For him there is this fable.

He can dream of the joy that is in the hearts of all on Christmas morning, while he is sitting on his throne and his chariot drawn by Reindeers is waiting to take him back home!

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