

For That Cold Christmas Evening

By GERTRUDE BROWN

COMFORTABLE, cozy evenings in front of a crackling, glowing fire; brisk invigorating walks or outings in a December world, general gaiety and joy, welcome homecomings—that's Christmas vacation. White-haired old folks, staid business brothers and sisters, college sons and daughters, tiny nieces and nephews or grandchildren, all must be included in the festive plans for the week.

Everyone will be bubbling over with laughter and talk the first evening; hence no one need feel responsible for any special entertainment, but if you're a clever hostess you'll plan something extra before your family or guests have completely talked themselves quiet. Christmas on the farm is usually a slack time as far as any pressing work is concerned. The evenings are long and everybody is ready for some recreation, something to make them forget the regular grind of humdrum everyday duties. There are old acquaintances to renew, the childhood pals whom your visitors have not seen for years, perhaps, or at least not since the previous Christmas. When you invite them in for the evening, don't let the radio be a substitute for all originality and ingenuity—rather call for an impromptu program. Someone will surely remember Eugene Field's "Jest 'Fore Christmas," Moore's "Night Before Christmas," or some of the other old country school program favorites. By the way, there's another suggestion—bundle up in furs and blankets, pile into the bob sled, and drive to some of the programs which the children always beg "teacher" to let them give. Songs and jokes and a lively team make the way short. The crowd will enjoy the wee tots' lisps and singsongs if they have with them the spirit of youth and Christmas. And the youngsters will be delighted to have them come.

If it's cold enough, plan to spend at least one evening on the ice. Nature is sometimes too lavish with her Christmas cheer; hence it may be well to provide shovels and boards with which to scoop the pond. But many hands make the task light, and the preliminary workout gives a good opportunity for getting acclimated. It's good sport to go gliding across the glass surface in twos, or pulling your best girl on a coaster sled. Give her a spill once in a while if there's a good big drift handy. Her squeals and threats, coupled with the catastrophes of the various skaters will add enough humor to the situation to make everyone's sides ache. A roaring fire with log seats arranged about it at one edge of the ice will furnish a comfortable refuge when lack of wind leaves one stranded or toes fail to keep themselves warm. Good juicy steaks from the winter's supply of fresh meat will fittingly cap the merrymakings.

I wonder how many folks have once upon a time played Rook, Somerset, Flinch, Carrom or Crokinole? Oh, yes, and there was another old classic—"Pig"! Even the most serious-minded young medic or law student will find his carefully preserved, much prized dignity vanishing into the future as he yells, "Two for trade; two for trade!" with his finger tightly glued to his nose all the time. It's this way: Use any cards such as Flinch and deal out a set number, say ten, to each player. When everybody is ready, start trading with the aim of getting all ten cards alike. As soon as one succeeds he puts his finger to his nose and keeps on shouting and pretending to want to trade. The others must get their fingers to their noses at once, the last one being "pig". Three times "pig" makes one a "hog" and puts him out of the game. Then no one can speak to him without suffering a like misfortune. There's one warning before starting: be sure that no one in the crowd has any nerves, for the noise will probably drive such an individual insane.

A more novel suggestion is to work out some psychology tests. Bring in a carefully covered tray holding several articles. Provide each person with paper and pencil and as soon as all are looking uncover the articles for one to two minutes depending on the number of things used. The test is to see how many things each can remember well enough to write the name on his paper. For hearing tests one person in another room makes various familiar sounds which are to be identified. Touch tests involve the recognition of objects put in the hand of one blindfolded or one who has his hand behind him. Taste and smell can be similarly worked out. The average of all the grades may show some surprising results as to the keenness of many present! This time last year cross word puzzles were the vogue. Now although they are considered rather passe it is interesting to revive the old pastime. Gather up a number of old magazine or newspaper relics or some recent copies of the Liberty and race to see which two can finish their puzzle first.

There's a delightful little story entitled "Why the Chimes Rang" which lends itself beautifully to story telling. It tells of a wonderful set of chimes, chimes that had not rung during the life span of any living person except the most ancient. The tradition was that when some one brought a gift perfect enough to the altar of the cathedral, the chimes would sound once more. Each costly magnificent offerings were brought and yet not a sound was heard from the tower high up in the clouds. People began to doubt that the tradition was true. One Christmas Eve two little boys trudged

miles through the snow to give their wee bit to the Christ Child. Just outside the city they found a woman lying in the snow almost frozen to death. Much as he longed to go to the great church, and after having worked so hard to get nearly there, the older little boy remained bravely behind and sent Little Brother on with the offering. Then it was that the chimes rang forth in the purest, sweetest tones that anyone had ever heard. Such a thought is in keeping with the Christmas spirit. If you have any of the art of a story teller, the children and adults, too, will sit spellbound during the tale.

Kate Douglas Wiggin wrote a small book filled with humor and pathos entitled "The Bird's Christmas Carol" which the grade school boys and girls would like to read.

Let's see if you recognize this quotation: "Oh! but he was a tight-fisted hand on the grindstone, Scrooge! A squeezing, wrenching, grasping, scraping, clutching, covetous old sinner! Hard and sharp as flint, from which no steel had ever struck out generous fire; secret and self-contained, and solitary as an oyster. The cold within him froze his old features, nipped his pointed nose, shrivelled his cheek, stiffened his gait, made his eyes red, his thin lips blue; and spoke out shrewdly in his grating voice. A frosty rime was on his head, and on his eyebrows, and his wiry chin. He carried his own low temperatures always with him; he iced his coffee in the dog days; and didn't thaw it one degree at Christmas." Of course you've located him—Scrooge in Dicken's "Christmas Carol." Have someone read the whole story aloud, or take turns reading it while everyone is finishing last minute gifts. It's worth a good many laughs and a good many serious thoughts by the time you've followed the old curmudgeon through all the experiences which make of him the big, generous-hearted chap he becomes.

Through all the legitimate festivities of the holiday season, we must remember and give place to the deeper meaning of Christmas day. They say that Christmas is a time of mercenary giving and getting, that we have supplanted the Christ Child born in Bethlehem so many years ago with a Santa Claus of our own time. Christmas eve when the gifts are all finished, the preliminaries of Christmas dinner dispensed with, and the stockings are all hung, read Henry Van Dyke's story of "The Other Wise Man." Follow the gifted Artoban through all his years of searching and service for the King, and say with him at the close of his life, "Verily I say unto thee, Inasmuch as thou hast done it unto the least of these my brethren, thou has done it unto me."