

ANNIE'S CHRISTMAS DINNER PARTY

By TERESA BRAYTON

"TWENTY-FOUR pence make two shillings, five pence more make half a crown all but a penny. Two sixpences bring it to three and six. Why, I can buy a nice chicken for two shillings, roasted, with plenty of stuffing, that ought to be enough for three people, providing the man doesn't eat more than a leg and a wing.

"Jenny can have nearly all the breast, and sure, anything will do for myself. I'll have plenty of cabbage and potatoes, with stewed apples and custard afterwards. It will be a nice dinner, even if it doesn't be just what a body would expect for Christmas. I suppose at home they would have roast beef and turkey, or a goose maybe, but there is no use thinking of that."

Miss Anne laid down the stub of a pencil with which she had been reckoning her financial assets and gazed out of the window. It was a cold wintry scene that met her eyes.

Hear frost glittered on the withered grass and dead leaves of her garden, where a robin was hopping about in the vain hope of corralling a fat worm or two for the ease and comfort of his hungry little stomach, a crowd of lustily from the top of a beech tree now swaying its bare branches in the chilly wind.

A GENTLE HERMIT

MISS Anne Cleary lived all alone in the big dreary house here at the end of a grass-grown avenue where few feet ever came and few wheels ever turned. So had she lived for many a year like a gentle little hermit wrapped up in her quiet meditations, while the world hurried on its rapid way outside of the creaking old gates that shut Gort House away from the main road and all its busy town-to-town traffic. Many changes had come, many been born and many had died in the countryside around since silence and poverty had first thrown their shadow over this old home which once had been filled with light and laughter. Miss Anne's mind was running now over a gallery of pictures that never were quite absent from her vision.

There was herself, a little girl of five years old—forty long years ago that was—and she hugging a big doll that squeaked when you pressed its middle. It had long yellow curls and was dressed in pink silk with real kid shoes on its stumpy feet.

She saw herself sitting half dumb with joy by the parlour fire, humming little songs to her treasure. It was after last Maas on Christmas Day, a mighty fine smell of good things came from the kitchen, for the friends who had brought her the wonderful doll from Dublin were to be guests for dinner; so all was happiness and good cheer.

Miss Anne remembered the blue silk dress with white spots which her mother wore that day, while she herself was sticking out on all sides with starched white petticoats all trimmed with lace.

Her brother, Patrick, was engrossed in a story book, also the gift of the friends from Dublin, old Shep, the collier, lay on the hearth rug casting jealous eyes occasionally at both doll and book that seemed to be taking so much attention from himself.

FIFTEEN YEARS AGO

THEN there was another Christmas Day, nearly fifteen years later, which Miss Anne reviewed with a sharp pain tugging at her heart. Again were holly and ivy draped everywhere about the old house, but their

father had passed away and she and Patrick were doing their loving best to bring a smile to their mother's face.

There was a big fire in the parlour grate, but no jealous old Shep was there to mind if his mistress did not give him undivided attention, and no jovial father bustling in and out with hospitable solicitude for his guests. There was only one other there on that Christmas Day, and that other was a grey shadow that sat with them at table, slipped after them from room to room and refused to be dispelled by all their efforts to chase it away with Christmas cheer. It was the shadow of a great fear.

When Michael Cleary died old and Lawren Brown read his will, made it clear to the stricken family at Gort House that the property which they had so long considered their own was really belonging to the bank which had financed it for many trying years. The house itself, luckily, was a freehold, but the broad acres surrounding it were mortgaged to their last penny of worth. Only two fields and the garden would be theirs when everything was settled up, and those two fields, being marshy ground, were barely sufficient to graze the one cow left to them when the rest of the cattle was sold to satisfy their creditors. No wonder fear of a dark future sat by their hearth that sad Christmas Day.

Then Patrick, declaring he could not be a burden on the place any longer, decided to try his fortunes in another country. Jimmy Collins, the son of a local labourer, had gone to South America some years previously, and, by all accounts, was making money there. Why shouldn't Patrick Cleary do likewise?

A NEIGHBOUR'S CHILD

Taking some of the little money left after the settlement at Gort House, Patrick had called for Bueanos Aires, leaving his mother and Anne alone in the old home, where now twin spectres of loneliness and poverty were with them by night and day.

How well Anne remembered Jimmy Collins, the gay hearted boy with red curly hair who used to climb the apple trees in the garden like a squirrel to bring her down the reddest fruit growing there! There always had been a strong bond of liking between herself and Jimmy, though, of course, the labourer's son had no social standing in Gort House except as a neighbour's child who was permitted to play with herself and Patrick, and who was often repaid with bread and jam when he had helped them with the picking of currants and gooseberries.

Anne, unknown to anybody, had shed some very bitter tears when Jimmy had come to bid them goodbye before starting on his long trek into far-off fields of endeavour, and had slipped into his hand at parting a silk handkerchief on which she had embroidered J.C. from A.C.

Jimmy had given her a long, long look then which she had never forgotten through all the years between.

Patrick had prospered fairly well, sending them remittances from time to time which kept things together after a fashion for two lone women who lived on the ragged edge of next to nothing. There was a cow to keep them in milk, the garden supplied them with vegetables, a few straggley hens deposited eggs when in a laying humour, but of ready money there was always a plentiful scarcity. Gort House, growing shabbier and shabbier from day to day, looked the picture of neglect and poverty. Still Anne Cleary kept the garden neat, the walks scuffed, the windows and door brasses shining till her crowning calamity came.

Anne's mother passed quietly away one wild grey November morning, and when Christmas Day came round again Gort House was indeed a place of loneliness supreme. Now Christmas Day was at hand again and a most disquieting ripple had stirred up the sluggish backwater of affairs in this forgotten corner. Shawn Burke, the postman, had given Miss Anne a letter that very morning.

"It's not foreign, Miss, it only from England," said Sean as he presented his missive. Miss Anne's face fell.

For three months she had not heard from Patrick now, surely he would be writing for Christmas, and he sending her a little remembrance also. Of late, it was seldom he wrote, and little he had to send her evidently. Well, maybe things were not going well with him! She looked at the letter in her hand wonder-

ing who would be writing to her from London. Sean still stood at the door wishing her a happy Christmas, and she with nothing to offer him in return, but the same kindly wish. But what about a cup of hot tea?—It was a cold day and poor Sean's nose looked decidedly frosty.

Sean shook his head as he thanked her. "My mother is roasting a goose for Christmas, Miss," he said, "and she bid me say that if you'd like a nice jar of goose grease she'll save it for you. Sure, it's fine for chilblains and the like of that, and it will be no trouble at all for me to bring it over to you."

Miss Anne flushed with pleasure at the offer. Goose grease would be grand for the pains in her chest that bothered her so much in cold weather. Indeed, she would be glad to have it.

"I have a lot of apples, Sean," she said, "and if your mother wants some to stuff the goose you can fill your bag with them out of the barrel there in the kitchen."

It was a long time since she had a bit of goose grease, and it was a long time, too, since she had the happiness of making a gift, even of a few apples. Sean filled his bag with juicy apples and went on his way while Miss Anne read and re-read the letter in her hand.

A FORGOTTEN FRIEND

IT was from an almost forgotten cousin in England, Jenny Cleary, now Mrs. George Anderson of London, who stated that she would be with her husband in Dublin for over the holidays and would like to come and visit her on Christmas Day.

"George has business that will detain him in Ireland for a short while," the letter stated, "so I thought it would be a good chance to renew old ties. We may drive down to your place or may come in the bus, but anyway, we will be in time to take pot-juck with you for dinner. Don't go to any trouble on our account, as you know we are just plain people who like plain food and fear the loneliness of a hotel dinner on holiday occasions. Hoping it will be agreeable to you as it surely will be to us to have this little get-together for the glad festival."—Your fond cousin, JENNY.

So we find Miss Anne assembling her pennies and sixpences in anxious endeavour to meet this coming assault on her resources.

"Two shillings will get me a chicken from Rose Gorman, and I know she always feeds her fowl well. I have a packet of custard powder to help out the eggs. The cream is poor, but it's as good as they get in London anyway, and the apples are fine. I'll make a currant cake for tea and open that last jar of gooseberry jam. If I had a bit of bacon it would help out the chicken, but that can't be helped."

Then a terrible thought came to Miss Anne's mind. Suppose they drove down bringing one of those liveried jads with them in the car. That would be disaster indeed, for one of those fellows would need a whole chicken to himself, and it wouldn't do to try filling him up with custard or cabbage and potatoes. Her poor fare would melt before him like a pat of butter on a hot August day. Well, she would wait and see. She would do her best and leave the rest to Providence.

Rose Morgan had a chicken to sell. Sure, Miss Cleary could see for herself that the creature was bursting out of its skin with the fat of him, Miss Anne bringing home the hefty bird in triumph after. Rose had shorn it of its feathers (when dead of course. Rose said she was giving the bird sixpence cheap on account of falling heir to its feathers, as she was trying to puff up an old tick that was getting as flat as the palm of your hand with the wear and tear of ten years on it.

Miss Anne's apples were deliciously juicy, her custard set admirably, her cabbage was crisp as frost could make it, her potatoes still floury. As for her chicken it came from the oven with its chest as proudly stuck out as if it were heading a tribe of prize-winners.

RE-AWAKENED MEMORIES

NOT in many years had Gort House known the embellishment of holly and ivy on a Christmas Day, but behold it now as Miss Anne walked through the rooms seeing if everything was in order. Glint of red berries and sheen of green leaves smiled back at her from wall and window. Even the old grandfather clock in the hall had a festive crown set above its solemn face, giving it rather

a rakish appearance as the wreath was slightly askew.

Miss Anne herself was wearing her best attire which, though of ancient vintage and a bit shiny here and there, still showed her to be a good looking woman with whom time and sorrow had dealt tenderly. Her luxuriant hair was still glossy and brown, her eyes as candid as those of a child but having many a shadow there now which was unknown during the happy days of her young life.

But Miss Anne's heart was lighter to-day than for many years, and somehow, it would not have surprised her very much if she suddenly glimpsed her mother in the foudlard silk dress of long ago, or her genial father to come bustling through the house on hospitable errands once more.

Something else had brought her relief from her fear of a shortage in provisions, also. Good Mrs. Burke had sent over the promised jar of goose grease, and with it was a substantial slab of the goose itself that had yielded such penance for chilblains. This had touched Miss Anne very deeply, and she resolved that Sean should have another bagful of apples for New Year. The driver should have goose for his dinner (if there was a driver), and the glorious chicken still be spared for her guests.

So there is Miss Anne having come in from last Maas with the Adeste still ringing in her soul. The parlour fire is lighted, the table set with her fine old china, Gort House all in holiday mood and even the robin—who had probably chanced on an unwary worm—singing a cheery song outside the window.

Soon there came the unusual sound of a motor car along the grassy avenue and Miss Anne all aflutter, opened the front door to receive her guests. There they were—Cousin Jenny, her husband, and the liveried driver who didn't look half so rapacious as Miss Anne had imagined. There were warm greetings and great bustling as the guests from London were ushered into the parlour, so gay with its firelight and green adornments. It was a red letter day for Gort House, indeed!

But what is this? George Anderson had shipped out after the first greetings were over, and here he was back again helping the driver carry in a big hamper that might have anything almost packed away in its interior. Miss Anne felt her knees a bit shaky.

"Now, Cousin Anne," said Jenny's husband, "we know how hard it is for people in the country to get some things they might want for the holidays, so Jenny thought we should bring a Christmas cake and a few dinner trimmings. As we didn't know what you would like we brought a little of everything you'd be had in country shops. Now, please don't be angry, but just blame our English stupidity if we have done wrong."

Angry, indeed! It wasn't anger that brought the funny lump into Miss Anne's throat, or the tears so close to her eyes. Oh, the kindness of people, the blessed kindness, blessed kindness! God be praised this Christmas Day!

A CORKSREW NEEDED

ANNE Cleary had none of the pride that apes humility, so when the reheated chicken upreared its haughty breast from the willow-ware platter at the head of the table, it was flanked by a roast ham that would have made a worthy epitaph for the pig that produced it.

(Continued on page 10).

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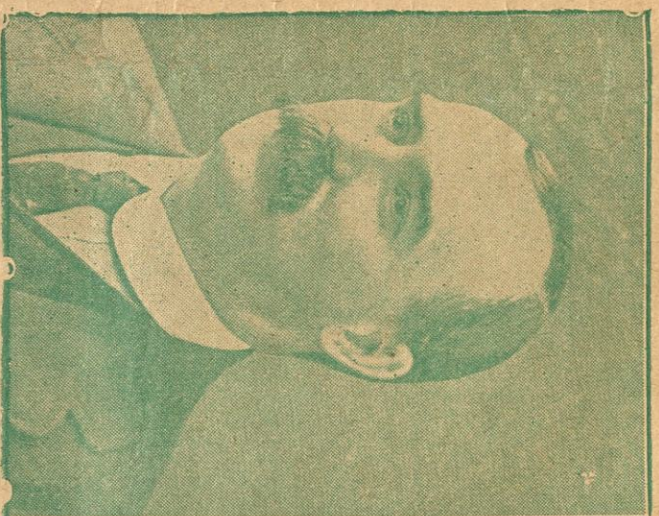
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IV.

UP stood Jim, you all know him, he was always the workers' friend, straight and true, he might break in two, but Jim—hed never bend!

"You both are right, let us have the fight, tho' the odds are a thousand to one; thing is said and done;

My lads are rough, but they're genuine stuff, and they're anxious to hear the call; Each mother's son has handled a gun, for they've practised at Liberty Hall;

I'll give you my oath, and I tell you both, the citizen boys will have

To the bugle's sound," and they cheered all round—Connolly, Pearse and Clarke!

V.

THEN they all grasped hands, whilst history's sands thro' the glass were dropping fast,

And an oath they swore that they'd nail once more the old flag to the mast;

And they kept their word 'mid fire and sword, for up in Dublin town,

They kindled the fire of their hearts' desire, that the tyrant can never drown.

I.

THREE men sat 'round a fire one night, 'twas up in Dublin town,

When silence reigned in the city's streets, and the winter stars looked down;

No revelers they who sat there but men with a purpose set,

Whose names would shine on the martyrs' roll and live in history yet;

O'er books they pored and each one looked bored, at times they scanned a map,

Whilst every man discussed a plan that one had outlined on his lap,

A thoughtful trace outlined each face, for worry had left its mark,

And they who sat there, I now declare—were Connolly, Pearse and Clarke!

II.

PEARSE stood up in his gallant way, and said: "We must have a fight,

The country is dead; its soul has fled, in the end you'll find I'm right;

I have struggled for years in sorrow and tears and I know the people's faith,

Then let us show we can strike a blow, what odds if the end be death?"

I'll tell no lie, I'm willing to die if the country's soul is saved.

Then let us be men and face again what other stout hearts have braved!"

"Brewol Brewol" said the other two, "if we die we'll leave our mark;

'Tis all the same, we'll all die 'gangs,' said Connolly, Pearse and Clarke!

III.

SAID Clarke, "As you know, I hate the foe that has held us enslaved for years,

And tho' I am old, my spirits as bold as any the Volunteers.

Pearse is right, let us have the fight, and we'll start us soon as we can;

We have money enough and plenty of stuff, so we'll mobilise every man;

I've spent my time since manhood's prime in Portland and other jails,

If they now forget on what we were set, they're not worthy the name of Gaels!"

"Here, Connolly, Pearse," says Tom, looking fierce, "some people think 'tis a lark, but they'll rue the name and envy the fame of Connolly, Pearse and Clarke."

Anne's Christmas Dinner Party

(Continued from page 9).

bottle of wine which caused Miss Anne to ransack Gort House for a corkscrew to open it. There was so many things came out of the hamper it was the wonder of the world how there had been room at all for the plum pudding that lay at the bottom.

Miss Anne thought of her apples and custard power sauce, but with a flash of good Irish spirit, determined to put them on the table just the same. What she had deemed worthy of offering her guests should be offered for sake of her hospitality and the name of Gort House. And when all sat down to the old mahogany table it was no wonder that ancient piece of furniture fairly groaned under a weight which it had not known for many a long year.

Don't think that Mrs. Burke's slab of goose was handed to the driver, either! It was divided between Miss Anne and Cousin Jenny, while Mr. Anderson and the driver waded into Rose Gorman's chicken with such gusto that it was a pleasure to see them. Neither were the apples and custard sighted. Plum pudding was all right, but Irish apples with cream!—there was nothing else half so good. It was a Christmas feast to remember.

When the board was cleared for confidential chat over a glass of wine Miss Anne poured out all her little troubles to the sympathetic ears of her good English friends. It wasn't that she was complaining, but the advice of Mr. Anderson would be of such help to her who could no more see a way out of the difficulties around her.

It seemed nothing was left to her but sell Gort House and try to make some humble way for her future living. When the sad little story was finished George Anderson exchanged a meaning look with his wife and said quietly: "I think that can be all settled very easily, Cousin Anne."

Miss Anne gave him a startled glance. It was all very well to be thinking of selling Gort House, but to have it accomplished so very quickly was another thing. Why it gave her a shock that George Anderson could make such a decided move on the wind of her words, so to speak.

"I have some wealthy clients who are looking for a place like this," he continued. "They are here in Ireland at present—in fact they are staying a few miles away from here, and I could send the car and have them call this afternoon. It would not bind you to any decision, you know, for of course, you will need time to think over any proposals they may make. But so long as I am here it would be a good chance for you to see them in my presence and hear what they may have to say. I'll have Grant go for them now, if you wish."

Miss Anne's breath was almost taken away.

This was pressing her with a vengeance! Still, sell she must at some time, and how was she to put through the sale of Gort House unaided? With trembling lips she answered: "Well, so long as you are here with me, Cousin George, maybe I might as well have a word with them." Cousin Jenny patted her hands and whispered, "Don't be afraid Anne, the gentlemen will only make a Christmas call, and you don't have to talk a word of business if you don't like. They will just give a glance around, and we will give them a cup of tea and some of your lovely currant bread. Leave everything in George's hands."

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And we mind what they said, tho' themselves are dead, for their spirit will live for ever, And other men will come again and follow the same old way,

'Till the fight is done and freedom's won, when a monument grand will mark the sacred ground where in slumber sound sleep Connolly, Pearse and Clarke!

manage to get along so long as a beam of the old house was there to shelter her, but taxes must be paid, and she had no money to pay anything, especially now when Patrick seemed to have deserted her if he were still living. But Patrick might be dead, and then what could she do but take the road from Gort House to wherever she might find another shelter. It was a bitter prospect, but she must face it like all the other trials of her life.

After what seemed ages there came the sound of a returning motor, and George Anderson went to the door to receive his expected callers. Miss Anne heard him halt them in his genial English accent, she heard their muttered answers, but covering her face with her trembling hands did not stir from the fireplace till the door of the parlour opened and she knew the strangers were entering the room. They were coming to take Gort House from her, how could she bid them welcome! There was dead silence in the little group. Cousin Jenny took Miss Anne by the hand and led her forward to where the two strange men were standing. Miss Anne tried to focus her eyes upon them, but only saw a blur of faces. Then it seemed to her she was seeing visions out of past years—or was she mad or dreaming! Why, these two looked like—why they were—Oh, good Father in Heaven! could it be?—Oh, blessed little Child of Bethlehem, could this really be Patrick and—and Jimmy Collins! Patrick and Jimmy! Patrick and Jimmy! Glory be to God forever and forever!

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