

Dec 24, 1923

CHRISTMAS NIGHT...

Dearest Dad and Mother:-

I intended to get you-all off a Christmas letter, one that would arrive today, but somehow I didn't feel like writing a real letter of that sort until today. Might have wired but there's no certainty of its being delivered on a holiday and if it came Wednesday it would be anticlimax indeed. Long distance is mighty expensive although I would like so much to talk to you-all, or at least to hear your voices.

Mamie and I want to thank you, first of all, for the nice things you sent. The pup arrived all right at 2 o'clock Monday afternoon, the cake and Bob Henry's gift preceding it by a day. Dad's letter today was my first intelligence of the sex of the animal but am not so sorry that it is a female. May automatically embark on the business of raising Airedales. Think she is in good health and hasn't given us much trouble yet. The cake was delightful and will serve as dessert for many a day. We are both nimble and spent a portion of the morning jumping over the candles which Bob Henry (alias Ichabod) sent. Note his writing is improving, presumably in answer to my question as to whether he could read and write. Kiss him for me.

Christmas night---away from home--- is the saddest of the year. It's rather depressing at home, if you understand the way I mean it. A kind of over-the-hill feeling that it's all past.... seems that it ought to last a week, anyway. A vicarious feeling of Alexander with no more worlds to conquer. But it's twice as poignant away from home on Christmas night.

I think everyone is at Christmas time within hearing distance of "Little boy Blue, come blow your horn" and every other kindred memory of childhood. All day I've thought lots of Bob Henry, envying him his happiness, the Christmas joy of a kid. It makes one feel like Conrad in quest of his youth even at 21 to know how a child enjoys Christmas. I hope he appreciates those precious years before anything is tarnished.

He ought to for they fly fast enough. Even now he's through

with some of the best. The experience called school has already taken some of them. Going out, as someone has said, with only the blade of a fresh spirit to face the dragons of the world. Let's hope he's a Galahad, "whose strength is as the strength of ten because his heart is pure". It is so much better that way than like Lancelot, coming back bedraggled; with the fresh sword splintered.

I'm thinking back tonight, over all these happy Christmas's spent at home. For me this is more in the nature of Thanksgiving than the day designated for that purpose, a more national holiday. I'm thankful tonight for all those nineteen happy Decembers passed at home; for the kindness of everyone and of you-all, it goes without saying, particularly. Exceedingly blessed is the boy who has such parents. Fortunate is the boy who grows to manhood with such happy memories.

Tonight I remember walking home on a Christmas night that seems like a great many years ago to me, after our dinner at Aunt Ellie's. We lived on the other side of town then and it was bitter cold but clear as a bell with a big moon and thousands of stars. On the corner where we live now Dad saw a star fall and pointed it out to me. That was a childhood Christmas passing----and there were not so many as there were stars in the sky that night. I skipped ahead of you and Mother, keeping warm by stepping briskly. The square was deserted, cold, gusty, empty. I felt it then but I didn't know what I felt. I suppose it must have been a sense of time fleeting, of a Christmas passing. Scott Fitzgerald phrased it but I haven't his words nor a copy of his book at hand. Can't recall the exact words: "In all true beauty there is a poignant sense of its transiency.....a hoping against hope that it will last, and it won't." Wish I had the book here it is so well said.

Charles let the fire-crackers in his over-coat pocket catch fire.....Dad and I selected Mother's gift and she and I chose his... I got an air-rifle, a bicycle, books, everything I could have wanted....Newsom basting the turkey in the oven for our Christmas dinner, the last in the series.....Uncle John and Uncle Ryan....the latter's dollar every Christmas....Mrs. Stonestreet's for the cream.....celery and salted almonds..

Ryan, Charles, Ros, and Walker singing with Sarah at the piano....Walker's last Christmas.... getting up in the morning to see what Santa had brought..... eating an impatient breakfast while the first fever of Christmas morning was still on.... your pleasure in my enjoyment.....happy, happy days.

Absence, with my nature, certainly makes the heart grow fond. And after reading this letter over I find that it sounds affected. Maybe I ought not to send it, but I'm going to. Mother once told me never to stifle a good impulse. They're infrequent enough. I believe this is a good impulse, regardless of how it may sound. I'm trying to say that I love you-all a very great deal and am not forgetting it at Christmas time.

I hope, and know, you've had a merry Christmas with everything you desired. And in the New Year may every day be a Christmas in that respect. Love to all,

Your devoted son,

William