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Christmas Dinner In Stone House At Emmittsburg—1809

Interest In Mother Seton's Cause Makes This Story Timely

By S. V. S.

(Written for N. C. W. C. Christmas Supplement) (Copyright, 1939, Mother Seton Guild)

(With interest in the cause for the beatification of Mother Elizabeth Ann Seton constantly increasing, this Christmas story has extraordinary timeliness. Mother Seton was the Foundress and First Superior of the Daughters of Charity of St. Vincent de Paul in the United States. The following story reconciles in an interesting and wholly logical manner two divergent historical notes on the Christmas at Emmittsburg 180 years ago.)

Mother Seton stood in the little front room of the Stone House by a window, looking across a series of natural terraces that descended in irregular fashion to the creek below.

She could see it very clearly indeed, for the many trees which covered the terraces were quite leafless. There were no evergreens on the southern side of the Stone House. The snow had been falling for the last twenty-four hours. Now since it had stopped the grey clouds were being rapidly driven away by the brisk west wind, and she could already discern patches of blue overhead. And then suddenly the sun came out. To her artistic nature the scene before her was a thing of beauty the vast expanse of sparkling white—the iridescence of the ice-covered trees—the gleaming frozen surface of the Tomacut where the children were skating back and forth.

"Dear God, how beautiful! O Lord, Our Lord, how wonderful is Thy Name in all the earth. When I consider the works of Thy Fingers—

A sound nearby attracted her attention. It was a log that had fallen in the fireplace. She went over and pushed it back farther and came to the poker iron bar that served as a cruet. There, that would do. The blaze was already rising and little sparks were shooting out making sounds like little pistol shots.

TABLE Laid FOR DINNER She stopped to the door and looked into the next room where the table had been laid for dinner. A plain pine table set with tin plates and tin cups shaped like goblets. Coarse linen napkins—pewter plates ready for the coarse yeast bread which they would eat—a molasses jug. There were two chairs, one at the head and one at the foot of the table; pine benches were on each side.

Mother Seton turned and went back to the fireplace in the front room. It was nearly 10 o'clock. The Sisters would not be returning until nearly dinner time. Christmas was a day of recreation yet since they could combine gaiety with the practice of good works, she had sent them in bands of two and three with messages of Christmas cheer and little gifts for the poor in the neighborhood.

Mother Seton had raised her hands with a little wistful smile. "But what, Father? Indeed we are grateful and glad that we have all that is necessary. Bread and coffee, fish, and sometimes meat. We did have apples but they are all gone. We generally have onions and once in a while potatoes." She looked at him.

TWO TURKEYS Father DuBois smiled mysteriously. He was a generous heart and now it felt like glow with the Christmas spirit. "You must not tell the Sisters." He had glanced around to be sure he would not be overheard. "I am going to send you two turkeys." He smiled appreciatively, thinking of the surprised and happy looks of the children as well as the Sisters. "Oh Father! But can you afford it?" "You must not deprive yourself or the good mountain priests, or the college boys."

"No, no Mother. Nothing of the kind. I have made arrangements with a farmer up on the mountain. He is selling me a number quite cheaply. Let me send you a couple. It will be my Christmas gift to your little community."

"But two?" she queried. "Will not one be sufficient?" "No, no, Mother," he said stoutly. "There must be no exception. Think of the children! Why Dick and Will will make ravages into one of them, and then the three little girls. Children always have such appetites. He beamed again in the thought of their enjoyment. "—little seven-year-old Rebecca with a big drum stick, for example."

"You are too good to us, Father!"

SISTERS SENT AWAY "Nothing of the kind. Now I shall send them down on Christmas morning, after you have got every one out of the kitchen. Are you sure you can cook them?" Mother Seton smiled. "I think so, Father."

"And if you have no vegetables, he broke off suddenly. "Well, don't worry, Mother. Get the Sisters out of the house early after breakfast. Send them on errands of Christmas cheer and tell them not to be back until dinner time."

He walked off abruptly, fearing that he would say too much. Mother Seton herself should have a Christmas surprise. Onions and potatoes—perhaps fresh white bread and butter. His pleasure expanded as his imagination added to the list. Maybe he could get coffee. He would try. What a joy it would be to her to be able to prepare a real Christmas dinner for the Sisters and her five chil-

dren. He would do the best he could. She should not have the faintest suspicion of what was coming, except the two turkeys. And those two turkeys should be the very best he had.

Mother Seton went to the door and looked in the direction of the mountain, where she could see the group of log buildings that constituted Mount St. Mary's College. She scanned as closely as possible the roadway winding down the mountain side, and then shook her head. No one was in sight.

WOULD NOT BE MISSED She went in again, and stood looking thoughtfully into the fire. Suppose the turkeys didn't come after all. Well, since the Sisters didn't expect such a surprise, it would not be missed.

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Such a tiny chapel. Just big enough to hold a plain little altar against the north wall, but the tiny red light resting upon it, told of the Presence of the Prisoner of Love within the tabernacle. The two silver candlesticks were flanked by vases of evergreen.

Her great dark eyes rested lovingly upon the little door. "O my Adored," she whispered, "no matter what else is wanting, we have You. And in You we have all."

She leaned her head against the door lost in contentment. Even Bethlehem was not so small as this was chapel. How its must love souls to be here with them night and day.

Max DuBois had been said here only a few hours ago, by good Father DuBois, and all except little Bec had received the Little Christ in the Sacrament of His Love. Was not that enough? Surely.

"Whatever Thou wilt, as much or as little as Thou wilt, O my Adored," she repeated.

HERRINGS, CARROT COFFEE Footsteps overhead told that Sister Rose White was preparing to descend. She had been sent back to bed to rest because of a heavy cold. Sister Rose would be very in wall stairway and then she appeared. Sister Rose looked rested.

"Why Mother?" half past ten already. It is time to start getting ready for dinner. They will all be back within an hour. And what a Christmas dinner to greet them!" she laughed merrily.

Christmas menu in the Valley? HERRINGS and carrot coffee for a change.

In spite of all her watching, no messenger of good cheer. Well, it was a good thing that no one knew the secret but herself. It would be too late to roast the turkeys over the open fire now—even if they did melt butter and some real coffee. Poor Mrs. Stone! She was so glad she cried when she showed them to me. "The children will have a grand dinner," she said. "God bless good Father DuBois! And his wife and all the priests. But he's different now. It sort of touched him, this did. Such a kind surprise, you know. He said to me, 'Mary, that priest is a good man. I'm wrong, I own, and I am sorry—and I'm man enough to tell him so, too. And you and the children can go to the Catholic Church all you want. Any Church that makes people as kind as Mr. DuBois is good enough for my wife and children, and me too.'"

A shadow passed the window, but not before Mother Seton had recognized Mrs. Stone. She suspected immediately the cause of the visit.

ANSWERS KNOCK AT DOOR "No, dear," she said firmly to Sister Rose who started towards the door in answer to a timid knock. "Stay where you are. I'll go."

She moved swiftly towards the door, and to the surprise of all

BRUTE BIBLE AIDS SETON CAUSE



The recent celebration at the Old Cathedral in Vincennes, Indiana, has brought to light valuable evidence in the Cause of Mother Elizabeth Seton, foundress of the Sisters of Charity in the United States. Pictured above are Mother Seton, the Brute Bible preserved in Vincennes and a sample of Mother Seton's Bible, taken from a page of the Bible. While stationed at Mt. St. Mary's College, Emmittsburg Md. Father Simon Gabriel Bruw, later first Bishop of Vincennes exchanged Bibles with Mother Seton, whose spiritual director he was from 1811 until her death in 1831. It contains many annotations and underings in her handwriting. (N.C.W.C. photos.)

supplied and then looked at each Sister in turn—then the children. How happy they were in spite of these hardships! They were talking and laughing, so gaily as they ate their poor little portions, and drank the miserable drink that went by the name of coffee.

"O Mother!" said little Sister Maria Murphy. "I have not told you yet of our surprising experience."

"And what was that, dear?" "You know the Stone family, so very poor and so many little children? You sent us to visit them, you know?"

"Well, a most surprising thing happened. Indeed it was lovely, and I know you will say it was the Providence of God—the poor things didn't have a thing in the house for Christmas. And Mr. Stone who was so sick. You remember the one who is an atheist?"

FALLEN-AWAY CATHOLIC Yes, Mother Seton knew. Mr. Stone was a fallen-away Catholic, and most bitter against the Church. He would not allow his wife or any of his children to go to Church or even to learn the catechism. Still, he had taken a liking to the Sisters because of their great kindness.

"Well, it was very strange. I don't know what inspired Father DuBois to do it, but he sent the family the finest basket for Christmas—two turkeys, and a goose—think of it!—and vegetables, onions and potatoes, and white bread—and even butter and some real coffee. Poor Mrs. Stone! She was so glad she cried when she showed them to me. "The children will have a grand dinner," she said. "God bless good Father DuBois! And his wife and all the priests. But he's different now. It sort of touched him, this did. Such a kind surprise, you know. He said to me, 'Mary, that priest is a good man. I'm wrong, I own, and I am sorry—and I'm man enough to tell him so, too. And you and the children can go to the Catholic Church all you want. Any Church that makes people as kind as Mr. DuBois is good enough for my wife and children, and me too.'"

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opened it and went outside to where the woman was standing. "O Mother!" the poor woman began in desperation. "I'm so sorry. I thought all those things were for us."

"Hush," said Mother Seton. "Speak low. The Sisters will hear you."

"It wasn't our fault," the woman said. "It was the mistake of the boy who brought the things. Jake can't read very well, and he thought that it said 'Stone' on the basket. And I never thought to look. I just happened to find the paper basket and when I saw it, I didn't know what to do. But I just slipped out. I had to come over. My children are so happy. They are having the finest dinner. We've eaten the best part of everything already. And my husband, well it just broke his pride, that's what it did. And he says to me, 'Mary,' he says, 'that priest is a good man and I'm wrong and I ain't ashamed to say it. You can go to Church all you want, and I'll go too, please God.'"

CONSIDERED SELVES BLESSED "How could I tell him after that that it was all a big mistake? And all these things were for you and the children and the Sisters. And I looked in the window just now at you all eating herrings and black bread. Oh, I don't know who to do. I can't come over as soon as I could. I feel so bad, honest, but what can I do? It'll just about kill me to tell Bill and the children."

"There was no mistake, Mary," Mother Seton said. "I forbid you to say a word about it to anyone. Do you understand? I'll explain to Father DuBois."

A Fern of "Merry Christmas" In wishing you a "Merry Christmas," a Blackfoot Indian says: "Oke, annork esinokittak! Kaitokmopk. Kit kit satato Kark orkoye arsanpisse, Kark esam arapaitalisse, Ke Kark orkote etotore Kinnon okoa apris isortok."

Literally, this means: "Well, today is the day we embrace. I wish you a good health, a long and holy life, and that you may arrive at the abode of our Eternal Father."

The town of Bethlehem is believed to be little changed today from what it was at the time of Our Saviour's birth. The style of houses has remained the same for centuries. The population today is thought to be not much greater than it was that first Christmas Day.

The Grotto of the Nativity is found in a chapel whose stone roof has been blackened by the smoke of lamps. The steps leading down to the Grotto are narrow, rock-hewn and worn smooth by the steps of pilgrims through the ages.

The first Christian oratory of what is now Belgium was erected about the year 50 by St. Materius, Bishop of Cologne, in the fortified Roman camp of Aduaticum-Tungurum. It was dedicated to the Blessed Mother.

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