

I read at Xmas Revels
Dec. 8, 1943

CHRISTMAS

By William Saroyan

First I would like to say to you, "Merry Christmas." It is like this - when I say it, I want it to mean what it means. Not just words under a picture on a card, dropped in the mailbox on the corner, or handing you something wrapped up in red paper which I have bought. I want it to say what it says, the way a child says it.

Christmas is looked forward to by a child with even greater excitement than the excitement with which he looks forward to his own birthday, because Christmas is everybody's birthday, with the party going on all over the world. Christmas is to every child, in his own way, the wonder of the world and the light of life.

Christmas is odors, brought in from the cold to the fire, a great laughing blend of perfume made of the scent of snow mingling with the scent of sanctity; of holly and fir mingling with the gifts of new clothes and new shoes; of Christmas candy and the bright, painted toys mingling with the unmistakable scent of happiness that comes out of people at Christmas, no matter how deeply it is buried.

Christmas is sounds - the talking and the laughing, the shouting and the singing of childhood's hymns - the tinkling of the music box, which says "Hosanna" in the child's language of gladness, no matter if it is only saying, "This is the way we wash our clothes, wash our clothes, wash our clothes!" in English.

Christmas is tastes - the round, golden taste of the orange - the taste of the perfect sphere, which has hung among the green leaves in the warm sun. It is the red-and-white striped taste of peppermint. It is the sharp, sweet juice of the apple from the toe of the stocking. Many tastes

must blend to make the taste of Christmas.

Christmas is sights; but who can tell of the sights of Christmas reflected in the eyes of a child?

Christmas is being together - gathering together. It is the time of the heart's inventory. It is the time of going home in many ways. You do not have to tell a child what this means, and at Christmas, if at no other time, all men are children.

Because it is the child's day, the coming of Christmas up the white steps of December transforms mothers and fathers, through old and wintry legerdemain, into the children they once were - and still are, for that matter, and must always be - until at last, on Christmas Eve, their caroling beside the tree is with the earnest voice of childhood. And the tears in their eyes are once again the tears caused by great expectations of wondrous things to come - expectations stirred in the infant heart of humanity, and someday, as sure as the sun, to be fulfilled.

If children could speak - or if anybody could - what would be said on Christmas Day would be the book that all books would be. But who can say, with words, what children feel, what Christmas means to them and to us? There are no words for it.

And yet children say it all - with meaning straight and clear - when they say only, "Merry Christmas."

And so, as one of them, and one of you, and one of us, helpless with the clumsy words, I say to them and to you: "Merry Christmas."

I say it as a child says it.