

The Birmingham Eccentric

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Witnessing Christmas

One Christmas Eve a young man went to the home of his brother to spend the night.

About five o'clock in the morning he heard his brother's children—a boy age seven and a girl age eight—opening presents.

"Oh, just what I wanted!" cried the girl. "Oh, just what I wanted!" echoed the boy.

And so it went. Every gift was "just what I wanted."

This was Christmas morning, the joy of opening presents and finding the things dreamed about for so long.

For these two children, thought the young man as he lay in the dark of his bedroom, this was the joy of receiving.

For their parents, he reflected, this was the joy of giving.

He could imagine the glow of satisfaction on their faces as they watched the children excitedly opening gifts.

Later, he knew, there would be breakfast and then church services, when the family would meditate on the spiritual meaning of Christmas.

The story of the birth of Jesus, of Joseph and Mary, of the Three Wise Men, and of the manger, the shepherds, the angels and the Star from the East would be retold.

Voices of the congregation and the choir would ring out with the words of Christmas hymns.

After the services would come the traditional family dinner, dimming another Christmas.

AS HE LAY in the dark, the young man tried to picture the entire Christmas season:

The search for the "just what I wanted" type of gifts.

Personal efforts that go into the making of gifts.

Excitement of wrapping gifts.

Exhilarating anticipation of the event. Satisfaction of giving without expecting return.

Pleasure of watching reactions as gifts are opened. And the joy of receiving, too.

The solemnity of the occasion; candlelight services on Christmas Eve; worship services on Christmas Day.

The telling and retelling of the Christ Child's birth.

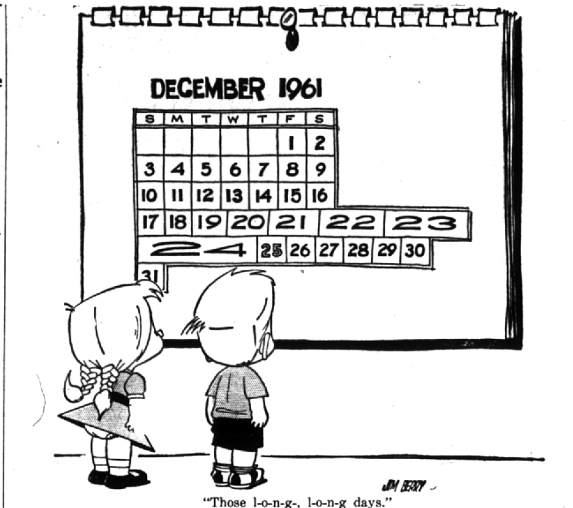
Christmas carols, sung over and over again.

Christmas trees and Christmas decorations.

AND NOW, hearing voices at the breakfast table, the young man remembered: this is Christmas morning.

He arose, dressed, walked out into the kitchen and said:

Merry Christmas!



PEOPLE'S COLUMN

Says 'Consult Cousins' On Subject of Shelters

To the Editor: Birmingham is considering construction of a fallout shelter. Professional advice on shelters is sought. I would suggest that our city commission consult Norman Cousins, editor of the Saturday Review. His series of editorials entitled 'Shelters, Survival and Common Sense' mark him as an expert in this area. I think James H. Carmel and his wife and family by donating the cost of a shelter to the United Nations have set an example of individual responsibility for us to follow as a community.

AVOIDANCE OF nuclear war and controlled disarmament should get our concerted effort. We could contribute to this accomplishment and at the same time advance the world role of law by sending the whole cost of a Birmingham community shelter to the United Nations. In any event, I think further discussion and perhaps a formal debate in this community should be held before going ahead with construction of a shelter. JOHN R. CALDWELL, M. D. 4850 Bryn Mawr Birmingham

Happenings of Long Ago

Bits of News Gleaned From Old Files Of The Eccentric

50 YEARS AGO Dec. 22, 1911 A man living 15 miles away from the Birmingham Post Office now has his mail brought to him free of all expense. He may receive four to six pieces yearly, while a business man in Birmingham receiving from three to five pieces many times daily has to go after it and pays for a box to put it in besides. It used to be 25 cents per quarter on a large sized lock box. A second raise in the price places the price now at 75 cents per quarter. The merchants of Birmingham have at last succeeded in bringing about a much needed reform and one that cannot fail to work out for the benefit of themselves and their clerks. It is a move that has been contemplated many years past. The move is an economic one too for it is a saving of light and fuel. Merchants agree to close places of business at 7 p. m. on all evenings except Saturdays, from Jan. 1, 1912 to April 1, 1912.

Humane Society Makes a Plea For Assistance

To the Editor: As humane workers, here we are again. The Birmingham Humane Society is still struggling and hoping to get a shelter for our lost, stray and unwanted pets. Will some of the hundreds of people we have assisted during the past year help us? The Birmingham Humane Society gets no help whatsoever from The United Foundation, or through memberships. We were incorporated Jan. 4, 1956, and receive only donations from people who know what work we do, although there are a great many who think we receive help like the other societies do through different sources. There is no cause that is more Godlike than that of animal welfare for it is a cause from which one never hopes to gain any reward of material nature. It is only reward is peace of mind and the knowledge that by our efforts we have helped to make the world a little kinder place than we found it. We are reminded, too, that He came into this world, suffered and died. His doctrine of justice and mercy might win.

Kindness, Mercy To All Living Creatures Asked

To the Editor: As we celebrate this blessed season we are reminded of the fact that Christ who could have been born in a castle chose instead to be born in a stable surrounded by animals "the least of these." We are reminded, too, that He came into this world, suffered and died. His doctrine of justice and mercy might win. There is no cause that is more Godlike than that of animal welfare for it is a cause from which one never hopes to gain any reward of material nature. It is only reward is peace of mind and the knowledge that by our efforts we have helped to make the world a little kinder place than we found it. We are reminded, too, that He came into this world, suffered and died. His doctrine of justice and mercy might win.

36 YEARS AGO

Dec. 22, 1925 Members of the Birmingham Lions Club were hosts to 280 needy children of the village Monday night in the Community House and their second annual Christmas party. Gifts, candy, Santa Claus and entertainment were provided to give the youthful guests, who ranged in age from 3 to 11, at least one happy remembrance of the 1925 Christmas season. "The Wondrous Story," a Christmas cantata, will be presented by students of Adams School Wednesday afternoon. Betty Deer will be featured as soloist of the production. Assisting Mrs. Edith Goyveill in producing the cantata are Mrs. Ann Corvett, in charge of the dialogue; Mrs. Louise Hendry, who directed the making of costumes; Jeanett Kriekar, who will accompany the chorus at the piano and Marilyn Smiley who has charge of the scenery.

LETTERS FROM READERS

Letters from readers always welcome. But they MUST be signed, although identities will not be divulged if the writer so requests. 15 YEARS AGO Dec. 19, 1946 An organized Saturday morning recreational program for youngsters in the Birmingham school system is expected to be presented. (See HAPPENINGS, 5-B)

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'Getting Warmer', George?

Although he formally and officially has not announced himself a Republican candidate for governor of Michigan, from words he has spoken and acts he has committed, we would not be surprised—any day, now—if George Romney did so announce.

But he has come so close to it that already he is being sniped at by leading state Democrats—as we pointed out would happen in this column two weeks ago. That's the inevitable destiny of any man or woman who enters the "knock-down-and-drag-out" pastime known as POLITICS, U.S.A.

Why did we suggest that Mr. Romney refuse to be hustled into actual or near-revelation of his gubernatorial thinking? Because we hold that he is too rare and too potentially valuable a citizen of Michigan to compromise his non-partisan status at this time. It was this pattern of "political virginity" that, we believed, had given him the unique image he has created in the public mind.

THUS FAR IN HIS civic activities George Romney has given outstanding proof of his leadership qualities, plus his more-than-average devotion to improvement of government.

We would deeply regret the appearance

of circumstances that might endanger availability of his ultimate services as a public official—and such political circumstances could emerge should he make any mistake in launching, formally, his gubernatorial candidacy.

You can be sure that Michigan's Democrats are alert to such possibilities, and will make the most of them.

We felt that, should he enter the 1962 race and win, he would have only two years in which to prove himself; we held that, if Michigan adopts a new Constitution, with four-year terms for its governor, then this longer period would provide sufficient time for a man of Romney's apparent stature to really achieve the maximum of civic improvement and progress.

SUCH A RECORD of accomplishment is, of course, very necessary on a state level, if Mr. Romney has aspirations to live at 1600 Pennsylvania Avenue, Washington, D.C.

Of course, George Romney is going to be governed in this matter by his own convictions. He has promised, not later than Feb. 10, to make known his decision. Should he say "Yes", we'll certainly wish him good luck and hope to support him.

From The Eccentric's Point of View ...

The joy of giving cannot be surpassed—but the joy of being able to give runs it a close second.

The holiday season started earlier than usual this year—as usual.

A civilized community is confronted by few problems as disturbing, and as difficult of solution, as that posed by the sex killer.

Say a man has committed a number of sex offenses; say he displays tendencies that might become homicidal.

At what point is he to be locked up? What kind of treatment is he to undergo? What assurance can there be that, once released, he will not offend again and perhaps, this time, leave a corpse in his wake?

These and other questions were brought into painfully sharp focus in Minnesota, where a man captured by the police has confessed not one but several sex murders.

Governor Anderson has said that he will ask his crime commission to study ways of controlling such criminals. "I want the commission," he declared, "to find a way to deal with people like this and protect our citizens."

One cannot be optimistic that a way will be found. The problems involved are baffling for two principal reasons.

One is that a society such as ours cannot encroach too harshly, through imprisonment or otherwise, on individual rights, even the rights of known criminals.

ables under control so that they do not walk abroad to rape and kill—must be diligently sought.

Perhaps there ought to be changes in our laws. Certainly we need to learn more about the psychology of sex offenders, and why they go berserk. The one thing sure is that our present system of dealing with this problem is not good enough.

Sixteen states voted cigarette tax boosts, a record for a single year. Looks like a squeeze play between doctors and tax collectors.

"Automobile sales zoom" reads a recent headline. To which we pleasurably add: "Let 'em zoom . . . and boom . . . and make room for more and more zoom and boom!"

Do you know where, economically and politically, your country is heading? If you were told that already it has entered the governmental vestibule of the House of the Welfare State, would you believe this?

Sealing off East from West Berlin is, of course, open admission by Russia that its type of socialistic government cannot produce a decent standard of living, neither can it nurture freedom. It is nothing but the "police state", and policing is required wherever people are bound to the conditions created by excessive bureaucracy. Already some evidence of excessive bureaucracy exists in the U.S.A.

U.S. foreign aid since World War II totals 78 billion dollars. How did the world ever get along without us before the war?

Talk of the Towns

By DENI SCANLON I have a question for the women—the women who are active in PTA, Girl Scouts, Boy Scouts, Brownies, Little League, Sewing Clubs, Knitting Clubs, Hostess Clubs and Garden Clubs. Is it worth it? Practically speaking, do the time you put in on these things add up to something you wouldn't trade because of the immeasurable return in satisfaction? Or is it tea-party-time wastage? I wonder how many of the local groups, especially their officers, have sat down and thought: "Is this organization going somewhere or is it leading us up a garden path of thorns where somebody's going to get tramped on?" A word of explanation before continuing—I am not opposed to organizations. The U.S.A. would be non-existent and me too if it weren't for people getting together for a united cause. The question brought up here is not should clubs exist but rather what are they like underneath their titles. Are they living up to the big words in the preambles of their constitutions? When you're teaching a class in flower arrangements and a real lousy job, can you tell her so tactfully? Or do you have to rave about it because she's the wife of your husband's boss? How fair and square do you have to be? Should you be impressed with your son's Little League team even if they lose? Or should you grumble about the ref at the dinner table because "that last call was stupid" and the little guy's group got licked unfairly? I really don't know the answers to these questions because working at The Eccentric and at home keeps me too busy. The club joining phase is still ahead of me. Whether I want to get involved or not depends a lot on if I will be contributing something—or playing Patzie in a cast of small club politics. Tell me the truth, pals. Is it worth it?

Suburban Sidelights

By HANK HOGAN

As the new year approaches, the State Legislature is preparing to go back to work. This will probably not be an exciting legislative year since much proposed legislation will be held up until Congress comes up with some answers. Taxes will probably be put off for another year, except for some nuisance taxes to help education and mental health.

One bill that is sure to be introduced again is compulsory motor vehicle inspection. This would stipulate that all of our automobiles would have to be inspected periodically to see if they are safe for use on public highways. Proponents of the bill have statistics to prove that when such legislation is passed motor vehicle fatalities go down. New Jersey, for example, experienced a 32 per cent drop in traffic fatalities the first year the program was in operation.

OPPONENTS OF the bill contend that most of these laws were passed in the mid-forties when everyone was driving an old car that probably wasn't up to par and that the statistics are misleading when compared to the cars on the road today. They say with the improved construction of modern automobiles such legislation is unnecessary and very costly to administer. The opponents also claim that the people behind the bill are the garage owners and car accessory dealers who would see more and service more, if people were forced to submit their car to periodic scrutiny.

What the legislature must decide is whether such a law would in fact lower the death toll. Also, can the inspection be done at a cost to the State that is proportionate to the good it will do? In other words, can the system be made to be self-sustaining? If the decision is in the affirmative in both cases, legislators must decide how the inspection is to be accomplished. Should local gas stations, car dealerships, the local police department or the state make the inspections?

IF LOCAL people do it, are they in a position to make work for themselves? Do the local police have a staff that can do it? Can we afford to have the State set up another department? The State in the past has side-stepped the issue. Compulsory anything is not necessarily popular. Now the Michigan Citizens Highway Safety Committee has called them to answer. But the people of the state have yet to be heard.

Do you want to lower the death toll on highways? Do you want to subject yourself to a semi-annual inspection and pay another motor vehicle fee? The time is now to let your elected representatives know your desire before they must vote on it. If you wait till later, you will again have to live with something someone else either wanted or didn't want.

City Beat

By KEN WEAVER

"Avoidance of nuclear war and controlled disarmament should get our concerted effort," declares a writer in this week's People's Column on this page.

The writer's column and others should take positive steps to avoid war.

The letter-writer cites "as an example of individual responsibility" for the community to follow the donation by a local family of a fallout shelter to the UN.

He suggests that Birmingham contribute the cost of a community shelter to the UN, implying that this would be better than building a local shelter.

I THINK the writer of that letter, and many others like him, have the idea that such measures will avert war.

Unfortunately, we have no such guarantee. To put it briefly, we can neither assume that there will be war nor that there will be no war.

We must make every effort, exhaust every resource to avoid war, but realize that these efforts still might fail.

The fact that we make these efforts is no assurance that war can or will be avoided.

SOME PEOPLE seem to think that such acts as sending a thousand dollars to the UN will avoid war. They may help. But we have no guarantee that they will succeed.

So, it seems to me that rather than resting our hopes entirely on such acts and doing nothing else we should continue them—but at the same time prepare our defenses in case of failure.

This defense would include shelters. Some people believe that building shelters reflects a defeatist attitude.

This, I cannot buy. It's common sense to prepare for a possible eventuality when the situation is as critical as the world crisis is today, especially when we consider the nature of our adversary and the possibility even of an accident touching off a holocaust.

SOME PEOPLE take this attitude: Be brave. Be patriotic. Be loyal to your country. Stand up to the enemy; meet him head-on; beat him with blood-and-guts courage.

Nuts. If there is another war, it will not be this blood-and-guts type. You don't stand up to a nuclear bomb. You get into a shelter and stay out of its way. This is common sense.

If there is another major war, it will be fought mainly with super-weapons—not so much with tanks and guns and soldiers.

There'll be no hand-to-hand combat as we have seen in previous wars, as happens today in the small-scale conflicts. If the United States is attacked, it'll be by the big bombs—not by waves of soldiers hitting our beaches and trying to move inland.

In short, there'll be no chance for us to form battle lines to force back the enemy. There'll be no opportunities to stand up to the enemy, to beat him off by sheer force of courage and determination to defend the homeland.