

## The Peace and Love of Christmas

And thus, again, Christmas.

The chill of the December air is over the land, the short day is dull and damp, and at dawn it is sometimes cold enough to see your breath. The rice harvest is being gathered, and in the far-off villages, the peasants are still simple enough to celebrate the event with songs and dances which the city folk have long forgotten. From Aparri to Jolo the bright clothes to be worn at midnight mass are being sewn by the women; the men are busy making the colored lanterns that will hang from the windows or around the big *belen* in the town plaza. The air is redolent of chestnuts roasted over charcoal and of the sharp reek of acetylene lamps that light up the fruit stands in the church patio. The new shipyard in Bataan will soon build and service big ships, and a jute factory is busily turning out thousands of jute bags that were formerly brought in and paid for in scarce dollars. There is much to be thankful for on Christmas, 1952.

And yet,—

The rich land is not everywhere fruitful, many farms will yield no harvest this year. The Head of the State, surveying the Bicol peninsula by air, noted the devastation caused by two typhoons coming one after the other and decided not to collect taxes from the Bicolanos this year. In Central Luzon, great tracts of fertile land lie abandoned to cogon, for one cannot raise crops where there is no peace and order. In Manila the stores announce extension of their office hours and the Blue Sunday Law is suspended so that the people can go to the stores to buy their Christmas presents. The crowds that throng the streets look briefly into the glass windows and pass on, searching for something that can be purchased with the Minimum Monthly Wage. In the streets at night, small bands of hopeful boys try to make music with their piping voices, a home-made bamboo flute and a pair of incongruous castanets, but the people remain deaf to their Christmas carols or their mamboes, and the windows remain closed. Down in Jolo a band of outlaws which the Army, with its planes and tanks and flame throwers and specially trained police dogs could not capture, finally surrenders and drives a hard bargain. Convicted by a court of law for "rebellion, with multiple murders", the band is pardoned before they even enter the prison gate. Perhaps there will be peace in Jolo this Christmas.

Far away from the Philippines, everywhere in the world, there is "not peace, but a sword." The newly elected American President, has just finished a tour of the European battle front and bravely admits that he has no easy solution to the problem. In the middle East, not far from the hills where the shepherds first saw the Star of Bethlehem, a conflagration whose brightness may outshine that star, threatens every day. Somewhere in the watery wastes of the Pacific Ocean, on a God for-

saken coral reef, the radioactive debris left by the explosion of the first hydrogen bomb lies strewn on the beach, marking the graves of the animal and vegetable life that it has exterminated. And in the United States, the highest court of the land affirmed the death sentence on a man and his wife, convicted of disclosing the secrets of the atomic bomb to another country.

"Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace to men of good will."

Almost two thousand years later, peace is farther anyway than ever, and men of good will are outdoing each other trying to build the bigger bomb, the faster plane, the more lethal weapon with which to wipe out man from the face of the earth. Will this be the last Christmas in this world?

It will be, at that precise moment that man uses the hydrogen bomb (or any other nuclear fusion bomb) against his neighbor in order to settle a dispute.

It will be, as long as men look on their neighbors as enemies, not as brothers.

It will be as long as they believe that might makes right, and that the end justifies the means.

This may indeed be the last Christmas, if we forget the meaning of the First Christmas. For men who do not have faith in man will ultimately make mankind extinct, and men who do not believe in the miracle of love and faith cannot have any idea of the worth of human life. There is no defense against an atomic bomb, not even another atomic bomb, and those who live by the sword shall die by the sword. Nineteen centuries is a long time, long enough to prove the immutability of certain truths. But man's memory is short and his understanding pathetically simple.

And so, on Christmas day, on Triangle Hill and Snider Ridge, men will greet each other with bullet and bayonet. In many a farm in Pampanga, and Nueva Ecija, the doors and windows will be closed and barred on Christmas Eve. Along Escolta and Plaza Santa Cruz the neon signs will turn night into day, lighting up the sky for miles around, eyes, even the caves of Intramuros and the *barang-barang* along the esteros. And any day now, Malacanan will put up a Christmas party for the poor, and the First Lady of the land will distribute her gifts with a gracious smile. The big companies will give their faithful employees a month's bonus, and the Social Welfare Administration will send out its field workers to look for the Ten or Hundred Neediest Cases.

Thus, again, Christmas.

