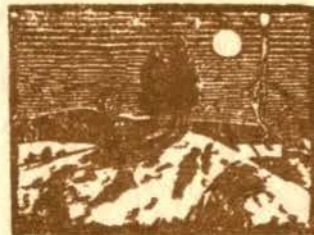


Landoit

# The Season's Greetings

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*God's hand has taken away the seal  
That held the portals of his speech;  
And oft he said a few strange words  
Whose meaning lay beyond our reach.*

**M**ANY times, in wandering in the hill country, I have passed a deserted stone chimney, standing like the dead sentinel in armor of the legend, keeping sightless guard over the old homestead. And always have I been reminded of what these sad monuments to departed homes may mean, both in memory and imagination. You have seen them standing stark and still in the moonlight, or in the garish light of noon, surrounded by the unkept apple trees that no longer bear fruit in the garden where the flowers once tended by careful hands are now growing wild and fast returning to primitive type.

But at Christmas time, of all other times of the year, the forsaken chimney makes us sad. As I look at the broken walls and the blackened hearth, I seem to see the garden filled again with the hardy flowers; and the frail mother with her young babe in her arms, bending over the roses, which bear as life always bears, bloom and thorns, and see again strong men stand before the steaming hearth to warm after the day's work is done.

Again, on many a winter morning, I see a little girl, as long ago I saw one, in our own county here, rise and run to the open fireplace, and in childish glee, as she saw her little shoes, say to them, "Morning shoes, howdy shoes, where are we go today," and I wonder where they have gone today, as we stand on the crumbling urn of the forgotten years. Have they gone in paths of pleasantness and peace, or the ways of sorrow and despair?

Once more I see the lovers sitting by the chimney place, with trembling hands clasped, with the boy's eyes not searching the glimmering flames of the fire, but rather the flashing of those other eyes, half hidden by dark lashes, as their lips whisper eternal vows. Many a forsaken chimney stands through the nights and days where once happy families gathered about bright home fires, but I doubt not that many hearts worn by the conflicts of life and weary of the "tumult and the shouting," which must die away, turn back to the old home in the hills, and in tender fancy recall the days of their childhood. Again for them the fairies dance in the coves of the hills, again Santa rides the North wind to the chimney tops, and childhood's joys and simple faith return as the day is done.

It may be in palatial homes, love has died, and man and wife sit across the fireside staring at each other in blank amazement, because love is dead, and there is no death so drear and dark as dead love, unless it be a dead faith—and both go hand in hand. Better the forsaken chimney in the wild-wood than the forsaken heart in the city. But at Christmas for deserted hearths and lonely hearts, in city streets, and by the sounding sea, there comes the mighty presence of the One whose birth we celebrate. This Glorious One stands where the Cherubim meet, and we hear the beat of the War Horse's feet as the hosts of the Lord pass by. But His presence also blesses every heart and home in every land, unless our hearts and homes are like forsaken chimneys. May His presence bring present and eternal peace.

By F. C. BUTTON, December, 1927.

