

HOLIDAYS

by
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Even after we had grown up and had children of our own, we went back to Germantown to spend holidays with Grandpa and Grandma Parlin. Through the years, traditions were built up and we all looked forward to being together.

Easter was always celebrated with an "Easter Egg Hunt." This meant that the folks had to hide the jelly beans before we all arrived. Practically every year, my mother made the same remark, "No matter how hard you look for them, I'll find jelly beans at spring house-cleaning time!"

The excitement of Thanksgiving was always enhanced by the Penn-Cornell football game which was played on the afternoon of Thanksgiving day. By tradition, mother always had a big kettle of oyster stew at noon. Then we all put on our warmest clothes and headed for Franklin Field. By the end of the game, whether we had sat through sun, rain or snow, we were ravenously hungry and did full justice to a huge, golden brown turkey with all the trimmings which had been prepared by Irene Green.

Father always sat at the head of the table and carved. He started every meal with a blessing but Thanksgiving was always something special. Throughout his life, he had two abiding passions: his family and his work. So, when time for the Thanksgiving grace came, he was wont to expand a little on his gratitude to the Lord for the many blessings he had received through his wonderful and ever-expanding family. One Thanksgiving, as 18 of us sat down to dinner, he was more voluble than ever before. The grace went on and on. Our amazement can only be imagined when we heard him conclude, "I am, Yours sincerely."

Father had one characteristic which all of us children learned to deal with early in life. Although Father had a marvellous sense of humor, he could never take a joke on himself. Knowing this, no one DARED to laugh at the thought of Father dictating to the Lord but, as in so many cases, George's quick thinking came to our rescue. To this day,

nobody knows WHAT he said but he said SOMETHING . . . and we all exploded with laughter. The meal progressed without further mishap.

Of all the Christmases which stand out in our memory, there is one which was brighter than all of the rest.

The basic idea started many years earlier when I was in Grammar School and Charles was at Penn. He used to come home at holiday-time and tease me to teach him how to play the piano. We'd try, but I wasn't a very good teacher and he'd forget everything I taught him by the time the next vacation rolled around. He'd watch George and me having fun with our music and he'd remark, a little wistfully, that he wished he could play an instrument. "If Mother had only kept me at my piano lessons when I was little," he'd say once in awhile.

One Christmas, after we were all grown and married, I had an idea. When I was getting my Master's Degree in Music Education, I took a course in Orchestra during which we learned the fundamentals of all of the orchestral instruments. It seemed to me that the double bass was the easiest if you had the physical strength necessary to press down those heavy strings. THAT would be just the instrument for Charles and would fit nicely with Howard's violin, George's cello and the piano.

None of us had much money but Father said that if we would put into the kitty whatever we would expect to spend on Charles' Christmas gift, he would make up the sum necessary to buy a bass viol. Then Mother had an idea!

To add to the excitement and mystery, Mother fashioned a Christmas Stocking out of sufficient red cloth to cover the entire bass viol. Of course, we stuffed paper around it to fill out the sock.

When Christmas morning dawned, since Charles had only ONE gift, he had to wait until everybody else had opened gifts. At long last it was his turn. First, he was handed a small square package which was marked, "So that your Christmas gift will not turn into a white elephant." It turned out to be a block of wood. We rolled with laughter as Charles pretended great fear in opening his stocking for fear a white elephant would step out. He had to stand on a stepladder to reach over

into the stocking and when he finally got the paper stuffing all out, the look of wonder and amazement on his face should have been caught by one of our camera buffs.

In advance, I had written an extremely simple bass part to a trio we already knew—mostly on open strings. To this day, I never hear Cesar Cui's "Orientale" without thinking of that Christmas, and remembering the joy and excitement of having a new member in our family "orchestra."