

PEACE AND GOODWILL—A CONTRAST.

(By P. MONCRIEFF.)

Xmas had come, and with it perfect weather. In the cities, towns and villages people were opening their Xmas cards and reading messages of peace and goodwill.

It was holiday time, the season when everyone pursues his favourite pastime.

As the day broke, away across Nelson Bay sailed yachts and numerous launches.

On the beaches at Torrent Bay and Astrolabe folk were gathering to fish or bathe. One party, on exploration bent, wended its way up a creek, following the stream inland.

It was hot work climbing uphill, through thickets of supplejack, kiekie and tall ferns; therefore, the party hailed with delight the suggestion to return to the shore and bathe.

Into the deep, cool sea they plunged, crying out that the water was so clear they could see the bottom. To and fro they swam, amidst granite rocks, against which the wavelets splashed. Overhead the sky was cloudless, and round a headland sailed a small white Sea-Swallow. It was not timorous, for it hovered over the bathers for a second, whilst they exclaimed at its graceful movements; then pursued its way, like a large white butterfly; the embodiment of life and freedom.

"Must have a nest nearby," said one of the party. "See how it swoops to settle on yonder rocks."

Bathing over they ate their lunch; then lay outstretched on the hot, sun-baked sands beneath a gigantic rock which afforded shelter to their heads.

"What a perfect day," sighed the woman of the party, gazing with contented eye at the vivid green of a broad-leaf tree spreading above the rocks. "Where could one find a more peaceful spot to spend Xmas? The whole place preaches peace and goodwill. . . . We must come here to-morrow."

The following day found them returning to their paradise. Overhead the sun shone as before; the sea still sparkled as it splashed against the granite rocks. The picture seemed the same, but not quite. One thing was different.

On the spot where the woman had laid her head the previous day they caught sight of a small white object.

"Who is the untidy one who left the paper about?" demanded the joker of the party; then, horrorstruck, recoiled.

At their feet, wings outspread, his black-capped head touching the sand, lay the joyous Sea Swallow they had admired the day before. Dead! Shot by some person in a launch.

There he lay close to a fresh water creek, nothing but a