

But gradually everything became easy and beautiful. I drank and believed, ate and believed, talked, melted and sang because I believed. When it was too hot indoors we went out of doors, turned to music when we began to repeat ourselves in talk, sipped coffee when wine threatened us, returned to wine when dullness drew near, said things we had always wanted to say and knew that we were saying but neither could nor would have said without the wine, the friendship, and the occasion. Our talk, I remember, wandered from Milton's paradise to Dante's, from Holy Willie to Whitman, from Matthew Arnold's "Now He Is Dead" to Job's "I know that my Redeemer liveth." About midnight I had to meet a mellow assault on my agnosticism. Later I was myself the aggressor, calling Christians cowards, and resurrectionists stubborn fanatics who had not the grace to accept the fate of all other living creatures. It sounds raw and childish now, but at the time it was neither disturbing nor painful, so perfectly in tune had we become in the emotional areas not ruled by reason. It was not the first time I had eaten too much, drunk too much, talked too much, confessed too much, but it was the only time I ever felt so strongly that the eating, the drinking, the talking, and the singing—even the arguing and occasional maudlin silences—had worked together for good in all of us, been a sermon, a sacrament, and a rejoicing all in one, a Christmas that offended neither mind nor spirit.

My third Christmas had a curiosity interest only, and already seems a little unreal. But I would have lost much if I had missed it. I was on the Mexican border of Texas, and spent the day half on one side and half on the other. On the American side I saw hard-headed business men gazing reverently at cribs and angels and infant Christs in department store windows, moving in an endless procession through a truck containing life-size figures in wax of the twelve apostles, or with maudlin expressions of surprise and delight walking round Christmas trees 50 feet high. On the Mexican side I passed from kneeling crowds in a cathedral to a bull fight that lasted for four hours. We were all, I suppose, God's children, but for an inhibited New Zealander to stand on that bridge on the Rio Grande, with 100,000 non-puritan and mushy Protestants celebrating Christmas on one side, and 50,000 mediaeval Catholics celebrating the same event on the other side was to feel neither awake nor asleep nor surprised nor excited but so completely confused and dumb that it was a wonder that I found my way back to my hotel.

(To be continued)

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