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A Christmas Letter from Australia

Douglas Sladen

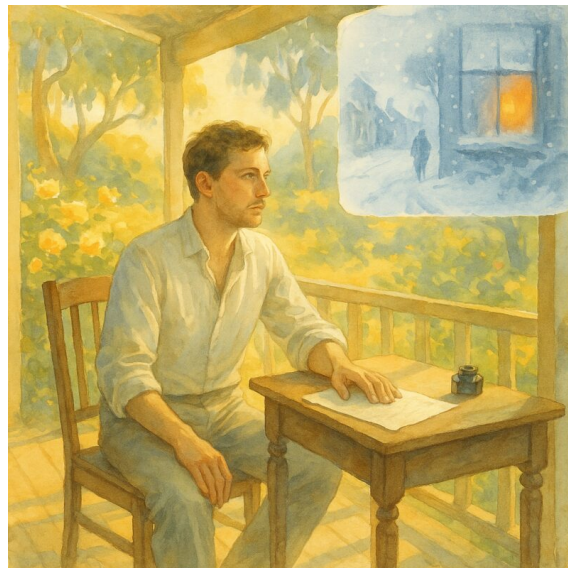
'Tis Christmas, and the North wind blows; 'twas two years yesterday
Since from the Lusitania's bows I looked o'er Table Bay,
A tripper round the narrow world, a pilgrim of the main,
Expecting when her sails unfurled to start for home again.

'Tis Christmas, and the North wind blows; today our hearts are one,
Though you are 'mid the English snows and I in Austral sun;
You, when you hear the Northern blast, pile high a mightier fire,
Our ladies cower until it's past in lawn and lace attire.

I fancy I can picture you upon this Christmas night,
Just sitting as you used to do, the laughter at its height;
And then a sudden, silent pause intruding on your glee,
And kind eyes glistening because you chanced to think of me.

This morning when I woke and knew 'twas Christmas come again,
I almost fancied I could view white rime upon the pane,
And hear the ringing of the wheels upon the frosty ground,
And see the drip that downward steals in icy casket bound.

I daresay you'll be on the lake, or sliding on the snow,
And breathing on your hands to make the circulation flow,
Nestling your nose among the furs of which your boa's made, —
The Fahrenheit here registers a hundred in the shade.



It is not quite a Christmas here with this unclouded sky,
This pure transparent atmosphere, this sun midheaven-high;
To see the rose upon the bush, young leaves upon the trees,
And hear the forest's summer hush or the low hum of bees.

But cold winds bring not Christmastide, nor budding roses June,
And when it's night upon your side we're basking in the noon.
Kind hearts make Christmas — June can bring blue sky or clouds above;
The only universal spring is that which comes of love.

And so it's Christmas in the South as on the North-sea coasts,
Though we are staved with summer-drouth and you with winter frosts.
And we shall have our roast beef here, and think of you the while,
Though all the watery hemisphere cuts off the mother isle.

Feel sure that we shall think of you, we who have wandered forth,
And many a million thoughts will go to-day from south to north;
Old heads will muse on churches old, where bells will ring to-day —
The very bells, perchance, which tolled their fathers to the clay.

And now, good-night! and I shall dream that I am with you all,
Watching the ruddy embers gleam athwart the panelled hall;
Nor care I if I dream or not, though severed by the foam.
My heart is always in the spot which was my childhood's home.

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