

# New Book Reviews



An illustration by Bill Crawford for H. L. Mencken's "Christmas Story."

## H. L. Mencken Writes a Christmas Story To End All Other Christmas Stories

**CHRISTMAS STORY**  
By H. L. Mencken. Illustrated by Bill Crawford.  
(Knopf; \$1.)

Reviewed by MARY-CARTER ROBERTS.

Although this little piece was previously published in the New Yorker magazine, it seems worthy of notice now that it has been issued in book form. Christmas is approaching and it is, after all, a Christmas story, even as its title indicates. It is not, to be sure, a Christmas story in the orthodox manner, unless you concede that the unorthodoxy of H. L. Mencken has become orthodox by custom's sanctification. Anyway, it is H. L. Mencken. That should do for his fans.

It is the sad little tale of the Christmas dinner given, circa 1900, by Mr. Fred Ammermeyer for the bums of the city of Baltimore. Mr. Ammermeyer, an ardent atheist, was offended on hearing that the mission dinners tendered to the city's assorted outcasts opened with hymn-singing and closed with obligatory public confessions by the guests of misspent lives. He accordingly offered his own variety

of competition. At his dinner the meal began at 11 a.m. and continued until midnight unbroken save by performances of a burlesque troupe. Beer flowed and cigars were handed out by the half dozen. No hymns were sung and no confessions called for. A good time was to be had by all. Such was Mr. Ammermeyer's hospitable intention.

But alas, it did not turn out that way. Virtue raised its rejected head in the midst of the revels and the Ammermeyerian program went glimmering. Mr. Mencken calls his story the Christmas story "to surpass, transcend and put an end to all other Christmas stories" but it is hardly that. It is a nice little piece of rather mild Mencken. Its illustrations are a lot more noisy than its text.



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## Kaleidoscopic Reminiscences Of Childhood

**TIME LAY ASLEFF**  
By Carman Barnes. (Harper & Bros.; \$2.50.)

Reviewed by J. N. HAMILTON.

Miss Barnes' latest novel is a somewhat soporific opus of childhood with an autocratic family which settled the river country of Tennessee. It relates the disintegration (or success) of each individual through reminiscences of a child now grown. Possibly it is because Miss Barnes employs this kaleidoscopic flashback method in spinning this yarn of the feminine members of a family that it tends to become confused and jumbled.

Characters weave in and out of "Time Lay Asleff" without regard for time or space in dreamy sequences. True, these characters are destructively pierced with the needle point of womanly insight, but their actions remain astral. There are, in spots, keen observations of character analysis that may titillate maidenly ladies kept in by rainy afternoons, but the whole thing just never escapes being slightly adolescent. There is little doubt, after scanning the publisher's biography on Miss Barnes, that the novel deals in some measure with her childhood. They also slyly mention that Miss Barnes can write her name in Sanscrit. Just what that has to do with writing novels we couldn't discover.

Miss Barnes probably will be better remembered for her first novel, "Schoolgirl," written when she was just 15.

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