

Christmas Dreams and Christmas Eve

CHRISTMAS DREAMS.

SOME tiny elves one Christmas grew mischievous, it seems, and broke into the storeroom where old Santa keeps his dreams. And gathered up whole armfuls of dreams all bright and sweet. And started forth to peddle them adown the village street.

Oh, you would never, never guess how queerly these dreams sold. Why, nearly all the younger folk bought dreams of being old, and one was chap in curls and kilts, a gentle little thing, invested in a dream about an awful pirate king.

A maid who thought her pretty name old fashioned and absurd bought dreams of names the longest and the queerest ever heard, and, strange to say, a lad who owned 'all sorts of costly toys' bought dreams of selling papers with the raggedest of boys.

And then a dream of summer and a barefooted boy at play was bought up very quickly by a gentleman quite gray, and one old lady, smiling through the grief she tried to hide, bought bright and tender visions of a little girl who died.

A ragged little beggar girl, with weary, wistful gaze, soon chose a Cinderella dream, with jewels all ablaze. Well, it wasn't many minutes from the time they came in sight before the dreams were all sold out and the elves had taken flight.

—St. Nicholas.

CHRISTMAS EVE.

THE snow is white on the roofs tonight, the moon looks down with her silvery smile, and the wind blows free through bush and tree and whistles along for mile on mile.

And, ah, hark there! On the midnight air comes the faintest tinkles of fairy bells. They are coming near, they are coming here, and their sweet sound swelling of joy foretells.

It is Santa Claus, and he cannot pause, but down the chimney he quickly slides, each stocking gills till it almost spills, then gayly chuckles and off he glides.

How happy he, the saint to be, of all the girls and all the boys! He hears his praise through the holidays as they eat their sweets and break their toys.

So still he smiles and the time beguiles concealing schemes our hearts to cheer. He loves us all, and great and small regret that he comes but once a year.

—William Barclay Dunham.

TELLING THE OLD SWEET STORY OF CHRISTMAS



Christmas Cakes

English Plum Puddings and Yule Babies and Their Symbolism

THERE seems to be little doubt that porridge (and not pudding) was the older and more correct designation of this time honored delicacy. The word pudding was formerly used in the sense of stuffing (or forcement). Porridge, on the other hand, was used in the sense of our present day pudding. When Shakespeare speaks of "porridge after meat" he undoubtedly means "pudding after meat." And in Sheppard's "Epigrams" (published 1651) we read, "No matter for plumb porridge or shred pie." P. H. Ditchfield says: "The plum pudding is not older than the early years of the eighteenth century and appears to be a 'house of Hanover' or 'act of settlement' dish. The pre-revolution or Stuart preparation of plums and other ingredients was a porridge or pottage and not a pudding and was made with very strong broth of shin of beef."

Christmas plum puddings have of late years become the toys of fashion. In the good old days, when the Yule log crackled in the spacious fire grate of the rich and poor and when snow actually fell at Christmas time, people were well content with plain homely plum puddings topped with dancing spiffle. But custom has changed with the times, and the present generation (or at any rate a part of it) requires its Christmas puddings enriched with jewelry or gold coins. This innovation commenced about 1835.

But of greater importance is what has been considered the theological reason for being of the plum pudding. The searchers after symbolical interpretations contend that on account of the very richness of its ingredients the plum pudding is emblematic of the costly gifts of the Magi.

About Yule babies, Yule doughs or pop (lollypop) ladies, a custom existed in some parts of giving sweetmeats of a special kind to children at Christmas. These tiny morsels in the shape of a doll—eyes, mouth and all—were made of dough and currants. They were flat cakes about the size of a hand, roughly shaped in the figure of a woman with the hands crossed over the breast, and in the crossed arms was a smaller figure, representing a child, the features being rudely suggested by means of currants. There can be no doubt that this sweetmeat—which was made and given to children only at Christmas—represented the Blessed Virgin Mary and the Holy Child, a practical and pleasing way of bringing home to the mind of the children the central facts and figures of Christmas-tide.

Happy Christmas

President Grant and His "Tribe" Enjoyed It in the White House

THE Christmas of 1869 found the happy, wide awake family of General Grant settled in the White House. It was just four score years on March 4 since Mrs. Washington was "executive mistress." During their eight years in the White House the Grants were counted an unusually happy home circle.

All their holidays were marked with simplest pleasures and unselfish charities. Mrs. Grant was very systematic in her charities. She made lists and distributed Christmas gifts with wisdom and good sense. There was no end of calls upon them soon after the war, and none went away empty.

In 1870 President Grant's father spent Christmas at the White House. The sons came home from college, and Nellie and her friends made the old house ring with good times. Mrs. Fremont gave them a dancing reception, and the sewing club of which Nellie was the president had a wonderful Christmas entertainment, furnished mostly from the White House.

General Grant, like General Sherman, had a great love for children and their pleasures. One Christmas the antiece was "The adventures and misadventures of Clown and Pantaloon in the wonderful pantomime of 'Jack and the Beanstalk,'" and the White House children were determined to go.

"Now, father, please," urged Nellie Grant, and "Yes, father, you promised us," said Jesse, and General Sherman said, "We'll go, all of us, and take the whole tribe."

And they did—uncles and cousins, several distinguished generals and the president. Officers of church and state were forgotten in the riddleous pranks of "Jack and the Beanstalk." A great banquet was afterward served in the state dining room by the new steward, Melah. All the distinguished guests joined with the children in games and fun. There were music and pronouncements through the east room.

The Child Immortal, on Mary's arm soft against the child and dreaming still caressed "The pillow of her snowy breast, and as he slept he smiled.

He slept and dreamed—he dreamed and smiled—The centuries come and go, but still that bit of heaven we know—The mother and the child.

—Martha Summerfield Shucy.

Yuletide Culprits in "Ye Olden Time"

THE first century of colonial life saw few set times and days for pleasure. The holy days of the English church were as a step to the Puritan nostrils, and their public celebration was at once rigidly forbidden by the laws of New England.

New holidays were not quickly evolved, and the sober gatherings for matters of church and state for a time took their place. The hatred of "wanton bacchanalian Christmas" spent throughout England, as Cotton said, in "revelling, dicing, carding, masking, mummery, consumed in computations, in interludes, in excess of wine, in mad mirth," was the natural reaction of intelligent and thoughtful minds against the excesses of a festival which had ceased to be a Christian holiday, but was dominated by a lord of misrule who did not hesitate to invade the churches in time of service in his noisy revels and sports. English churchmen long ago revolted against such Christmas observance.

Of the first pilgrim Christmas we know but little, save that it was spent, as was many a later one, in work.

By 1639 the Puritans had grown to hate Christmas more and more. It was, to use Shakespeare's words, "the bug that feared them all." The very name smacked to them of incense, stole and monkish custom. Any person who observed it as a holiday by forbearing of labor, feasting or any other way was to pay 5 shillings fine, so desirous were they to "beate down every sprout of Episcopacie."

Judge Sewall watched jealously the feeling of the people with regard to Christmas and noted with pleasure on each succeeding year the continuance of common traffic throughout the day. Such entries as this show his attitude: "Dec. 25, 1685. Carts come to town and shops open as usual. Some somewhat observe the day, but are vexed, I believe, that the body of people profane it, and blessed be God no authority yet to compel them to keep it."

When the Church of England established Christmas services in Boston a few years later we find the judge wagging his tongue against Governor Belcher over it and hear him praising his son for not going with other boys friends to hear the novel and attractive services. He says, "I dehort mine from Christmas keeping and charge them to forbear."—Alice Morse Earle.

Yule Log Must Be of Ash. In Devonshire the Yule log, to be a luck bringer, must consist of a bundle of ash sticks bound around with bands of the same tree, nine in number, no more and no fewer. And every time the fagot cracks in the flames the good host must furnish a bowl of liquor to his guests.

THE LITTLE FELLER'S STOCKIN'

OH, it's Christmas eve and moonlight and the Christmas air is chill, and the frosty Christmas holly shines and sparkles on the hill, and the Christmas sleighbells jingle and the Christmas laughter rings as the last stray shoppers hurry, takin' home the Christmas things, and up yonder in the attic there's a little trundle bed where there's Christmas dreams a-dancin' through a sleepy, curly head, and it's "Merry Christmas!" Mary, once ag'in for me and you, with the little feller's stockin' hangin' up beside the flue.

ISN'T silk, that little stockin', and it ain't much for show, and the darns are pretty plenty round about the heel and toe, and its color's kinder faded, and it's sorter worn and old, but it's really is surprisin' what a lot of love 'twill hold, and the little hand that hung it by the chimney there along has a grip upon our heartstrings that is mighty firm and strong, so, old Santy, don't forget it, though it ain't fine and new, that plumb little worsted stockin' hangin' up beside the flue.

AND the crops may fail and leave us with our plans all gone ter smash, and the mortgage may hang heavy, and the bills use up the cash, but whenever comes the season, jest so long's we've got a dime, there'll be somethin' in that stockin'—won't there, Mary?—every time, and if in amongst our sunshine there's a shower or two of rain, why, we'll face it bravely, smilin', and we'll try not to complain long as Christmas comes and finds us here together, me and you, with the little feller's stockin' hangin' up beside the flue.

—Joe Lincoln in Saturday Evening Post.

Christmas Was For Adults Then.

Seventy years ago Christmas was an adult and a home festival. It received all its honor, all its joyousness from the ideas of father, mother and home. It was the golden ring that held all the love and sentiment we associate with those three almost divine words. Sons and daughters might stray to the very ends of the earth, but Christmas brought them home again—in the body if possible, but if not possible then in the sweetest love and memory. If a child had done well it looked forward to the joy of telling it to father and mother at Christmas; if it had done ill it felt sure of pardon and help at Christmas. "Father Christmas" was their own father, and by his side stood the dear, sweet mother, ever ready to persuade and plead for all her children; glad to welcome, glad to forgive, glad to praise; full of sympathy for every joyful and sorrowful condition.—Annie E. Barr.

Mistletoe Superstitions.

What superstitions cluster, thick as its berries, round the mistletoe! In old times such were its magic powers that it was worn as an amulet, and potent love potions were brewed from it. It cured wounds, enabled any who held it not only to see ghosts, but to compel them to speak. And that its magic is not all lost will be proved this Christmas-tide in thousands of our homes, where its white berries lend sanction to the osculatory homage paid to pretty faces.

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OFFICIAL REPORT

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"The need is greater than ever"

This official statement signed by Alexander J. Hemphill, Treasurer of the Commission for Relief, and Oscar S. Straus, Chairman of the Appeal Committee, urges the American people to contribute liberally to the relief of destitute Belgians and adds:

"We are happy to announce in this connection that the Dollar Christmas Fund of which Henry Clews, Broad Street, New York, is Treasurer, has today (December 7th, 1915) paid to the Commission for Relief TWENTY-FIVE THOUSAND DOLLARS of its receipts to purchase CHILDREN'S SHOES WHICH ARE SORELY NEEDED IN BELGIUM AND WHICH WILL BE SHIPPED IMMEDIATELY.

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