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The Christ Cradle

A Christmas Ballad

By MARGARET J. PRESTON.

["Christ cradle" is the old Saxon name for mince pie.]

T WAS the time of the old crusaders,
And back with his broken band
The lord of Lascarcon castle
Had come from the Holy Land.

It was Christmas eve in the castle;
The Yule log burnt in the hall,
And helmet and shield and banner
Threw shadows upon the wall.

And the baron was telling stories
To the little ones at his knees
Of some of the holy places
He had visited overseas.

Then he spake of the watching shepherds,
Who saw such marvelous sights
And the song that the angels chanted
That first of the Christmas nights.

He told of the star whose shining
Outsparkled the brightest gem;
He told of the hallowed cradle
They shovled him at Bethlehem.

And the eyes of the children glistened
To think that a rack sufficed,
With only the straw for blankets,
To cradle the baby Christ.

"Nay, dry up your tears, my darlings,
Right gayly the baron cried,
"For nothing but smiles must greet me!
I'm home, and it's Christmastide!"

"Come, wife; I have thought of a cradle
Another than this, I say,
Which thou in thy skill shalt make me
To honor this Christmas day.

"We would not forget the manger,
So choose of thy platters fair
The one that is largest, deepest,
And cover it in thy care

"With flakes of the richest pastry,
Wrought cunningly by thy hands,
That thus it may bring before us
The wrap of the swaddling bands.

"And out of thy well stored larder
Set forth of thy very best,
Is ought that we have too precious
To honor this Christmas guest?"

"Strew meats of the finest shredding
(The straw was chopped in the stall);
Bring butter and wine and honey
To lavish around them all.

"Set raisins and figs of Smyrna

That draw to the east our thought;
Let spices that call of the Magi,
With their gifts, to mind be brought.

"Let sweets that suggest frankincense,
Let fruits from the southern seas
Be given ungrudged. Remember,
His choicest he gave for thee!"

"Then over the piled up platter
A cover of pastry draw,
With a star in its midst to mind us
Of that which the wise men saw.

"Christ's cradle is what we'll call it,
And ever, sweet wife, I pray,
With such thou wilt make us merry
At dinner each Christmas day!"

Gypsies' Christmas.

The gypsy Christmas is a love feast and a carnival in one. The wandering folk come together in tribal celebration to choose their queen for the beginning year. Each clan has its own usages and superstitions. In Roumania the cradle, so they say, of nomadism, the gypsy queen is crowned with roses, and roses tip her scepter and her wand. In place of holly and mistletoe the hardy little rosebud which blossoms at this season on the apex of the hills is honored not for its sweetness merely, but because of a fair Christmas legend which the gypsy folk would make distinctively their own.—Chicago Tribune.

HERE COMES SANTA CLAUS!



Christmas Pie Has Long Family History

HAPPY the Christmas reveler who has a digestion to tackle the Christmas pie. The modern fad, dist in diet is trying to rule out the plum pudding and the mince from the Christmas feast.

Shame on him! Better a night of groaning to the few than a ban on a time honored custom for the many. Lay in a stock of soda mint, pepsin and salt water. Be sporty and take chances on the plummy goody.

First it was old Santa under a ban—a dreary world it would be without Santa Claus—now it is the toothsome Christmas pie bulging with raisins, flaky of crust and redolent of burning brandy.

Truly the modern progressive who lives by rule is akin to the old Puritan to whom the Christmas pie was an abomination savoring of Popery. Indeed the Roundhead had more excuse for his abstinence; it was a test of orthodoxy. He felt his morals would be injured by eating a pie whose savory contents were typical of offerings of the Magi and whose form was often that of a manger.

The Christmas pie is of ancient and honorable lineage, and its name of "mince pie" came centuries later, being given in derision by the Puritans. Are we such weaklings that what our ancestors have thrived on for centuries will slay us in one eating? Surely the stomach specialist, that product of modernity, must have slipped up.

Our grandparents did not eat one merely little slice of the Christmas pie in fear and trembling. Boldly they swallowed huge hunks, not on Christmas day only, but during the entire season of Christmas, unto Twelfth Night. Was it not writ, "As many different houses as thou shalt eat mince pie during Christmastide so many happy months shalt thou have during the year?"

And they began the mixing of that Christmas pie early and with great ceremony. It was a gala occasion when the plum pudding was to be stirred and each member of the household down to the infant in arms must have a turn at the spoon.—Philadelphia Press.

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A Christmas Burglar

AHA! A burglar in the room!
I hear his stealthy tread;
He's skulking somewhere through
the gloom
By yonder trundle bed,
Across the creaking chamber floor
His fearful footsteps fall.
What form was that stole through the
door
And out along the hall?

What form was that, clad all in white
And scarcely three feet high?
A burglar? Or some Christmas sprite
With mischief in his eye?
What! You! Abroad before the day
Has lit his round, red lamp?
What takes you from your slumbers,
pray,
You little, owlish scamp?

You came away down here because
You really felt that you
Must wait for Mr. Santa Claus
And see if he was true?
You braved the darkness, unafraid
And all its terrors grim,

And this long, dreadful journey made
To prove your faith in him?

Well, back to bed, for he IS true;
Your precious faith hold fast.
Old Santa Claus will live for you
While dreams and childhood last.
And when at length you take your place
Among the world of men,
In every little Christmas face
He'll live for you again.
—James J. Montague in New York
American.

Edwin Booth's Christmas Gift

I REMEMBER a Christmas I spent in Edwin Booth's company many years ago," said the theatrical manager. "He had bought a summer residence at Cos Cob, Conn., the previous summer and invited me up to play Santa Claus and do the chimney act. His property was a fair sized little promontory of land bounded on one side by the Connecticut river, on the other side by Long Island sound, and the New York and New Haven tracks formed the base line. If there is any road affected by tramps it is

that same New Haven road, and when I arrived, two or three days before Christmas, there was a line of them waiting their turn at the gate that reminded me of a highly successful advance sale, one tramp near the gate even offering to sell his advanced position for 10 cents. Booth was much worried about the dangerous looking fellows, and it struck me that a dog would be highly appropriate as a gift. I wired to a friend in New York, and the day before Christmas the biggest Siberian hound I ever saw was waiting at the little station for me. Booth was tickled to death, and we managed to chain that dog just inside the main gate near the lodge, and then we shook hands. It was an awful big dog, bigger than a little donkey that arrived on the next train with a gocart as a present to Booth's little daughter, Edwina.

"Well, we fixed up the presents that night. I dressed up in fur rugs and traps as Santa Claus and had arranged to drive the donkey into the reception room and distribute the gifts from the well-laden gocart.
"The dog was to remain in the little shed we had extemporized for him, but he didn't. He was there on business, and he attended to it promptly. The chain broke like a piece of twine, and I broke for the balcony, which I just managed to reach from the cart. Of course there was a racket, and I got into the window, and by the time we had armed ourselves with antique swords and a Revolutionary musket the noise had subsided sufficiently for us to venture forth.
"The dog was just seen in the moonlight disappearing over the stone wall, hundreds of dollars' worth of presents were scattered in the deep snow, and donkey meat and fur were an inch deep all over the premises."—Buffalo Express.

Christmas in Rome.
Christmas in Rome is a quiet and solemn affair, with religion featured in its observance. The observance begins the day of Christmas, when the image of the Christ Child is brought out, till Jan. 6, when it is again put in place. St. Peter's is brilliantly illuminated, with myriads of candle lights flickering their significant tribute to the central fact of the church's life. What appeals to Italian art lovers is the gift, which is as usual as the feast. Every child is presented with a plaster cast of the Nativity, and even in the phase of the holiday which is joyful and essentially "merry" the underlying sentiment is always conception of the manger and the birth. There are family reunions and social festivities, but always it is the religious feature which is most significant.—Century.

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