

# The Best Years Christmas of the Modern Child

**F**ASHIONS change so, it's hard to keep track of them. A few years ago we were all for disillusionizing childhood, on the principle that it is a hard world at best, and the quicker the children realized that they were facing harsh facts the better for them. And now, the good old saint has come into his own again; and the children are to be handed back their sweet faith as a toy too popular to be flung aside among the other wrecks made by the modern iconoclast.

When Santa Claus comes around this year he will find himself confronted by the penalties he must pay for his more than lavish munificence in the past. It is glorious, indeed, to have a perennial treasure house of playthings wherewith to buy the jubilant laughter of the young; but it costs more in the future to spoil a child than it does to do the spoiling in the present.

If the children of today are not spoiled it must be only because they're all so very, very good that it's impossible to spoil them. Never in the world's history has childhood revelled in such gorgeous Christmasides, when, for the rich, wealth in fortunes is oftentimes laid out and, for the poor, the charities of thousands and the investments of millions join with untold talent and inventive skill in the endeavor to supply to Santa Claus the playthings he must work with.

**O**F COURSE, the most elaborate aspects of all this gorgeousness have developed in the one land where nobody expects to be happy unless he is happier than anybody else—in the United States.

If we were to betake ourselves to the early home of Santa Claus, and if we were to take along with us the average American child on whom the good saint has bestowed his gifts for only the few years necessary to cement youthful loyalty to his patronage, we should see one child at least suddenly afflicted with grave doubts of the saintly perfection that ought to belong to him.

Surely, Santa Claus' charity ought to begin at home. An American child in Germany would be astonished at the moderate supply of Christmas playthings, and the modest character they bear, when compared with the wealth of toys Santa lavishes on this side of the ocean. It does seem strange that, with such a vast store of gifts, he can't afford to treat the simple, faithful German children best of all.

But he doesn't. He doesn't treat any of them so well as he does those very shrewd-eyed, shrewd-tongued little skeptics over here, the last of all the world to come under his loving, generous guardianship.

Can it be because we materialistic Americans have all but forgotten that he is a Christian saint, instead of some sort of pagan providence, or god of good luck; and that, eager for the tangible unrealities we crave, we have lost the intangible realities that should be, after all, Christmas' most valued gifts?

For the toys our children see and feel and play with, "indestructible" as we try to make them, last but a little while in comparison with the unseen, intangible spirit of Christmas itself, which, after all, is the only real reality that enters into the soul of childhood.

Perhaps the poorest, least lavish Christmas of the world, in the material sense in which we regard the festival, is that which occurs in Italy; yet it is precisely there, more than in any other country, that the beautiful reality of Christmas Christianity is most faithfully commemorated.

It is there that Santa Claus comes always with a guide, companion and friend—no less a personage than the Divine Child Himself, returned for this one night to earth in the form of a little boy, in order that He, who bade the children come unto Him, shall direct the saint in preparing their celebration over the anniversary of His birth.

No child in Italy would dream of Santa Claus finding his home and his playroom without the aid of the holy Christ Child, any more than an American child would dream of Santa being accompanied by any living being except his nimble reindeer.

## NEVER FORGETS THE DONOR

So the Italian child—and, for that matter, many more children of other nations on the European continent—may break his toys and eat his Christmas cake; but he never forgets the divine face of the other Child who guided the jovial donor to his door, however cruelly in after years the world may break his manhood's toys and gnaw at his manhood's heart.

Here, poor Santa has been separated from the One Child whose love inspired him in his chosen work—separated ever since hard Plymouth Rock was landed on by the harder Pilgrim Fathers, who feared that the tough fiber of their religion might be warped by even the most lovely fancies of the faiths they sought to put behind them.

He has grown up with us into a distinctly unpoetic Santa, very much like the big, generous father who gives us the nickel for ourselves when we get the nickel for the missionary box, and packs us off indugently to Sunday school, while he leans back to the comfort of his cigar.

But what a generosity, whenever he isn't so strapped himself that he has to worry about the bread and butter. A George Gould, who happens to have the cash to spare, has no trouble in arranging with Santa to act as chauffeur for a tiny auto that has been specially built for the Christmas trips of the Gould children—not a toy auto, but a real, working machine that runs by its own power and operates as readily as papa's big touring car.

It is one of those magnificent Christmas gifts whose practicability for road use raises them beyond the level of mere toys and makes Santa Claus look like a captain of industry.

He is relatively as munificent to the son of some clerk on one of the Gould railroads, who, in the light of his father's modest income, receives a gift even more generous in the form of the foot treadle auto. It may cost only \$5, against the children's real machine worth \$300; but the gorgeousness is there in a higher proportion than that in which the millionaire employer indulges his family Santa—and himself.

There are rich men's children here who have received whole railroads as Christmas gifts, not the rolling stock and miles of tracks in which their parents act as directors, but railroads in miniature—and not nearly so small as one would imagine should be the size of a Christmas toy.

These railroads have had locomotives that were equipped with the boiler and tender and all the mechanical construction precisely like the huge monsters that draw the private cars of their elders in the family. The gift served the double purpose of supplying the Christmas toy most ardently desired by the boys who wanted



Children's Party in an Old English Manors House



How Blessed to Give Them to Receive

it, and of familiarizing them with the practical working of the calling for which it was intended they should be qualified to do.

The doll's house, that edifice dear to the soul of every girl and next in her affections to the doll itself, has been made the prototype of a Christmas gift so costly that only a mansion occupied by people of the wealthier class could vie with it in outlay.

There have been doll's houses which were large enough and substantial enough to admit the doll's own little mother in all their apartments, with furnishings of the utmost splendor made to a corresponding scale in size, while the grounds around them, laid out on the pattern of actual ones, were terraced with as much skill as though the whole human family expected to be suddenly dwarfed into lilliputian stature and must remove forthwith into the residence Santa had provided for Yuletide.

It has been some time since New York welcomed its pioneer Christmas plays, those trade adventures in the socialism of amusement; but American childhood has taken to the delights of the theater with all the zest it puts into a diversion that is supremely splendid.

## TAKING LESSONS FROM ENGLAND

That is only one feature of the broader, more gorgeous Christmas brought by these later years to the pleasuring of Uncle Sam's young ones. The children's party is growing into the dignity of an American social institution, a "function" that has about it as much of the form and ceremony as the ambitious elders feel they dare load upon a rising generation already more than amply sophisticated.

It is here to stay, an illuminating sign of the added measure of enjoyment which Santa Claus, by reason of his steadily increased munificence, is called upon to provide.

Here, however, America is only taking apprentice lessons in Yuletide pleasures from England, where, for years and years, the Christmas festivities have been elaborated until they are as completely ordered as a court ceremonial.

In England, no child could imagine Christmas coming around without the Christmas pantomime. The traditions of Drury Lane are heavy with legends of the marvelous that have been wrought for the delight of childhood.

It is, in truth, a real fairy tale, and always a fairy tale, for a child to go to the pantomime in London, at the house that there must be neither bread nor bacon in admission to the pantomime before the joyous season is past.



The Living Christmas Dinner—a Modern Charade Idea

turned, with the handsome fairies they eloped with later from "Little Miss Muffet," as gray old grandfathers escorting the fairies' grandchildren to the newest, most magnificent, most gorgeous, most marvelous, most spectacular pantomime, entitled "Babes in the Wood."

There, to be strictly honest about it, is the true origin of the "Christmas play" on this side of the Atlantic, which we imitators have been making such an enthusiastic fuss about.

It is the same with our children's Christmas parties. We are only following the English, with whom, since the middle age of Queen Victoria, the exaltation of the child and the child's interests has been an increasing fact.

It used to be that, on Christmas Eve, a simple children's party, with a sufficient "refreshment" in the way of cakes, candy and lemonade, was all that was planned, and all that was expected by the children themselves.

In those houses where unusual wealth does not exist, and in those where children are still held to the old rule of some degree of repression, the Christmas Eve dance is regarded as enough in the way of relaxation and fun.

But soon there developed an ascending scale of entertainment, from the magic lantern that was, twenty years ago, what the cinematograph is now, to the extravagantly planned affair where the children are the audience, while hired performers give a whole vaudeville show and the youthful critics are nicely particular as to the quality of the legerdemain and the skill of performing animals.

Of late years the good sense of English society has been turning away from such formal entertainments, and reverting to those features of children's parties in which the young people themselves make their pleasure.

So children's games have come more and more into vogue, and that hostess has been most highly esteemed who could devise the form of enjoyment that should be most absorbing, most picturesque and most harmless in its excitement.

One charming idea, which is every little while revived at the Christmas Eve party, is called "The Spider's Web."

Christmas Eve party would be a delusion and a snare if it failed to supply gifts to the guests. What is Christmas Eve for, anyway, if not for those glorious surprises? The Christmas tree, however, has been flourishing so long—as far back as the days of the Druids—that even in conservative England it sometimes wears an air of sameness.

So, in place of the tree, the spider's web comes in. When the hour for the gifts arrives the children are admitted to some large room where, from the ceiling, an immense spider hangs, usually made of wire, although his spidership often presents the tints of the rainbow because of the parti-colored ribbons that cover his monstrous body.

Attached to his many legs are spoils or spindles, every one holding the end of a thread or ribbon, to be wound upon it as the child progresses to a greater distance from the spider. At the other end of the thread is fastened the gift its holder is to receive.

Simple, isn't it? Not a bit of it—very intricate and complicated, even under the mildest of conditions.

The threads have been led in and around all the articles of furniture, up and down and around, to the utmost extent of the grown-ups' ingenuity, so that often, although many of the gifts are plainly in sight, no child can distinguish, which is the one belonging to his or her particular string.

Above everything, tumultuous though the game may be, it is a mortal sin if any child overt or disturb a single piece of furniture. That's a game for you, on a Christmas Eve!

But the spider's web loses its novelty, too. And it isn't nearly so gorgeous as many people expect, these

in tender thralldom and redeems the gorgeousness of the festival in America. Its luxurious refinement in England, and its poor simplicity amid the poverty of the Black Forest and the sierras of the Apennines. Seen or unseen beside the burly joviality of Santa Claus, there is always present the radiant, sanctifying presence of the Child.

## Holiday Travel in Other Days

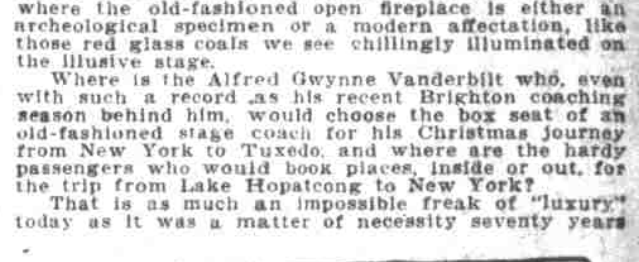
CHRISTMAS travel in the old stage coach days! How few there are who remember the combined discomforts and joys of those long-gone days.

In the cities, electric cars, electrically warmed, snatched us up from pavements so scrupulously scraped, under the drastic penalties of local ordinances, that within a few hours of a snowfall, boys have hard work finding snow enough for a bobbed; and those cars shuddered to the doors of dwellings that need only an extra shovel of coal to feel like conservatories.

In the country, trains that are swift processions of luxury whisk us to farmhouses or suburban residences where the old-fashioned open fireplace is either an archeological specimen or a modern affectation, like those red glass coals we see chillingly illuminated on the illusive stage.

Where is the Alfred Gwynne Vanderbilt who, even with such a record as his recent Brighton coaching season behind him, would choose the box seat of an old-fashioned stage coach for his Christmas Journey from New York to Tuxedo, and where are the hardy passengers who would book places, inside or out, for the trip from Lake Hopatcong to New York?

That is as much an impossible freak of "luxury" today as it was a matter of necessity seventy years



A Substitute for the Christmas Tree—the Spider's Web

days. One hostess decided that the animated dinner would come pretty close to satisfying eyes that are always bigger than stomachs, and she tried it, with supreme success. So the animated dinner has become popular.

On the table the originator of the idea set an enormous paper mache turkey, in which was the roost turkey of toothsome reality; an enormous plum pudding, big enough for a regiment, and containing the real pudding that was to be eaten; and all the other viands, on a scale proportionate.

Then she provided bonbons big enough for a child to walk in; Christmas stockings, filled with gifts, that would have fitted the famous seven-league boots of the

ago. The traditions of those jovial rides linger far more vividly in the country than in the city. They managed it better there, for in those days we were still the raw and poor pioneers, who put up with our crude realities, and drew our romance from abroad.

The Londoner, in the Chelsea coach, the Cheltenham coach, the Norwich coach—all the famous, futile apologies for adequate transportation which inclement England held in those times before steam had worked out its destiny—played a part in Christmas cheer they never can play again.

And when—the long, adventurous miles traversed at last with their desperate chances of snowdrift and flood—the Christmas guest descended at the crossroads, he was driven to manor house or country home, where the struggle against the elements still went on by night as well as day. No hot-water or steam pipes left the open fireplace or the glowing grate to lag superfluous in room and hall. They had to glow and roar, or everybody froze to death.

It was glorious, but was it comfort? Surely not as we know our comfort, with the mistress of the house ready to discharge the man-of-all-work if the thermometer in the tiled bathroom shows one degree below or above the sacred 70.

Some of the cheeriest of Christmas traditions linger about those old stage coaching days, when the end of a Journey was never in sight, figuratively and literally, until the lumbering coach drew up at its destination. But there were as merry Christmas after those trips through storm and snowdrifts as have ever been enjoyed since.

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## Feasts for Royalty

**W**OULD you like to indulge in a royal Christmas this year? It's far easier than you imagine—and far less expensive.

First, put away from you the toothsome thought of the Christmas turkey, "Royal bird" 'Tut! The royal bird is only and always the swan.

Call your young swan a cygnet, and you have the royal Christmas dinner of the king of England, daily guaranteed by law and custom that date back to the ancient days when all game was royal preserve, and might few good things of centuries past.

Many of the birds he sends, in his turn, to members of his immediate family.

The best go to his personal friends, to whom the receipt of a royal cygnet is the highest mark of the royal favor. It is at those tables, far more than at the ruler's Christmas dinner, that the swan is most highly esteemed, for, to dine off royal swans at Christmas is almost equivalent to dining with royalty.

The ownership of the few swans now in existence is shared by the ancient and honorable Swan Company and the equally ancient and honorable Waterfowl Company, permission to keep cygnets upon the stream having been among the empty emblems that made their forerunners in dining and dining grandly loyal to the crown.

This year, at this time, the "king's swanmaster" is directing the slaughter of thirty young swans or cygnets, from among the royal birds, marked with the royal double diamond, that help to lend picturesque to the slaughter of thirty young swans or cygnets. They weigh from fifteen to twenty pounds, and are forwarded to Sandringham palace for the fitting feast of the royal Christmas table, as it is by royal precedent prescribed. All told, King Edward is thus supplied with between 500 and 600 pounds of swan flesh, the royal delicacy par excellence during centuries past.

Perhaps a little less avid seizure of the wealth in the first place, and a little more regard for the claims of the poor might work better, as making charity less needful; but those proposals are grim socialism and nasty revolution, out of place at Christmas time, when every one makes the best of what he has.

And surely no poor wails of the street, no Unsentimental Fenmies and practical Griseles from the alleys of London today will look in the mouth of the fascinating gift horse and the beautiful doll that the daughter of the rich spares to them from her paradise beyond.

After all, and after all, it is that infinitely sweet spirit of Christmas present which holds the whole world

together, and makes the Christmas season a time of joy and peace to all who observe it.