

Melodious Legends of Birds

By Marjorie Howe Dixon

Some say that ever "against that season comes Whose our Saviour's birth is celebrated The bird of dawn's gleamings all its light long." —Shakespeare.

LEGENDS of birds are as old as history itself. Many and quaint are the ones associated with the birth and life of our Master. The reference above shows that the great poet was familiar with the old story of the cock's crowing at midnight, at the Saviour's birth, a legend dating back to the fourth century.

There seems to be many more stories connected with the crucifixion, than with the birth of Jesus. Robins, swallows and owls have in this way become almost sacred because of some pretty story about them. These legends are told to the youngsters of many countries, and have created a feeling of affectionate regard for the birds, resulting in many pretty customs, designed to show forth their love.

For this reason among the rural villages and farms of northern Europe, where the robin stays all winter, he is especially remembered by the children. Grain is scattered about on the roofs for his Christmas, and he is offered shelter in barns and haystacks.

What They Do in Sweden

In Sweden the good farmer, assisted by his children, takes a sheaf of unthreshed wheat and ties it to a pole for robin to rest upon. The children watch for his coming, and have all sorts of little thrills over his pleasure in their gift.

Alas for the poor little wren. It fares most unhappily this season in Ireland and on the Isle of Man. Custom, the price of which is paid in the mist of time, decrees that little wren must die.

On the Isle of Man, it happens thus. Amid great excitement the wren is sought and killed and tied to a stick. It is then carried from house to house while a crude rhyme is recited and money is besought. Finally it is buried with great solemnity in the graveyard, with stinging of dires.

It is thought by Mr. Ingersoll, to whose book "Birds in Legend, Fable and Folklore," we are indebted, that this may be traced back to the early hatred the Christians felt toward the Druids. The wren was the Druid bird. From its chirping the priest drew auguries, and the poor little bird became an object of disapproval, if not hatred, to the Christians. The killings or it became the symbol of the severance of all connections with heathen practices. Variations of this savage custom are found in Ireland, belonging to both Christmas and St. Stephen's day.

Turkeys for Christmas

If he but knew, the turkey, too, would dread the approach of Christmas. We think of this bird as the one that should be served on Thanksgiving because the Puritans, who did not observe Christmas to any extent, handed down to us this custom. While they, no doubt, were influenced by the fact that it was found in great numbers here, in those hard days, still they may have brought the custom from England with them.

Going back a good ways, boar's head was the special Christmas dish. Then came the religious struggles when the "English Dissenters" and "Papists" were continually at swords' points. The Dissenters could not countenance anything savouring of "Papists" practices. And besides, turkeys were abundant during those troublous days of the reformation. So the

"noble bird" became the special meat for Christmas, and still is. Another legend of a bird has come down to us, varying in different countries. As told by the peasantry of the English midlands, a mother had a large lump of dough, which she promised to bake for Jesus. Her daughter reduced the size of the lump, until when it finally went into the oven, it was very small indeed.

However, as it baked it swelled to enormous size, and the girl exclaimed, "Heu, Heu." The sound suggested that of an owl and the girl was forthwith transformed into that bird. Ophelia says in Hamlet, "They say the owl was a baker's daughter," a reference to this old legend.

Baker Changed to Cuckoo

In northern Germany, a baker's man was the guilty one, and the Lord changed him to a cuckoo. He wore a dun coat, and thus cuckoo wears one too, with white spots on the wings where flour was sprinkled.

There are many stories of owls, and one little legend tells that the owl at one time had a sweet voice and sang charmingly. Unhappily it was present when Jesus died, and since that day it cannot bear daylight, and cries "Cru, Cru." This story comes from Spain.

From Russia comes the legend that all the farm animals are able to talk on Christmas eve, from midnight until sunrise. This is because Christ was born in a manger. Would one could slip away some Christmas eve and hear them! The legend does not say what they talk about, but perhaps they have far more curious legends than any we can gather from ancient chronicles, but our sources ever so many.

A proverb from Cornwall will furnish us with a wise maxim. "He that hurts robin or wren, Will never prosper, boy or men."

Owl appears, running with swooping motion of wings. Crow—Before you go any further, look at that tree. Owl stops, gathers wings to sides and regards tree solemnly. Crow—That is a Christmas tree. And it is for us all of us, from the children. Now you go and eat something and then we will talk to you. Owl—Who-whoo-oo? Crow—You caw, caw, go and eat. Threatens him. Owl (goes to tree and eats. Nods head) "Goo-oo!" Crow—Now you are changed as we all were. Come near you little candle and join us; the won't harm you. This is Christmas night. Listen. In distance children's voices heard. (Last verse. Oh come our pretty bird friends). Birds listen first part and then march around the tree in time to music for last part. (Curtain)

Why Not Send Gifts From Your Kitchen?

No Offering That You Can Buy Could Possibly Carry More Christmas Spirit Than Those You Make.

Are you wondering what to give your relatives and friends this Christmas? Why not send gifts from your kitchen? There are so many things you can make, and every one will be appreciated. No gift that you can buy can carry more Christmas spirit and cheer than those you make.

You may select an assortment of jellies, jams, preserves, or such things as you have canned during the past summer. Then there are some jams and marmalades which can be made now. Salted nuts and candies, especially the little candies, stuffed dates, and candied peel, make gifts which will all enjoy. Cakes of all varieties, and especially fruit cakes, cookies, and plum puddings, increase the choice of gifts.

Following up this good advice December "Good Housekeeping" proceeds to supply a number of recipes for candies and cookies that make excellent gifts from the kitchen.

This recipe for winter conserve comes from a reader in Ohio: Soak one pound of dried apricots overnight in sufficient water to cover them. In the morning add one pound of shredded pineapple and three cups of sugar. Cook for twenty minutes, stirring constantly. Then add one cupful of chopped nut-meats and pour into sterilized jars.

Dats Snowballs are sent by a Connecticut reader: Stone three-fourths pound of dates and put them through the food-chopper alternately with three-fourths cupful of shelled peanuts. Add one-fourth teaspoonful of salt and make into small balls about the size of butter balls. Roll in confectioners' sugar.

From New Hampshire comes a recipe for filled fig cookies: Cream together three-fourths cup of butter and one cupful of sugar. Add one egg well beaten and two teaspoonfuls of almond extract. Add two and one-half cupfuls of sifted pastry flour, or enough to make a soft dough which can be rolled out. Chill the dough, roll it out thin, and cut with a round cookie-cutter. Put a teaspoonful of fig filling on one cookie and press with a finger. Bake at 450 degrees F. for eleven minutes. To make the fig filling, put one pound of figs through the food-chopper and cook over hot water for one cupful of sugar and three-fourths cupful of water until thick. Cool and add one-half teaspoonful of lemon extract.

A good Christmas cookie is nut bars, which come from New Mexico. Cream together one-half cupful each of butter and sugar. Then add two beaten egg yolks, one cupful of pastry flour, and one and one-third cupfuls of finely chopped blanched almonds. Mix thoroughly and shape the dough into rolls about three inches long and as thick as a finger. Brush with eggwhite and bake at 400 degrees F. from twelve to fifteen minutes.

Besides prints, and patterned papers there is room to use in decorating boxes. The effects one may obtain are diverse and varied enough to please everyone, and



If one is clever with the use of paste, scissors and paper, one can make many lovely gifts of boxes that are ever acceptable, and among this year's gift suggestions are new ones, of unusual charm.

The use of wall paper to cover boxes is an old story, but a similar idea is popular—the use of small-patterned Japanese papers. These are available at the art stores in sheets, and exceedingly dainty and attractive are the patterns, and designs. When using a wooden box choose a color from the paper, and enamel the inside that color. Thin gesso may be used for pasting the paper on the outside. When the top is hinged, a knob made of a large lead may be attached to the top and thus add to the joy of the box.

Prints are being used for cover decorations. For a lady, an old print from "Godey's Lady's Book" will appropriately adorn the lid. The inside of the box can be divided into compartments with the use of wooden partitions. One place should be large enough for a powder box, another long and narrow for hair pins and so on.

Use Shelled Paper

If paper is used to line this box, it should be shelled, so that dusting it will be easy. The easy removal of the partitions will assist, too, to keep it clean. A box of this kind will be a great help for storing the small things that are so hard to keep tidy on the dresser.

Inside the lid a mirror is placed. Narrow strips of wood will hold it in. The edges may be painted or covered with gold braid. It is not always easy to find a print from Godey's Lady's Book. Other quaint old prints will lend themselves to the same purpose. Sometimes an old catalogue of paintings, will contain good steel engravings which will serve excellently.

Picture frames are handled in a similar way. If you can get the prepared board, that is best be-

cause it is braced and will not warp. If not, get wall-board and nail flat strips of wood to the back of it, or these may be nailed to the front to form a design around the picture. Magazine covers have been worked up on such a background, to form most effective panels.

Something About Gesso

For those who are not familiar with gesso as a basis of decoration, it is applied to rough or "raw" surfaces, to get raised effects, drying in a short time. Wooden boxes, picture frames can be made with gesso, and can be bought at art stores, and sometimes at department stores.

Suppose we start with a small box to hold playing cards. A small colored picture may be applied to the top and stued smoothly in place. Feet for the box can be made by using tiny tacks to fasten squares of wood to each corner of the box.

Let us imagine that we want a curved design on the top. Heavy cord can be used and glued into the desired shape. Now we are ready for the gesso. A good sized water color brush will be about right to use with gesso. Dip it in the gesso and apply freely all over the box, making a careful outline around the picture. When it partly dries, variegated effects may be obtained by dabbing at it with the brush. Too much lumpiness is not really good, giving a rather rough or unpleasant texture to the box, which should be pleasantly smooth to the touch.

Apply Coat of Gilt

Now coat the gesso with gilt and allow it to dry. Yes, it seems to take time all right. There is still another coat, this time of paint. Select from the picture a predominant color, and paint lightly over one end of the box. Take a soft cloth and wipe away most of the paint, leaving it in grooves and hollows, giving an "antique" effect. This will be found to be very attractive. The goldness of the gilt is softened by the top color, and gently blended to match the picture. It is well to do a small surface at a time, so that the paint will not dry before you have wiped away the surplus.

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The Finished Product

When the picture is finally glued in place, and the strips of wood or cord forming the design are fastened tightly, then cover the exposed surfaces with gesso as you did the box, next use gilt, last of all paint, wiping it away as before. It is a fascinating pastime and yet a most practical one and the effects are often surprisingly good. Needless to say people have committed atrocious things in this medium, but a moderate use of good sense and good taste will prevent disasters of this sort. For Christmas gifts, it is a happy idea since no two pieces will be alike, and one can do much original work on each, giving to it some little personal touch that makes for charm.

The Tea Wagon
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A School Room Play

"A CHRISTMAS TREE FOR OUR FEATHERED FRIENDS"

By MARJORIE HOWE DIXON (Scene I.)

A CHRISTMAS tree in the center of stage, arranged to give an outdoor effect. Eight or ten children, or more around it, placing last decorations on the tree. Color can be introduced into their wraps by using gay scarfs and caps, or "bits" of shanters.

Boy: "Do you think the birds will like it?" Girl: "Oh, 'm sure they will! It will be the best Christmas tree they ever had."

Another boy: "Which one likes the best?" Another Girl: "Well the robin for one. It's the blue Jay doesn't it first—and the wood peckers like it too, and the bread as well."

Boy: "Mother said the cracked corn would suit the sparrows and Sandy brought some mixed grain." Two girls join group: "There it's all finished. We tied bits of bread on the tree and scattered some more around. Let's sing before the birds come."

All sing to tune of Annie Laurie: When snow the ground has covered And foot is hard to find 'Tis then the needs of bird friends We ought to call to mind. Upon our Christmas tree Full piteous food will be, as all the birds are welcome To share our Christmas glee.

The birds are few in winter But loved the more for that. We hope they'll like their Christmas And all grow fine and fat, Upon our Christmas tree Full piteous food will be And all the birds are welcome To share our Christmas glee.

Boy: "Sandy promised us the one about the 'Little Warm Owl.'" (Children form two groups about the tree and Sandy comes to center and recites "Little Warm Owl" by John Vance Cheney.)

Sandy: "Darkness, grow and blacker fold, Rattle, hail and blast be bold. (etc.) Page 258 "Twelve Months with the Birds and Poets," by Harper suggested: unco—slate colored wings, dark gray cap, white bloomers. Crow—all black, older child, Robin—red smock, dark brown cap, brown cape and bloomers. Sparrows—Speckled brown outfit. Woodpeckers—red cape, white bloomers, and smocks, black and

white cape. Blue Jay—Cap, peak on top, blue, cape blue, white and black, white smock and blue bloomers. Owl—use hood with pointed ears, suit of speckled brown, cape the same. Others may be added, goldfinch in gray winter coat. Nuthatches, Red poll, Chickadees, downy and hairy woodpeckers.

Blue Jay enters at left, Robin at right. Both approach shyly and finally run around tree. Meet at front.

Robin—"What are you doing here?" Jay—"Why shouldn't I be here? It's my tree."

Robin—"It's my tree! I found it first!" Jay—"Did you indeed! Well, I shall eat all I please at any rate! (Woodpecker comes in and runs around to back.)

Robin—"That mean woodpecker! I'll have to chase him away, too (flies after him). Woodpecker runs around to front. Jay has pecked off food and is pecking at it.

Jay—"My, that's good; I was so hungry. Why, you folks must be hungry, too. Come and eat."

Robin—"Why what's come over him, he's always been so pert and saucy!" Woodpecker—"Well, I'm going to have some anyway! Oh, it is good, why, I feel so different toward you all. Come on and eat Robin.

Robin—"It's strange, even the quarrelsome old woodpecker is feeling kindly. I'll have to try one (eats) Oh, it is fine. Let's go and bring in all the others. (All fly away.)

Jay returns with Sparrow who is protesting. Sparrow—"There, I won't be hustled any more. You can't make me believe you want to show me some food, you've always driven me away here."

Jay—"It's Christmas, old dear, that's what. And we watched the children fill this tree with good things this afternoon. I'm made sick a difference, why, I don't feel like scolding any more. Try some cracked corn and see. (Sparrow eats and chirps.)

Robin returns with Junco, Junco tries to get away when he sees Sparrow and Jay. Robin—"They won't hurt you! It's Christmas and we're all friends. Come and eat (Junco approaches shyly and eats.)

Woodpecker—"Oh no, not after the first bite. He will change as we all do here."

Crow (struts back and forth importantly): "Well, I am glad to see all that food. Caw, caw. It looks fine, I think I can eat every bit of it. There won't be any left for the others. I can assure you, I shall drive them all away. Caw caw. Jay (aside to woodpecker)—"There I told you."

Crow—"Here goes (eats) 'mm, that's good. Caw caw. What a lot there is, I could spare a bit for the woodpecker. I didn't believe him when I heard him drumming on that hollow tree, saying food, food—oh, I know where there's food. Come on all you fellows and eat. Who gave us this fine feast, anyway?" Jay—"The children thought of



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(Scene II.)

Setting same as scene I. Birds are represented by children with smocks over bloomers, and caps pointed at front like bills. A cane with notched edges will give the effect of wings, the ends being attached to wrists. Each child should imitate the walk of bird as far as possible. The following are suggested: unco—slate colored wings, dark gray cap, white bloomers. Crow—all black, older child, Robin—red smock, dark brown cap, brown cape and bloomers. Sparrows—Speckled brown outfit. Woodpeckers—red cape, white bloomers, and smocks, black and