

The Real Christmas

Keep
Eternal
Christmas
In The
Heart

ELIZABETH STUART PHELPS

Working In the Name Of the Christ Child

SOME thirty years ago there lived in the city of Washington a young girl, the daughter of Richard T. Merrick, a distinguished lawyer, says the Survey. A serious injury, due to an accident, had left her an invalid, confined to her couch. The Christmas season was fast approaching and amid the preparations for the holidays, which the happy family were busily making, this young invalid, reared in luxury, conceived the desire of clothing in the name of the Christ Child some poor babe who was to come into the world in poverty. She made a simple but complete layette, sent for a friend who she knew could find the very mother who needed such assistance, and one small child was clothed in the name of the Christ Child.

The Christ Child society, founded twenty-seven years ago, distributed 139 layettes last year. Not one request has ever been refused to an applicant indorsed by its visitors. And from this has developed the material relief department, which clothes and shoes children, furnishes a fortnight's outing, a brace for a crippled leg or a book from the library. There are no religious qualifications. Active members contribute a definite number of hours' work each week, and any one may become a member by promising to answer the Christmas letter of a poor child. Washington numbers 1,000 members, and there are more than 4,500 in all, including the branches in twenty-two cities.

From her couch, where she has lain for more than twenty-five years, Miss Merrick directs and leads all the society's work.

St. Nicholas Day and Christmas.

A writer in the Pall Mall Gazette thus speculated concerning the amalgamation of Christmas eve and St. Nicholas eve: "Perhaps the amalgamation of the two festivals was brought about by motives of economy, the giving of presents on Dec. 5 and again on Dec. 25 constituting too heavy a toll on parental purses. That this was the case appears to be proved by the custom prevailing in Catholic Germany, where St. Nicholas day appears in each home on Dec. 5, and, inspiring into the conduct of the children, rewards the worthy with fruits and cakes and lectures the unworthy on the duty of obedience. He then asks children what presents they would like the Christ Child to bring them at Christmas, and on the morning of that day they usually find the desired articles in the shoes which they placed overnight on the hearth. This variation of the original Nicholas eve custom, for so long obsolete in England, probably accounts for our possession of Santa Claus in his present form. He is supposed to have been an importation from America about forty years ago (as a little earlier we had derived the Christmas tree from Germany on the initiative of the prince consort, husband of Queen Victoria)."

On Christmas Eve.

Oh, little babe, oh, gentle babe,
That in a manger lies,
A-listening to the choral sweet
Which floats a-dwain the skies,
We, through the year, who only hear
The world's harsh thundering,
Listen that we, dear babe, with thee
May hear the angels sing.

Oh, little babe, oh, gentle babe,
Who looked toward the star
And sweet when they bore their gifts,
Those who came from afar,
From wandering ways back to thy side,
Wizely and wisely, be thou,
But hearts that bleed and needs that
Are all we have for thee.

Oh, little babe, oh, gentle babe,
Our hearts were laid and cold,
The star we loved, the star of faith,
The good the word of God,
At the manger's side this Christmas
Tide,
We there and we love
To see thee and all those who
And bear the name of Jesus.

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 Luncaran 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 spoke 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
Outsparked the brightest gem;
He told of the hallowed cradle
They showed him at Bethlehem.

And the eyes of the children glistened
To think that a rack suffered,
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 chooseth 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 aught 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 drave 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 sea
Be given ungrudging. Remember,
His choicest he gave for thee!

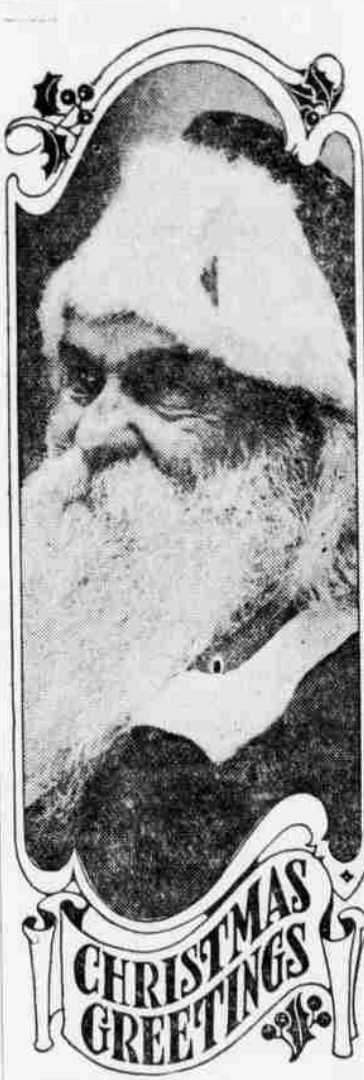
"Then over the piled up platter
A cover of pastry drave,
With a star in its midst to mind us
Of that which the wise men saw.

"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 places tip her scepter and her wand. In areas 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!



Gift Bringer In Various Countries

THE Dutch girls sing a pretty little song on the feast of St. Nicholas instead of writing a letter to Santa Claus:

Santa Claus, you good natured man,
Give me some nuts and sweetmeats—
Not too much, not too little,
Throw them into my apron.

For a Christmas without gifts would be no Christmas at all. So always there is a gift bringer, akin in nature, if different in name, to the good St. Nicholas, once bishop of Myra, who loved children and whose memory lives vitally today through its association with the great Christian festival. Kris Kringle, Father Christmas, Santa Claus, Sinterklaas, are identical. The holy Christ child comes to Germany. In mystical Brittany the Christ himself is thought to come to bless the households of the pious, especially the homes of simple shepherds.

In Spain on "Twelfth Night" all the people, young and old, put their shoes and slippers out on the balcony outside the window in order that the three kings journeying by may see and fill them. There are also grotesque Christmas visitors. Knave Ruprecht, terror of Teutonic babyhood, has a load of nuts and apples and other goodies with him, as well as his traditional bunch of switches.

The "Julbok" or "klapperbok," a tall, thin beast, with goatskin covered head, is after naughty Danish children, just as the "hahersack" is after those in the Harz mountains. Sinterklaas sends sometimes a goat laden with presents.

The animals which the saint of Christmas uses for his carriers are quite as various. Donner and Blitzen and the other fleet reindeer come first. Santa drives a span of reindeer in Sweden. In Alaska he comes by dog team. Camels, so the story goes, bring the three kings into Spain on their gift bringing errand, though sacred art would show us that horses might be used as well historically.

In Holland, on the Zuyder Zee, St. Nicholas comes on skates over the frozen wastes of water. In England there are in use for Christmas several imitation horses, the hobby horses of the Morris dancers, which caper still in Staffordshire, according to their ancient habit.—Chicago Tribune.

Christ Flowers.

Born of the clouds and darkness,
Of the frost and early snow,
When the summer blooms have faded,
The beautiful Christ flowers blow.
All through the budding springtime,
All through the summer's heat,
All through the autumn's glory
They hide their blossoms sweet.
But when the earth is lonely
And the bitter north winds blow,
With a smile of cheer for the dear old year
The Christmas blossoms blow.

Sweetest as the dream of summer,
White as the drifting snow,
When our hearts are filled with gret-
ing
The beautiful Christ flowers blow.
Not all the south wind's wooing
Opens their secret heart.
Slender they grow and stately,
Guarding their life apart;
But when the earth is dreary
And heavy clouds hang low,
With their tender cheer for the way
worn year
The Christmas blossoms blow.

Sweetest of all consolers!
Fairest of flowers that grow!
When hopes and flowers have faded
The beautiful Christ flowers blow.
Bright in the cottage window,
Sweet in the darkened room,
Fair in the shorted sunlight,
Cheering the dusky gloom,
Oh, when our hearts are lonely
And clouds of care hang low,
What blessed cheer for our dying year,
The Christmas blossoms blow!

Christmas For All

Go Hall
And Hovel
Come, Fair
Christmas
Day!

CHARLES KINGOLEY

How Washington Celebrated Christmas

IT is interesting to look back upon a Christmas day at Mount Vernon, with the Father of His Country as host and his charming wife as hostess. Christmas at Mount Vernon in the peaceful days which followed the Revolution was always exceedingly merry. The Virginians of those days, being cavaliers, made the most of the holiday, which the grim Puritans of New England practically ignored, says the Philadelphia Press.

Though generally serious, Washington could unbend considerably on such an occasion. Mount Vernon was always crowded at this period, and the celebration was of a luxurious character. The Christmas dinner was served at 3 o'clock in the "banquet hall," and probably no fewer than thirty persons sat down to the repast.

For this special occasion the hostess always got out her handsome service of pure silver, most of which had belonged to her when, as the widow Custis, she had married Mr. Washington, and there was also a big display of cut glass.

An oddity, as nowadays it would be considered, was the arrangement of the table, upon which all the dishes to be served, including even the puddings and pies, were placed at once. No wonder that in such days the festive board was said to "groan" beneath the weight of the viands.

As a matter of course, at the Christmas dinner, as well as all other occasions, the table was waited upon by slaves, who did duty as house servants. Two were allotted to each guest, so that quite a number were required. All of the eatables had to be conveyed a considerable distance, the kitchen being detached from the mansion, with which it was connected by a covered way.

At the houses of the great Virginia families at that period it was customary for the slaves to wait on the table in the ordinary plantation garb. But at Mount Vernon many things were on a scale of exceptional luxury, and the negroes who performed such service were clad in Washington's own ivory of red, white and gold, which was handsome and striking.

The necessity of supper was removed by a great prolongation of the dinner, at which each person was expected to eat all that he or she possibly could. In fact, it was the duty of the hostess gently to persuade her guests to gorge themselves to repletion, while the host made it his business to press wine and other drinkables upon the men to an extent which in these times would be considered most imprudent.

At a certain period of the meal it was Washington's custom to rise from his chair, holding a glass of Madeira in his hand and bowing right and left, to say, "Gentlemen, I drink to my guests." The natural response at the instance of the most distinguished guest present was a health drunk to Lady Washington.

Following the dinner a good, long evening was indulged in with pastimes appropriate to Christmas. Blind man's buff and hunt the slipper were not sufficiently undignified in the eyes of Washington to be indulged in. The Washington family Christmas gifts were exhibited, and Nellie Curtis was always called upon to play on her harp-sichord.

A colored fiddler, one of the slaves on the plantation, in picturesque plantation garb would be called in at a certain period, and when he would start some merry music the young people chose partners for the dance. But the older ladies and gentlemen preferred cards. Small stakes were usually played for, but gambling for money to a considerable amount was always most objectionable to Washington. As for Mrs. Washington, she would invariably enter into some of the general festivities, but would be the last to such part of her guests who sought not care to indulge in either dancing or cards.

It was at a late hour on the morning following Christmas that the guests would take their departure and the Washington household would quiet down to its ordinary routine.

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