

Spirit Of Christmas

There seems to be two major schools of thought about celebrating Christmas. One is modern, the other, old-fashioned.

Modern keepers of Christmas are blithe spirits, possessed of courage and imagination. They may decorate their trees with feathers. They may wrap their presents in brightly tinted burlap, and if the mood seizes them, they may serve pheasant instead of turkey.

The old-fashioned school, on the other hand, happily preserves the time-honored traditions. Theirs is the tissue paper and red satin ribbons, their tree lovingly ornamented with tinsel and the same decorations used in the family for generations. They proudly proclaim turkey the bird of the day and never lose their abiding faith in Santa Claus and his team of reindeer.

Each Christmas spirit is admirable in its own way. Each has its own merits, as an examination of a bygone Yule will show. This rollicking nineteenth century English Christmas is celebrated in the pages of Charles Dickens' delightful book, "Pickwick Papers." Though the characters involved are imaginary, we can be sure that Dickens, with his keen reporter's eye, presented the customs of the time pretty much as they existed. And the customs are a strange mixture of the enchanting and the peculiar. As such, they will give aid and comfort to the champions of both modern and old-fashioned Christmases, and make them glow with seasonal harmony.

The Pickwick Christmas is held at Dingley Dell, the farm belonging to Mr. Wardle, a jolly squire. Mr. Pickwick and his companions arrive on an idyllic scene. The weather is magnificent—crisp and frosty. Indeed, Dickens writes, "it was the sort of afternoon that might induce a couple of elderly gentlemen, in a lonely field, to take off their greatcoats and play at leap-frog in pure lightness of heart"—a temptation, alas, that the Pickwickians resisted.

At the farm, there is a bustle of welcome, a rich confusion of pretty maid servants, old friends, a full complement of family. Tapers blaze in tall silver candle holders. Fires crackle on the hearths. Mr. Pickwick himself dons silk hose and joins blithely in the spirited country dancing after dinner.

But let Dickens describe the revel in his own wonderful manner: "Away went Mr. Pickwick—hands across—down the middle to the very end of the room, and halfway up the chimney, back again to the door—poussette everywhere—loud stamp on the ground—ready for the next couple-off again—all the figure over once more—another stamp to beat out the time—next couple, and the next, and the next again—never was such going!"

There is storytelling, a well-filled punch bowl. As a climax to the evening, Mr. Pickwick leads

the aged grandmother of the house to the mistletoe, and solemnly kisses her under its benign branches.

All this would seem a clear-cut vote in favor of those who keep an old-fashioned Christmas. But wait. Although much of that Yule

might well be a guide to our own Christmas, it did have drawbacks, and serious ones too. Two instances will illustrate the point simply. After eating a hearty breakfast, the company feels the need for a brisk walk. So they take one. It is, Dickens mentions

casually, a twenty-five mile stroll that finds them back at Dingley Dell in plenty of time for dinner. Surely, this is an argument in favor of the modern school. Even the staunchest traditionalist would hardly undertake such a gruelling holiday hike!

Then there is the breakfast itself. It is made up of the heaviest food available—including mince pie. And though it is washed down with an assortment of beverages, now there is coffee mentioned in its connection. Here is where nostalgia draws a definite line. Who

could imagine a breakfast without bounteous cups of freshly made coffee, an abundant pot of comforting, roasting, bracing coffee? What would we do without coffee at Christmas breakfast? And after Christmas dinner, and through-out the holiday? Not all the mis-

tletoe and country dancing in the world could make up for its absence. Well, perhaps the finest Christmas spirit is one that keeps the best of the past, and welcomes the best of modern times. Let us wrap our presents in any color we choose

and decorate the tree as we please. It makes little difference whether we eat turkey, or select another food for our tables. Christmas, after all, is chiefly a feeling. There is only one really important thing to remember: Who was born, this day of happy days.

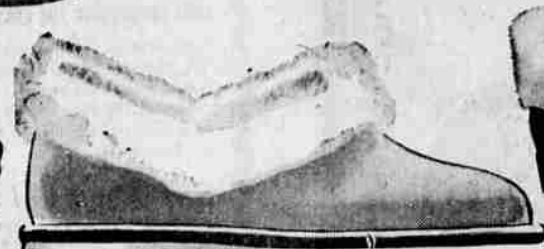
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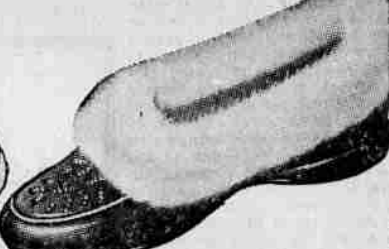
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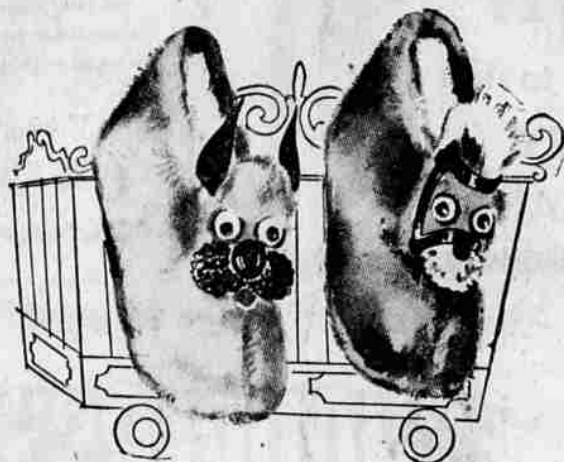


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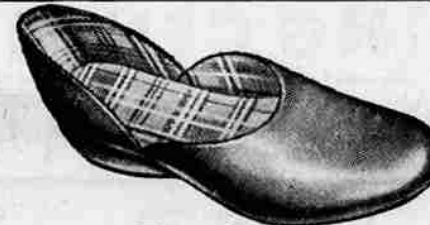


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