

Christmas For All

Go Hall
And Hovel
Come, Fair
Christmas
Day!

CHARLES HINGSLEY

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 three o'clock in the "banquet hall," and probably no fewer than 30 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 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 livery 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 drink 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 Custis was always called upon to play on her harpsichord.

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 none of the general festivities, but would be the host to such part of her guests who would 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.

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 Lancaran 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 shoved 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 shall 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 thatus that we have too precious
To honor this Christmas quest!

"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 sea
Be given ungrudging. Remember,
His choicest he gave for thee!

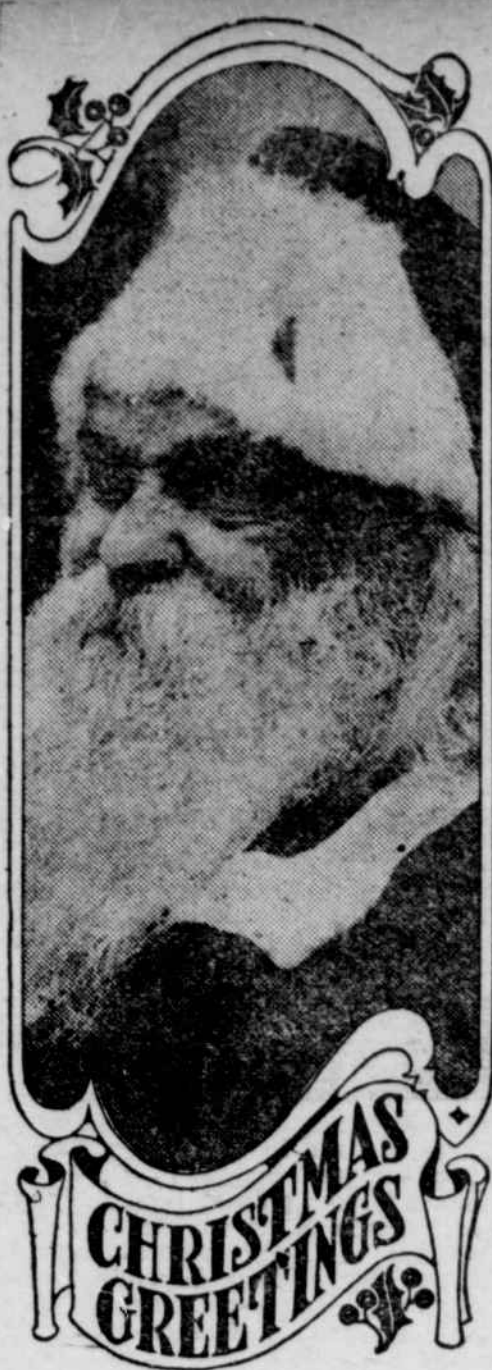
"Then over the piled up platter
A cover of pastry draw,
With a star in its midst to mind us
Of that which the wise men saw.

"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!



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 Christmas festival. Kriss Kringle, Father Christmas, Santa Claus, Sunderkloos, 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. Knaeve 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 "habersack" is after those in the Hartz mountains. Sunderkloos 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.

Sweet as the dream of summer,
White as the drifting snow;
When our hearts are filled with grieving,
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 shortened 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!

The Christmas Fire

By HARRIET PRESCOTT SPOFFORD

THE tree grew green in the forest,
Grew green in the sun and the dew;

His branches reached for the shadows,
He feathered his tops in the blue,
And happy the air about him
Wherever his balsams flew.

Drenched with the rains of the summer,
Fine from his stems spun the showers,
Soft dropped the snow on his mantle,
Dream work of silver and flowers,
And over him white light trailing
The stars swam through darkling hours.

Groping where great rock pillars
Stand shouldering rank on rank,
His roots at the cold sweet sources
The ancient juices drank,
And he swept with the earth companion
As the vast skies rose and sank.

His boughs brushed low on your forehead
As a passing wing might brush.
When night winds made shrill music
In the heavens, and hush, oh, hush!
For deep in his deepest covert
He hid the hermit thrush.

Low have they laid the giant,
And they hale him home with mirth,
And they fan the fires that twinkle,
And sing round his mossy girth,
And make with a mighty magic
The life of the Christmas hearth.
For his flames give the spicy fragrance
Of the summer atmosphere,
While the breath of the woody hollows,
The luster and light of the year,
The blossom, the bird song, the breezes,
He sheds through the Christmas cheer.

And the message of peace and blessing
In the great fire's glow they mark,
With the lad from the war and the sailor
Home from his tossing bark
Ere the Christmas bells come chiming
Like the touch of the frost on the dark.

And widely on pane and ceiling
Sparkles a fiery foam,
And the children dance with their shadows
Like the forest sprite with the gnome,
While the great log roars and blazes,
The heart of the joy of home.

And the cheek that has long been withered
With an old rose blooms once more
As memories glow like the embers
Whose flashes sink and soar
With the Christmas fire's warm glory,
Where the log burns red at the core.
—Woman's Home Companion.

The Christmas Spirit.

However it may be, when Christmas comes it finds us all to a greater or less degree ready to cry "A merry Christmas to all" and to the best of our ability keep it with good cheer. Deep down in our hearts every one of us cherishes what may be called the Christmas sentiment. Even if we go, as so many have done of past years, outside of the walls of our own home we still observe our Yuletide in a more or less conventional manner. We may escape our relatives, save ourselves the bother of home preparations, pretend that we have cut adrift from the old fashioned methods, but it all amounts in reality to the same thing. We are animated, after all, by the same spirit, whether we are in a country house, a flat, a restaurant or hotel.

A Joyful Yule.

Then drink to the holly berry,
With hey down, hey down derry;
The mistletoe we'll pledge also,
And at Christmas all be merry.

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