

ENTERTAINING ON CHRISTMAS

BACK IN COLONIAL DAYS FOLKS HAD GREAT FEASTS HONORING THE OCCASION: HERE'S HOW

The Christmas season brings to mind the many Christmas days gone by, with their four great features—turkey, cranberry sauce, plum pudding and mince pie.

It was a good old English custom, not to be rejected by the American colonists, although modifications were necessary to suit the religion and conditions of living in the colonies, the Christ-spirit being substituted for the pagan yuletide, the famous "boar's head" was omitted, and the Christmas pie became known as mince pie. However, many old observances were kept, including the mistletoe and holly, and Christmas was a day for family gatherings, with a feast prepared by the women of the house.

It is quite possible that we would not like their flavorings today. They used a variety of spices, wines and seasonings in even their plainest dishes; but as everything was prepared in the home, either under the supervision of the mistress or by her own hands, the mixtures were wholesome.

Everything was turned to account in the season with a view to future use, so in this way preparations for the holiday were going on long before the day.

In cherry time, a supply was carefully packed in hay and kept for Christmas.

The Christmas cookies, with coriander seed in them, were baked six months before and kept in an earthenware jar in the cellar.

Mince Meat Recipe.
The rich plum pudding and cakes were made early in the fall and put away to mellow and ripen.

The mincemeat was then made, the recipe for which was recently found in an old Philadelphia cookbook. We copy all but the spelling: "Four pounds veal, four pounds suet, two pounds raisins, one pound currants, six apples, some rose water and sack half a pound, no more of sugar, three-fourths pound cloves, mace, nutmeg and cinnamon, some candied orange peel, lemon peel, citron and blanched almonds."

They made a puff paste for pies different from ours. One recipe called for flour, one pound butter, ten eggs and some milk or water. Some housewives made their winter supply of mince pies before Thanksgiving and reheated them before using.

For the lemon tarts, the lemons had to be first soaked in salt water for two days. Then every day for fourteen days they were put into fresh cold water. When they were made, apples, oranges and sugar were added.

A few days before Christmas the mistress went to market, the maid carrying the basket. She would get her turkey, cranberries, celery, oysters, and a little pig for roasting whole.

The day before Christmas the real excitement began. The stuffing was made, and such stuffing! Bread crumbs, beef suet, liver, lemon peels, nutmeg, savory, pepper, salt, cream and eggs. The little pig, only four or five weeks old, was filled to his utmost capacity with mashed potatoes or apples.

Not the least to be considered were the green decorations. Ground pine for festoons and wreaths, mistletoe to hang, and holly everywhere were the necessities.

When Christmas morning came the excitement was at the highest pitch. The housewife, her daughters and her maids were up early. The brick oven was heated and the mince pies put in. The turkey was dredged with flour and put on the spit, with a small unwilling child to watch and turn it as it browned.

Another child was set to cracking nuts and polishing apples.

Roasting the Little Pig.
The little pig was put before the fire to roast in the dripping pan, in which were three bottles of red wine for basting.

While the things were cooking a long table, the length of the room, was spread with the white linen cloth, napkin, china and silver or pewter.

In the middle of the table was the famed Christmas bowl. Here are the quaint directions for making it:

"Break nine sponge cakes and half a pound of macaroons in a deep dish; pour over one pint raisin wine, half pint sherry. Leave them to soak. Sweeten with two ounces of powdered sugar candy and pour over one pint and a half of custard. Stick with two ounces sliced almonds. Place on a stand and ornament with Christmas evergreens."

The tankard with the Christmas brew was put on the table, and all the sillabubs, jellies, pickles, lemon tarts, red apples, nuts, the cookies and the cherries fresh from the hay.

The fireplaces were now blazing, and the red berries and green leaves of the holly were shining in the light.

The mistletoe was waiting for the unwary, and the good smell of the brown turkey, savory stuffing and appauce was everywhere.

Don Their Best Frocks.

After the housewife and her daughters had seen to everything they hurried to put on their best flowered silks, with white whins around their necks and the most secret beautifiers on their faces.

Then the dinner being nearly cooked, they took the little browned pig, raised him gently and put two small loaves of bread under him, and added more wine; an anchovy, a bundle of sweet herbs and a half a lemon was put into the sauce, which was poured over him hot. They had him sitting on his haunches looking lifelike. Then they put



PERHAPS YOU WANT SUGGESTIONS ABOUT DISTRIBUTING THE GIFTS. HERE ARE SEVERAL

All gifts, carefully marked, should be assigned the day before to the one in charge, and she must purchase a quantity of clothesline and clothespins. The line should be stretched back and forth across the living room, and each gift, wrapped in tissue paper and tied with red ribbons, should be fastened to the line by a clothespin, decorated with wings of red and green paper.

In the bay window a table should be arranged on which is placed a "Jack Horner" pie, containing a Christmas souvenir for each member of the family. The ribbons attached to the packages in the pie should be carried up to a holly-decorated hoop suspended over the table, each ribbon tagged with the name of the one for whom it is intended. When the "family wash" has been taken down—each person seeking his or her own gift—they gather around the pie, and at a signal "pull out their plums."

Hidden in Egg Shells.
When the family is all present at breakfast start to serve the meal of coffee, bread and butter, ham and soft-cooked eggs without any mention of gifts.

At each place have an eggcup or saucer, on which you put an egg, the contents having been removed previously through a small hole in the end; partly fill with sand, and let each contain a small paper with a suggestion in poetry of where or how to find their gifts.

As each person thinks he is cracking his egg he finds the puzzle inside.

Much merriment and good cheer will be the result.

Serve original content of eggshells in omelet with the ham.

Hide one person's gifts in bookcase, paper in egg to read:

If you are either wise or smart
You'll find me in a hurry.
Among gifted people I now dwell;
So hunt, don't sit and worry.

Frost King and Snowballs.

As one in the time for the clever woman of the family to devise some unique way of distributing Christmas gifts, she may decorate the living room with evergreens, holly and mistletoe, and then place in one corner a table covered with a white cloth, hidden from view by a screen of generous size. On this table is placed snowballs. These snowballs, made of white cotton batting and tied with white ribbon, contain each designated present, and are heaped in a pyramid, thus obtaining a mass of snowballs of varied size. The pile is scattered freely with diamond dust, in order to give it an attractive sparkle. If there is a small boy in the house he may be dressed as a Frost King, in a costume of white wadding, sprinkled with diamond dust; leaves and holly berries can be sewed here and there upon the robe. At a given signal the screen is removed, disclosing the tiny Frost King, who, with a few words of Christmas greeting, gathers the snowballs into a pretty basket, and as each ball bears a small tag he finds no difficulty in distributing the gifts to those assembled.

A Holly Pie.

A novel way of distributing Christmas gifts on Christmas morning is to make a big pie in the center of the table of holly branches, and arrange it so the gifts can be easily drawn from under it. Each gift must be tied with a narrow red ribbon and one end lead to each place at the table. This is great fun, and of course every one is anxious to see who gets the most ribbons, the lucky one being declared the most popular. The pie is not "opened" until end of breakfast.

A Christmas Trail.

One member of the family should take charge of the gifts, and when the coast is clear should lay the "trail" with them in all of the available downstairs rooms. Start from a tiny Christmas tree on the living room table by fastening to it a card for each person, marked, for example, thus: "Card No. 1, father. Look for card No. 2 in umbrella stand in hall." In the stand he will find a package tagged in this manner: "Card No. 2, father. Look for card No. 3 in your hat in hall closet." The third card will be found on a gift in the spot designated, with further instructions, which are followed on to the next, until all his presents come to light. Everyone pursues his or her trail at once, and a merry scene of confusion is the result. These cards may be prepared beforehand, and no difficulty will be experienced in placing the gifts, each trail is finished before starting to lay another. The last cards should direct the family to their places at the dining room table, where they will find amusing souvenirs of the occasion.

Cobweb Method.

A rather novel and entirely inexpensive way of distributing Christmas gifts is to employ the "cobweb" method. Suspend a rope diagonally across the room, over which the strings may cross, each string to be labeled at its source with the name of the member of the family or the friend for whom it is intended. A sheet can be hung across one end of the room, hiding the gifts from view until time for winding the strings. Let all begin the quest at once, it being necessary to find the beginnings of the strings where the names are attached. This will afford considerable amusement, as the strings should be run through keyholes, under beds, over transoms and even out of doors, if possible.

Aside from the element of mystery contained in this method, there is the added value which attaches to those things which have been really earned through one's own efforts.

Old Bill's Gift

By Octavia Roberts

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Bill, more familiarly "Old Bill"—he had never been known to mention a family name—looked around his "haven of holiday comfort," as he termed it, with a chuckle of supreme satisfaction.

"It's great!" he gloated, "with only one thing missing—a Christmas tree." Bill was a character. The townspeople designated him a tramp. Somehow, however, the appellation did not seem to fit. He did not drink nor swear. He did not beg. His willing ways had made him popular, and when Bill was "down on his luck" and passed a doorway hungry-looking, his wants were generally provided for unsolicited.

It was the day before Christmas. Behind the patient gleam in "Old Bill's" eyes lurked some sentiment of memory that impelled him to celebrate. This special year he had been preparing for the event with the eager ardor of a school boy. Bill had made no confidants. Quietly and enjoyably he had laid his plans.

These were now perfected. A week back Bill had "gone to house-keeping." He had discovered an old abandoned barn just beyond the town limits. The lower part had lost doors and windows and was bleak and cheerless indeed. A rickety stairs, however, led to a room in one corner of the loft. It was cozy and warm and at one time had been a harness room. Here Bill had "camped." He had fished out an old oil stove, a cot, a table and chair from the town dumping heap.

A particular housewife had presented him with a roasted chicken because one side was slightly charred. On the rude table beside it were half a dozen homemade doughnuts and a real mince pie.

Bill took a last look at the goodly array of comfort then went out to seek a branch of arbor vitae which would serve as a Christmas tree.

As he neared the barn on his return he came to a speedy halt.

A light glowed over at one corner of the place. It proceeded from a lantern set in the feed box of a manger. In the manger itself across the stable hay it contained a blanket was spread, and swathed in coverings upon this, as revealed by the lantern rays, lay a little sleeping babe.

Near by a serious-faced man was shaking the snow from his shoulders. Beside him, seated on an old suitcase, was a comely but care-worn woman.

The man began to speak. Bill, agape, drew into the shadow and listened. It was to hear enough to learn that bad luck was driving these homeless ones from their former home, penniless, on foot, to the father of the wife, ten miles further on. The storm had driven them to temporary shelter.

The husband and father had taken a well-thumbed volume from his pocket. He began reading aloud. It was of "an upper room," of a master and his beloved disciples, of a supper never to be forgotten in the memory of mankind.

Bill stood like one transfixed. What tender chord had been struck that he closed his eyes! He was back forty years in memory, at his mother's knee. How vivid, how appealing—a picture she had shown him of the Christ-child in a manger, of the devoted father and mother, as here before him, a prototype of that holy eve so real, so touching—the First Christmas!

A mighty thought moved him as he quietly spoke:
"Friend, upstairs you will find comfort till the storm is over. Call it a Christmas greeting—see?" and "was gone."

"I'll strike out for Farmer Dale's haymow," snickered Bill, after half an hour's desultory wandering, and he turned about—to start, to shout out, and then to run.

For there in the distance the familiar farmhouse showed no illumination within, but beyond it a glare shot up—a haystack on fire!

Bill reached the farmyard. The wind had blown the flames against one gable of the house and it was burning. He ran to the stable for a pitchfork. Then began a fierce battle. Bucket after bucket of water he carried. The last spark was dashed out and Bill sank exhausted to the ground as the farmer and his family, visiting at a neighbor's and attracted by the blaze, came rushing upon the scene.

"Yes," declared Farmer Dale, two hours later, as he showed Bill up the stairs and into a comfortable chamber, "this is your room, and you will sleep here, and you're a free boarder long as you like, understand? Why, there'd be no house to sleep in if it wasn't for you!"

Old Bill was a long time getting into bed. Like to a child he sank into a peaceful slumber, his softened spirit in radiant dreams wandering through that "upper room" filled with the souls of those, however humble, who had helped to make true "Peace on earth good will to men."

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"Maybe, no; but ye tell us it was Shakespeare who wrote, 'Uneasy lies the head that wears a crown.' Now Rabble would never hae written sic nonsense as that."
"Nonsense, sir!" thundered the other.
"Aye, just nonsense. Rabble would hae kent fine that a king or queen either disna gang to bed w' the croon on their head. He'd hae kent they hang it over the back o' a chair."

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