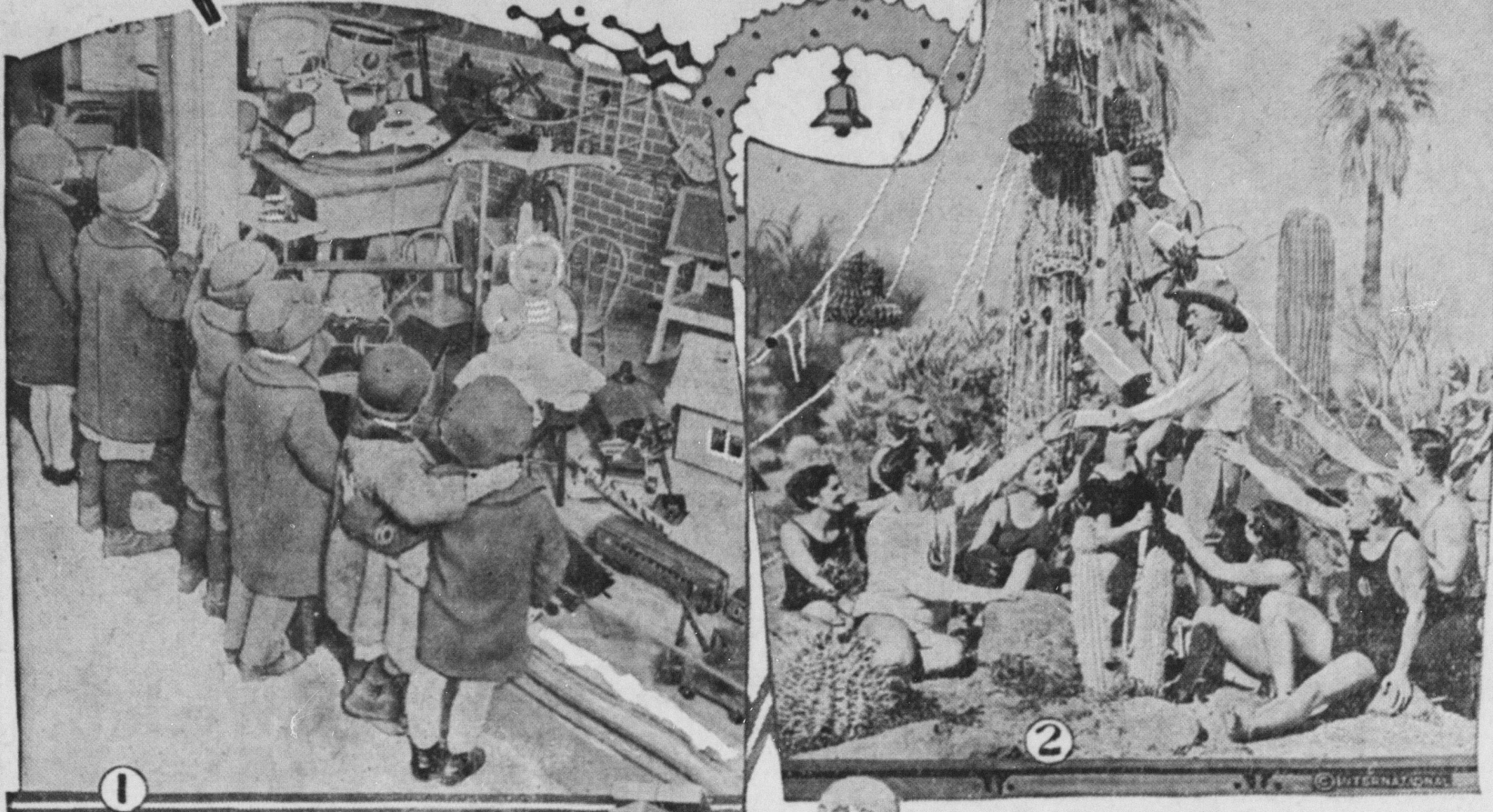


Christmas is Almost Here!



By LOUISE M. COMSTOCK

"Merry, Merry Christmas everywhere:
Cheerily it ringeth on the air!
Christmas bells, Christmas trees,
Christmas odours on the breeze. . ."



CHRISTMAS is almost here! And once more we find ourselves somehow again doing all the things one always does at this time of year, with an enthusiasm which repetition or business depression fail to dampen.

It is a wonderful thing, this spirit of Christmas, in the name of which we open hearts and pocketbooks in a stupendous effort to make joy universal for at least one day a year. When we stop to analyse it, clearing away from it the tarnished tinsel and candle drippings with which many years of sentimentality and commercial exploitation have to some extent covered it, we find it based after all on the most lasting, worthwhile and certainly the most pleasurable of human instincts. There will always, of course, be Scrooges to sneer and flout the spirit of Christmas, and busy business men who will send the stenographer out to buy the wife's present or else sign a few checks and be glad it's over, and unhappy mortals who give because they have received or expect to receive or hope to outdo the rest of the girls in the bridge club. But fundamentally the spirit of Christmas is sound and true and healthful, as is probably, right now when depleted bank accounts and curtailed wages put a new significance on gift-giving and indulgence in innocent merrymaking for the sake of a faith or a tradition, being demonstrated more convincingly than ever before.

What else but the real spirit of Christmas makes it possible for us to go into ecstasies over an off-shade necktie from Cousin Kitty, or a scrap of silk underwear three times too small from a school mate who hasn't seen us since we were twenty-one and a perfect size sixteen? What else gives us the strength, now that there are only a "few more shopping days" to go, to dive into crowded stores, elbow through crowds, and to pay more than we intended for something we are not sure will please.

Gift giving itself is founded upon the noblest sentiment of them all, the very heart and soul of Christmas, which is after all merely the annual celebration of a great Gift. The custom of exchanging gifts as we today practice it dates from the first offerings made to the Nordic god Frey for a fruitful year. Saint Nicholas, the Fifth century bishop who is said to have inspired our modern Santa Claus distinguished himself by his lavish gifts to the poor of Lycia, Asia Minor. Like Christmas feasting, however, giving reached extravagant heights during the Fifteenth and Sixteenth centuries, and Queen Elizabeth is said to have received almost her entire personal wardrobe as Christmas gifts from her courtiers, and an unbelievable quantity of precious jewels. Introduced into this country by the first Dutch settlers, the custom of filling the children's stockings, and heaping presents upon young and old alike has become one of the most important things about Christmas.

Nor is there any indication that there will be less gifts given this Christmas than in previous fatter years. When figures showing the total savings represented by the various Christmas savings clubs throughout the country were published recently, they showed the staggering sum of \$503,000,000, 6 per cent less in actual money than last year, but much more in real purchasing power due to deflated prices. It has further been estimated that fully 40 per cent of this total annual savings is actually used in making Christmas purchases, while an additional 3 per cent, this year probably much more, can always be counted on for educational and charitable uses. Certainly there will be no diminution in the amounts of charity gifts this year. National unemployment relief programs, local drives by charitable organizations, and individual gifts, old clothing, baskets of food, money, toys, will surely be made in greater abundance and in closer accord with the real spirit of Christmas than ever before.

One of the most painless methods by which we join in the universal philanthropy demanded annually at Christmas time is by the purchase of Christmas seals. This is the twenty-fifth anniversary of the Christmas seal in this country. The idea was first utilized in financing health work in Copenhagen, Denmark, in 1904. A postal clerk, familiar with the vast numbers of packages mailed at this time of year, suggested it as a means of raising money for a charity hospital. One of the original Danish seals, stuck onto a Christmas package, reached Jacob Riis, social reformer and friend of Theo-



1. "Gee, I hope I get something like that!" Young America lines up in front of store windows to gaze longingly at the fascinating displays therein and to hope that "ol' Santy Claus" will bring just what they have been wanting.

2. This highly unusual Christmas tree is nothing else than a gigantic prickly cactus being prepared for the outdoor celebration at Christmas at Palm Springs, Calif. The tree's holiday regalia was supplied by society folk from all parts of the country who winter there.

3. Mr. W. K. Public does his Christmas shopping. Loaded to the guards with packages, bundles and gifts, the poor fellow sets a good, if somewhat overloaded, example of buying his Yuletide gifts early in the season. Friend wife directs operations, and all he has to do is to furnish the funds and transportations.

dore Roosevelt, who was so enthusiastic about the idea that he wrote it up in an article published in the Outlook. There Miss Emily Bissell, trying to raise \$3,000 for a tuberculosis pavilion in Wilmington, Delaware, read about it, borrowed the idea and had the first American Christmas seals printed and sold in 1907.

Today, under the direction of the National Tuberculosis association, the work has reached vast proportions. In one year over 5,000,000,000 of these little stickers were sold. At a penny apiece their sale supports over 2,000 affiliated tuberculosis associations and committees throughout this country.

Another way in which we spend a goodly proportion of our Christmas money is on cards, which last year cost the American public some \$50,000,000, not counting engraving and postage. The first Christmas card was sent out in 1846. The idea was that of Sir Henry Cole, English gentleman and social reformer; they were designed and lithographed and hand colored to his order under the direction of J. C. Horsley, member of the Royal academy. The cards were 6 by 4 inches large, and bore three panels separated by a leafy trellis. In the two side panels were scenes illustrating the charitable acts of feeding the hungry and clothing the needy; in the central one was the whole family, grandparents, parents and children, all holding up brimming beakers and about to drink to the recipient "A Merry Christmas and a Happy New Year."

Cole ordered and sent out 1,000 of these novel Christmas greetings, and we may imagine that they were received with a great deal of curiosity, if not of enthusiasm. However, the card became really popular only in the 1870's, when, along with everything else they were highly ornamental and senders strove to outdo each other in original and expensive designs. The "best people" in this country got the craze about 1873, artists of note found it more profitable to prepare Christmas scenes for cards than to paint portraits, and poets of consequence did not think it beneath them to compose fitting sentiments for them.

As the result of our present need for individuality, the Christmas cards is no longer a sheer work of art, but a commercial novelty and a good racket. This year in addition to the conventional design of religious theme or showing snow scenes, carol singers, holly wreaths or candles, we have the card decorated by Scotty, the little terrier who is just now at the zenith of his popularity, or bearing a modernistic design, which, however incongruous to a thing as old fashioned as Christmas, nevertheless is always striking and fresh in appearance. Most 1931 cards are interesting also be-

cause of the paper on which they are printed. There are a great many stocks with shiny surfaces, black, gold or silver; bright candy stripes dash gayly across others, and one very popular paper is rough-surfaced and almost spongy in texture and brings out any printed design of lettering in clear-cut outline that is most effective.

Time was when Christmas dinner was many weeks in the making and many hours in the serving, but that was in the days before the grocer around the corner was brought even nearer by the telephone and quick delivery service, and every nearby restaurant offered a menu rivaling mother's own. Today even Christmas dinner may be procured in cans, and fortunately so. Imagine a modern woman in her most white enamel and shiny chromium plate kitchenette mixing together this recipe for "shred pie," an old English Christmas favorite: "Two bushels of flour, 20 pounds of butter, 4 geese, 2 turkeys, 3 rabbits, 4 wild ducks, 3 woodcocks, 6 snipe, 4 partridges, 2 neat's tongues, 3 curlews, 7 blackbirds, 6 pigeons!" Or even let her undertake the day's cooking with which little Sally Fairfax of Virginia, writing in her diary in 1771, credits her mother: "... Mamma made six mince pies, and seven custards, twelve tarts, one chicking pie, and four puddings. . ."

When Christmas feasting was in its heyday scarcely a self-respecting menu but included:

- "Beefe, mutton and porke,
- Shred pie of the best;
- Fig, veale, goose and capon,
- And turkie well drest."

There was also the famous boar's head, lemon in mouth and ears wreathed around with rosemary; the peacock, roasted, sewn back into its own skin with every lovely feather in place; generously garnished and carried in on a golden platter with due ceremony; haunches of venison, plum porridge, frumenty and the steaming hot wassail drink. The shred pie, unlike its modern descendant the mince pie, was baked in a long dish, shaped like the cradle, or manger of Bethlehem. However this lavish outlay of food may, in the reading, make the mouth water, there was probably in the tasting another side to the story. Imagine the fastidious and vitamin-conscious gourmand of today seated in some huge smoky baronial hall before a dinner served up by a nondescript retinue of servants from mysterious dark cellars and smelly kitchens and consisting of ". . . thirty-pound buttered eggs, pies of carp's tongues, pheasants drenched with ambergris, and a single peacock covered with sauce made from gravy of the bruised carcasses of three fat wethers!"

Nevertheless, it is to this old-time cookery that we owe many of our favorite Christmas dishes, and at no other time of year does the modern kitchen show such a flurry of old-fashioned activity as now. The Christmas turkey is, of course, America's contribution to the feast; and is found on almost every American table.

Time was when one of the most important duties of the last few days before Christmas was to cut, bring into the house, and set up the Christmas tree, which had been marked out from its sisters in the old back woodlot months ago for this very purpose, and tenderly watched over ever since. Onto its fresh, fragrant branches went homemade tapers, fancy paper cut-outs, strings of popcorn prepared with much ado by the children themselves.

Its glowing lights, its shining tinsel strings, its sparkling colored balls, represent the aged love man has felt for warmth and light, for the sheltered companionship of the open hearth, for the life-giving rays of the sun. In them the Christmas tree carries on the purpose of the old heathen festival to which our modern celebration in some ways corresponds, expressing their joy at the return of the winter solstice, when the sun once more became friendly to men, when days commenced to lengthen, and spring was not so far away. Our modern Christmas tree decorations are thus in one sense merely modern symbols of the sun, descendants of the burning barrel and the flaming torch with which the ancients used to worship it. Martin Luther made the first Christmas tree of the tree, when he set up in his home in Germany, for his own children, a little fir tree, and hung it with candles, like the stars, he explained to them, which lighted the night of the Nativity.

The fir tree is still regarded as the Christmas tree par excellence, particularly in the northeastern and lake states, because of its long, spreading and springy branches and its deep green and fragrant foliage which stays fresh longer than that of almost any other type. In the western states fir, while abundant, it is harder to reach and cut, and its place is largely taken by lodgepole pine and spruce, while on the Pacific coast white fir is most popular.

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The world laughed tolerantly at last summer's "Monkey Marathon," when small boys took to trees in endurance contests; and there could be no better proof that times have changed. The Fourth century took similar performances more seriously. Consider Simeon Stylites. He chained himself to a great rock on which he began to erect a column of smaller stones. Aided by his admirers, who rapidly increased in numbers, he raised the pile, first to a height of 9, and finally to 60 feet. In this last and lofty situation, he endured the heat of 30 summers and the cold of as many winters.

He sometimes prayed in an erect attitude with his outstretched arms in the figure of a cross; but his most familiar practice was that of bending his meager skeleton from the forehead to the feet, and a curious spectator, after numbering 1,244 repetitions, at length desisted from the endless account.

Simeon died, without descending from his pillar, as a result of an ulcer on his thigh. The ulcer owed its

origin to pride. The devil, so the story goes, assumed an angelic form and drew up beside the pillar top in a fiery chariot. He invited Simeon to ascend, as had Elijah, and the saint was ready. As he lifted his foot to step in, the devil spanked him cruelly and vanished in a cloud of sulphurous smoke.

This chastisement to pride won for the hermit great repute and when, a few years later, his bones were borne to Antioch, the patriarch of the city, the master-general of the East, six bishops, 21 counts or tribunes and 6,000 soldiers former the guard of honor.—Cleveland Plain Dealer.

For Domestic Peace

Teacher—Yes, children, one of the duties of the lord high chamberlain was to put the king to bed.

Willie (who has observed things)—And did he have to think up excuses to tell the king's wife?

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Camels and Locomotives

One of the biggest concrete bridges in the world is along the new railway lines being built through Turkey. Although only a little over 500 miles long, the two lines penetrate difficult country, necessitating the building of about 2,000 bridges, large and small, and many tunnels. In Angora an average of 8,000 blasts of dynamite a day are used to dislodge the rocky wastes. More than 18,000 peasants and shepherds are employed on the work besides thousands of peasant women who labor as stone breakers. An oriental touch is given to the picture by thousands of camels used to transport supplies as the building progresses.

Scalp Is Heirloom

The scalp of an Indian chief slain by her father is among the cherished possessions of Mrs. Burch Young, of Fort Worth, Texas. This heirloom and other trappings taken from the dead warrior passed into her hands recently on the death of her mother, Mrs. Ira Long, widow of the former Texas ranger captain of frontier fame. Captain Long died in 1913 at seventy-one. The Indian chief was killed by Captain Long in a hand-to-hand encounter in Lost valley in Jack county, Texas, more than fifty years ago.

Place for the Amateur

There is a current tendency fostered, I regret to say, by many of our clever writers—to scoff at the "amateur" and the "dilettante." This is an attitude with which I have very

little sympathy. We might as well take our food by sniffing at another person's plate as to confine our musical activities to an admission fee at somebody else's performance. If we keep on letting other people do things for us in that way, another century will find us with nothing of common interest to say to each other and no means by which to say it. Conversation is already becoming a lost art. An evening of talk is a rarity. One plays bridge.—Harold Bauer, in the Etude.

Wanted to Know

"John, it says here the government has a plan to thaw out the frozen assets of the banks," remarked Mrs. Dumbell.

"Well, what of it?" he asked.

"Why, don't the banks hire plumbers to do that?" she inquired.

Can't Convince Police

"I saw you arguing with your wife on the street yesterday."

"Yes, I was trying to convince her that the police wouldn't refuse to tag the car merely because she insisted it was all right to park that near a fire plug."

May Be Round the Corner

"Hasn't he got a rich wife?"

"Yes, but she hasn't declared any dividends so far."—Boston Transcript.

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