



On Christmas Eve, Nancy hurried breathlessly into her rooming house. Surely the package from home would be there! But Mrs. Groggins, the ugly little landlady, shook her head.

"Nothing," she said. "The mail-man went right by this afternoon. Up in her room Nancy spent a lonesome Christmas Eve. She read while to forget her hunger, then went to bed. Next morning it was the destitute Mrs. Wilson who awakened her.

"Merry Christmas, Miss Bell!" she shouted, walking into the room uninvited. Nancy was irritated momentarily, by this highly painted, shallow creature. But she quickly regained her composure. It was Christmas, after all!

"It was swell of you, dearie, to pay Mrs. Groggins a week's rent in advance last night," Mrs. Wilson said, settling herself into the most comfortable chair. "I don't know what would have happened because I'm caught a bit short just now and couldn't pay!"

About noon she dressed, for Jim was calling for her at one o'clock. What a ravenous appetite she would have.

But one o'clock passed, and no Jim. Now at 2 or 3, and Nancy's spirits began to give way. Had he, too, chosen to punish her on Christmas?

Downstairs she heard Mr. and Mrs. Groggins welcoming their guests for the day, and she took a vicarious pleasure from it. She heard the dinner bell, the clatter of dishes as they dined, and then the shuffling of chairs as the well-fed guests retired to the living room. By that time it was five o'clock and Nancy sat by her window, figuratively biting her fingernails. She was almost hysterical with fear, and she began to worry.

At six o'clock she put on her coat and dashed down the stairs, headed she knew not where. Perhaps to find Jim, perhaps merely to escape her room. She reached the entrance, turned the knob and pulled open the door — and there was Jim, just arriving!

"Fearfully she threw herself into his arms, shivering from fright. 'Oh, Jim!' she cried. 'Where have you been?'"

"But didn't you get my message?" he asked. "I had to work in the laboratory this afternoon, and telephoned Mrs. Groggins at 12:30!" His brow was furrowed. Just then there was a voice behind them. "Miss Bell!" It was Mrs. Groggins. "A message for you. It came just before dinner, but then our guests arrived and I didn't get around to bringing it up."

Nancy took the slip from her hand, wiping away a tear. She heard Jim cursing. "Let's get out of here, honey," he said, quietly. A short time later they were dining by candlelight while a string ensemble played soft Christmas music in the background. Jim looked up from his coffee and smiled, then reached into his pocket. "There was a big package on your desk at the office," he said. "It came today. From your folks. A guess. Too big to carry with me, but maybe this will take its place."

He reached for her left hand, then for the second finger, and at its tip he looked a diamond ring. Then he looked at her, asking assent. "Yes, darling," she said softly. "It's the merriest Christmas ever!"

Lord Of All

Infant holy, Infant lowly For His bed a cattle stall, Oxen lowing Little knowing Christ the Babe is Lord of all. Swift are winging Angels singing, Nowells ringing, Tidings bringing, Christ the Babe is Lord of all. —E. M. Reed.

bered there had been no dinner—and now no breakfast. All because of Mrs. Wilson!

"I was just about to drop out for a bite to eat," her visitor explained, "and seeing you're all alone, I thought you might like to come along."

Nancy remembered the lone 25-cent piece in her purse. "Thank you so kindly, Mrs. Wilson," she answered quickly. "But I'm—I'm not feeling so well this morning. I'll just have a cup of coffee in my room!"

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"I Can't Wait All Day!!"



This little boy has been good—oooh, soo good—but it's getting kind of tiresome waiting for Santa Claus. The tree is up, the fireplace decorated, but "where's Santa?" he asks. Here, he had just been put to bed — but he heard a noise in the front room, and as his attire reveals he got up and was away like a flash to the fireplace, looking for Santa. Little things like "southern exposures" don't worry him.

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This Was Their Christmas

By David Mauley

BUT OUR WAYS ARE NOT INFERIOR TO CUSTOMS OF PAST

It is one of our fixed ideas that the ideal Christmas was made by the Yule customs of some rather vague period in the past, and that our Christmas is inferior. The truth is that we have substantial reasons to be satisfied with Christmas as we know it, and not as it was in the "good old times."

If, for instance, we compare the games and sports in which our ancestors found pleasure at this season with amusements of our own time, we can flatter ourselves that we have progressed. From hunting the wren, or the fox and the cat, or toasting the cow to the humane and harmless Christmas pastimes of to-day, represents a transition with which we ought to be pleased.

Hunting the wren survived in some places until Victorian times. The legend is that, in far-off ages, the wren was held to be the King of Birds and regarded by people with superstitious reverence. To stamp out this form of bird worship was a duty, and so the wren was to be hunted and killed. The pursuit took place on Christmas Day, and on the following day the victim was hung, with wings extended from a long pole, and was carried in procession—and, of course, collections were taken en route.

There were areas in the Midlands where, down to the 19th century, the populace toasted the cat at Christmas. The ritual consisted of sticking a big fruit cake on the beast's horns. Then a countryman had to say—

"Here's to thy pretty face, and thy white horn, God send thy master a crop of corn."

Both wheat, rye and barley and all sorts of grain, And next year, if we live, we'll drink to thee again."

Whereupon a pall of good elder would be dashed in the face of the cow! Even the sober and scholarly mind of the 19th century was not immune to the strange ideas of Christmas amusements of long ago. There is a record of hounds being brought to the Inner Temple, and, at the blowing of horns, being set upon a fox and a cat.

SKATING—WEATHER PERMITTING

Other and more intelligent ideas of Christmas festivities gradually replaced these crude diversions. Dickens' picture of the jolly house party at Dingley Dell, with the eventual day on the ice, has left an impression of skating as a Christmas pastime. But while skating remains popular, we seem seldom to have the ice at Christmas.

Indeed the Christmas weather has been so mild at times that some enthusiasts have been able to spend Christmas playing cricket. Perhaps the most notable match at this time of year was that played between the Hampshire Exiles and the Invaders at Hambledon, the "cradle of cricket," on a New Year's Day between the wars. Sir John Squire, essayist and poet, Sir Walter Monckton, K. C., and Mr. Howard Marshall played in that match which thousands saw in brilliant sunshine.

Christmas football has grown into a tremendous attraction, with league games played to big gates. Even during the second war, football held its place as a Christmas-time attraction. One eventful Christmas the Arsenal played Chelsea in London, and faced a strong service eleven at Leeds on Boxing Day.

One of the great changes which have come over our ways of spending Christmas is the taste for outdoor games, both for playing and watching. Attendances at football matches, professional and amateur, have reached astonishing figures in recent times.

Fashions have also changed in respect of our indoor Christmas amusement. "The delights of the ten thousand million delights of a pantomime, come streaming upon us now," wrote Dickens in introducing the story of Grimaldi, the great clown. Pantomime continues to provide its delights; but how greatly changed!

Moreover, we may now have our fairy stories decked out and elaborated in Hollywood or British studios as the contribution of the cinema to our Yuletide entertainment. Pantomime is little more than two hundred years old; it made an elaborately dull beginning in

Bethlehem Sheep

(By Norman C. Schlichter) The little sheep of Bethlehem! Were not afraid that night When suddenly the angels sang And all the skies were bright.

And when the shepherds went away The Holy Child to see I think the sheep knew well its would Their Heavenly Shepherd be

The peace that fell on earth that night It fell on them, I know And ever since He's shepherded 'Dumb creatures here below.

IF THERE'S A MAN ON YOUR GIFT LIST?

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DANCING MORE POPULAR

Topical scenes and songs became inseparable features in pantomime about the time of the Crimean war. But the taste for pantomime suffered a reverse about this period. In "Fanny's First Play," Bernard Shaw makes his Count O'.

SANTA'S CHRISTMAS DELIGHT
Follow Santa's flight round the world by solving the jumbled towns given here.

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| BLUIND | ONCELY |
| STEFLAB | HIDEL |
| MICKLIRE | SPRUCY |
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| GWENPINI | PAIRS |
| AMAJIAC | SLUBRE 3s |
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