

Some War Christmases

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When the Christmas of 1916 came round, the authorities in France were determined to ensure that the fraternisation of the previous year was not repeated.

Stringent orders were issued, but it is to be doubted whether the British troops, at all events, had any inclination to fraternise. Since the previous Christmas, the Germans had forfeited much of the esteem in which they were held as fairly chivalrous opponents.

In the intervening period that had introduced poisoned gas and flame throwers. Their navy had sunk the Lusitania with a loss of 1,200 lives. Thus there was hardly any occasion for the reminder issued by G. H. Q. to the effect that "war is war," even on Christmas Day.

Had any man, moved by brotherly-love, been bold enough to put his head above the parapet, he would quickly have made a sacrifice to his ideal. Guns were kept going on both sides throughout the day, but warfare lacked the venom which it possessed on the other days of the year. There was nothing exceptional to report on the western front at the end of the day.

By this time, the war had spread its ugly tentacles, and there was fighting in progress in Egypt, in Macedonia, Mesopotamia, and East Africa.

Thanks to the unflagging efforts of good friends at home, most of the troops, even in the distant theatres of war, were supplied with some of the familiar concomitants of the Christmas season.

WITH THE FLEET:

At such times, of course, the sailor is in a better position than the soldier. His risks are no less grave, but he carries his home with him, and is thus able to enjoy in war much of what is customary in peace time.

Thus, we find the Grand Fleet having a tolerably good Christmas and even those weather-beaten men who were doing duty on mine-sweepers and small craft in northern waters, appear to have found their run rather less stunted than usual, as a reminder that the day had some exceptional significance.

Internationally, the Christmas of 1916 was the most embarrassing of the whole war. President Wilson chose this time to address to the combatant powers a note on the subject of Peace, and Switzerland endorsed the President's appeal. The Germans, cleverly ignoring the President's request for a statement of terms, proposed that peace delegates should be nominated at once. This note was issued on Christmas Day.

The reply of the British Army was to use the comparative quiet of Christmas Day to take over more trench line from the French, while the Allied statesmen returned an emphatic negative to the German Peace proposals which they described as "empty and insincere."

CHRISTMAS ON THE SOMME:

Our reluctance to pursue Peace negotiations was not in any way due to the fact that we were enjoying the War. The Christmas of 1916 found us with a casualty list staggering by comparison to the rolls of the previous years. We had indulged in the Somme adventure and had sacrificed the flower of the new armies in an effort which was more remarkable for the courage displayed, than for any strategic skill or tactical enterprise. The result was that the greater part of our army in France spent the Christmas of 1916 in muddy valleys between the rolling towns of the Somme country.

On the Ancre, almost daily, most sanguinary fighting was proceeding in swampy ground as unfavourable for battle as any land about Ypres. Such were the experiences through which white men had gone in the previous month, and such were the prospects that still faced them, that the iron had entered into the souls of many of them, and they mocked at Christmas, at its origin and its significance.

These facts were not stated at the time, but any man who was in that locality about that period knows they were true.

EMOTION DISAPPEARS:

Yet another Christmas was to be passed under war conditions, and thus the festive season in 1917 found people in all the combatant countries pursuing the War in a somewhat mechanical fashion. Enthusiasm for it had gone, even hate was abating. There was little emotion of any kind. The luxuries appropriate to Christmas time were rare—indeed, the necessities of life were rationed. Nations plodded on their way as a tired but determined man trundles listlessly on a journey that must, of necessity, be completed.

On the Allied side, although the Russians had withdrawn from the War, there were good grounds for hope. America had come in and had thus more than redressed the balance left by retirement of the Russians.

NEW HOPE:

Further, General Byng, by his offensive at Cambrai, just prior to Christmas, had shown that there were other ways of winning battles than by the unimaginative, expensive and disheartening tactics hitherto employed. There was a feeling that the secret of defeating an entrenched enemy, a secret which had been sought since 1914, had now been discovered.

In the trenches there was little of the Christmas spirit to be discerned. Although it was necessary, considerable artillery fire was ordered along the whole front in order to prevent any possible attempt at fraternisation. Among those who could celebrate Christmas, the means of doing so were readily found. Although times were hard at home, the amount of Christmas fare which was sent out to the troops in the field was surprising. In France, Italy, Macedonia, and Mesopotamia, there was, in every British camp, some sign of Christmas to display, and some additional items of fare to give cause for a pretence at feasting.

In France and Flanders, snow lay thick upon the ground. It was warmer (in more senses than one) in the trenches than it was in camp, for canvas is a poor protection from icy winds, and even wooden huts are not devoid of crevices!

I suppose there were few, if any, who guessed that this was actually the last Christmas of the War. "Overt by Christmas" had been a slogan in years past, and the man who quoted it was in danger of receiving the punishment justly inflicted upon the perpetrator of stale jokes. Few ever discussed the end of the War. Some, indeed, had a dull feeling that it could never end, and that each of us would go on until he was killed, and that others would come out to take our places.

When the Armistice actually came, men were too dazed to realize it. The frenzied rejoicings of London and other cities had no counterpart in the trenches of war. Just as an athlete who has passed through some great ordeal successfully is too dazed and tired to enjoy the immediate fruits of his success, so the troops were unable to realize what the Armistice meant.

By Christmas Day, 1918, however, a different feeling prevailed. Consciousness had returned. Men were now able to appreciate the significance of what had happened. They realized that, contrary to their first suspicions, there was no "catch" in it, that the War was really over, once and for all.

Thus it was that they were able to throw themselves with unexaggerated zest into the Christmas festivities of 1918, the first real Christmas many had enjoyed for four years.

How We Made the Xmas Pudding

Comedy of a Cookery Glass in an Irish School By Sexton O'Sullivan



It was a certain Thursday in the month of December, in a certain golden year when currants and raisins had not attained their present height in the world of prices; neither had butter and eggs soared so far out of the reach of little purse-holders.

"After the theory comes the practice," was one of our many cookery mottoes. The shopping was the first active step. This necessitated many journeys up and down the one and only village street to the one and only emporium of all commodities from a red herring or a stamp to a ton of coal, or a Parisian hat.

HEAVEN ON EARTH:

At last came the actual cookery day. The chopping of the suet, beating of the eggs, stoning the raisins, mixing the "dry ingredients," as the dry old notebook callously termed them. The delightful feel of the soft flour as it slipped through our fingers, the surreptitious tasting and passing along of a large raisin or a weasly little bit of candy peel when "She" was not looking—The cookery class was in a little heaven on earth.

Each one of the senior girls had a turn at mixing and stirring, for the recipe said "mix thoroughly." One very large senior girl with a red, round face, a dimple in her chin, and a queer impediment in her speech, was always "the head cook and bottle washer" (or rather dish washer). She was a good worker, in spite of the impediment which had the effect of sprinkling her words profusely with "ls." She always had a soft spot for the infants.

"What about the ill-falls, poor 'll ill-falls! I'll give 'em a 'll piece of candy peel." The 'ill-falls' were gazing with round eyes and round mouths and envying the great cookery class. The boys were in a corner doing 'algebra'—a mystic subject to which the ladies had no claim, but alas, the wondrous 'algebra' had no charms just then.

"I say, Mary Anne, give us a raisin." "Kate, just a bit of dough?" "Bridgie, a piecechen of brown sugar?" "SHE": "Quick Hattie, 'She' isn't looking. I'll do all your square roots to-morrow."

The currants and raisins were gradually disappearing. "She" had heard the "spellings" of the lower classes, now "She" was hearing the infants "tables."

"Twoanwanthree Twaotwanfour." "Sure 'tis eyes in my poll I'd want. You big, great, idle lazy boys! Did I see you, Pad Malone, talking to the cookery girls? Bring me your simple equation this very instant."

Soloman Sam - - - By Mabel Lucie Attwell

Soloman Sam was a nice little baby, So lovely and roundy and pinky and fair, Weighed what he ought to, a little more maybe, Ten toes on his tootsies, and gold on his hair, He'd only one sorrow to darken his eye, He couldn't, although he'd like so to—fly.

Course! nobody knew what went on in Sam's mind, Just lying all day in the meadow grass there, If anyone did, I am sure he would find, Our Sammy was longing to fly in the air, Nothing took place, till one day came a berry Of fairies who list'd to the plaint of our lad, "Wanting to fly! My! we think you're too heavy, We'll teach you—we can't have a baby all sad."

They managed to raise him, the dear little lump, Although he came down again, quick, with a bump.

They gathered all round and said things in his ear— They tapped on his shoulders, so dimpled and fat, "It's confidence, really," they said to the dear—

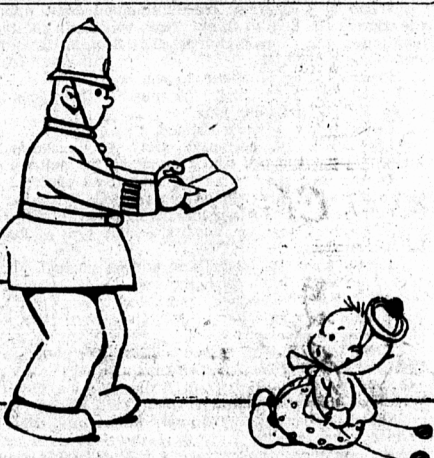
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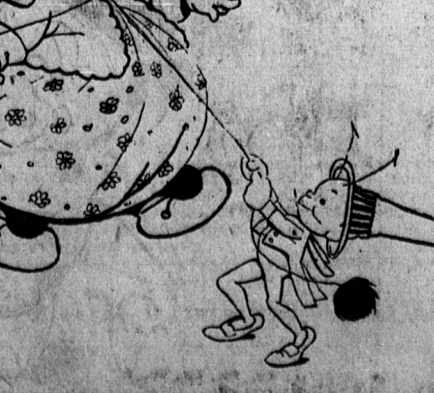
"What's your name, sir?"

"We're wondering if you have any of that?" He carried small Soloman home to his tea, And Soloman wasn't too sorry to go. With only this warning—"Sam don't fly again, Until you've a license—then fly in a plane!"

Police Constable X then took out his book, Proceeding to ask all those questions which vex; "Now—have you a license to fly?"— "Come let's look, "And what is your name, sir?" said Constable X, And many more such, which was rather absurd, Cos' Soloman Sam couldn't answer a word.

But Constable X is as kind as can be— All constables are, as we, all of us.

"Carried our Soloman home."



"OH! WIBBLEDY, WOBLEDY, STEADY, MY DEAR!"

Christmas in Rome

Continued from page 1

Pope borne shoulder high on the sedia gestatoria, the moveable throne supported by six footmen in the crimson livery of the Vatican.

Then, too, when the Procession has passed, a seat in the nave well up towards the altar offers the best position from which to see the ceremonies that follow.

The Mass commences shortly before midnight, but at half-past ten the great Basilica is crowded with thousands upon thousands of the Faithful, assembled from all parts of the world to be present when their Holy Father celebrates the great Feast of Christmas.

Indeed, there are representatives from every part of the globe, among whom, probably, pilgrims predominate. Our seats are excellently situated, and we while away the long wait by watching what is around us; to many these sights are new, and not always understood.

Presently marches in the Palatine Guard, that regiment of Infantry which keeps clear the way for the procession, through the teeming thousands of the crowd. There are strong barriers, and it is well that there are, for the pressure of people is enormous. The Palatine Guard lines the way between the barriers and the procession.

They are sturdy little fellows, these Palatine Guards; very different from the giants of the Gendarmier, who wear the tall bear-skins and blue uniforms similar to those of Napoleon's old Guard.

ST. PETER'S GUARDS:

There are two other Regiments which guard St. Peter's. The Noble Guard, which is the Bodyguard of the Pope, and composed of only sixty members; just one squadron as they used to be in the old days when the Pope rode out into the city of Rome, and the mounted Noble Guard surrounded his carriage. Their uniform—their best—for this great Feast of Christmas, is remarkably like that of our Life Guards; scarlet tunic, long jack boots, white breeches, with a brass helmet from which flows a long plume of black horse-hair down the back.

Then there is the Swiss Guard, clothed in the sixteenth century uniform designed by Michael Angelo. These men are all Swiss, recruited from certain selected cantons. They are fine, reliable body of men, and exceedingly picturesque in their wonderful uniforms, especially when wearing their armour and carrying their halberds—both beautifully Damascened—as they do tonight on this Great Festival.

Where else could such a scene be viewed as this? A man whose power extends to the ends of the earth, based on love. The Pageantries of other European Courts fade into insignificance—now that the Austrian Court has gone—in comparison to this!

NOTHING TOO GOOD:

But it is very necessary that the reason of all this great splendour should be well understood.

As in the Temple of Old, designed by God himself, nothing is considered at Rome too good for the service of the Almighty.

"For the poor you have always with you, but Me you have not always."

The Pope may sleep in a little truckle bed in some small room in the Vatican—and probably does, for he is a man of very simple habits—but Christ, His Master, must have everything that is beautiful, rich, costly, and rare devoted to His service.

Diamonds, gold, pearls, precious stones—gifts of the Faithful—are pressed into every sort of magnificent service to glorify God.

But, what is this? Our attention has been diverted, and time has passed.

A fresh detachment of Swiss Guards in breast-plate and helmet, with their beautifully Damascened halberds sloped over their shoulders, march in and take up position at long intervals between the Palatine Guard and where the Procession will pass.

There is a murmur and a rustle among the crowd of many thousands; they know that the Pope is not far off.

The officers of the Palatine Guard call their men to attention and slope arms, ready to salute.

Then, from the end farthest from the altar where the entrance to the Vatican is, there appears the head of a Procession.

THE PROCESSION:

First, a few of the Swiss Guards; then a long train of priests and Monsignori; Canons of the Vatican and the priests in their vestments who are to assist the Pope in saying Mass; a long procession of Bishops, among them a Great Archbishop in his Greek robes, wearing the Pallium over them; more Bishops, more Archbishops.

Then there is a burst of music from high up near the roof, and that familiar March played by the Silver Trumpets. The Pope has entered St. Peter's.

Then one long, sustained burst of cheering—yes, cheering in St. Peter's—and the waving of thousands of handkerchiefs. We see the Pope advancing in the sedia gestatoria, borne by crimson-clad footmen, with the celebrated fans held aloft behind him, with a few of the scarlet-clad Noble Guard and the officers of the household around him. The cheers intensify the waving of handkerchiefs is incessant.

And what do we see? Not a pale, delicate-looking man, the type so often connected with the Pope, but a Pope who is an athlete, a mountain-climber who is credited with taking more than a passing interest in boxing; a man who, strange to say, without much stretch of the imagination, might pass as an English Squire!

The Procession passes up to greet nave to the High Altar of the Basilica, the Pope blessing his People. He descends from his throne, and after a few minutes spent in prayer, with the aid of many assistants, commences to robe for Mass.

After a very short time he ascends the steps of the great High Altar and stands facing the people—for this is the Altar of Basilica—with the altar between, upon which every movement can be seen. The High Mass of the Nativity has commenced.

After the fatigue of the Midnight Mass, Christmas Day is a day of ease in Rome. It is a day of festivity and rejoicing, still, we must find time to visit the Church of Ara Coeli, for on this day the children of Rome make their speeches and petitions to the Holy Child (the Bambino) resting in the crib—or representation of the Stable of Bethlehem—at this church.

Each school vies with its neighbour in producing the best speech at Ara Coeli. The crib is erected at the end of the church, and opposite to it a platform. Each child mounts the platform and commences the speech.

Some of these addresses are very touching, addressed by one child to Another. They nearly all contain a profession of Faith, in simple terms, in the Incarnation.

And now there remain the thousands of treasures to be seen, thrown open to all this great time of rejoicing—relics so wonderful that one is almost afraid to gaze upon them.

But what is not marvellous and wonderful in Rome!

the cloth and tell me what you do to it."

Norah Mary was off like a non-stop gramophone.

CURRENTS MYSTERY:

"Quite right. Why, those currants seem few and far between—did you get the right amount of candy peel? How much sugar did you put in?"

A chorus shouted:— "3 lb. Demerara sugar."

1 lb. currants.

1 lb. raisins (or sultanas) Raisins must be carefully stoned.

1/2 teaspoonful of nutmeg.

1 teaspoonful of mixed spice."

"That's quite enough. It is very strange indeed. Perhaps you put too much flour."

"We measured out two pounds, exactly. You saw the scales go down, Norah Mary."

"I cannot understand it. Still we must get it finished. Is the water boiling? Who are the volunteers for the first watch—until six o'clock? I'm coming at eight and I'll wait till it is one before I look up."

"The water was ready; a dinner plate placed carefully in and the pudding lowered slowly and reverently into the boiling depths."

"Prayers—there, I thought you'd do it, Mary, careless—knocking the whole packet of spice over! No wonder you'd sneeze with the best mixed spice flying up your noses!"

The prayer was said, and reluctantly the children left the warm, spice-laden atmosphere of the school-room.

BOOK CHOICE:

The pudding was boiling merrily, the kettle singing on the hob ready to discharge its contents and so keep "the pudding on the boil continuously." Hattie Sheehan and Norah Mary were comfortably seated on a low form in front of the blazing fire.

"I have the peppermints and the caddies."

"And good job I brought the books, Norah Mary. Which will you have 'The Duchess's Lovers' or 'The Earl's Will'?" They are both scrumptious, so our new servant girl says. She has piles of 'em—keeps 'em under a mattress for fear Mother would see 'em. I haven't read those two, but our new girl says 'The Duchess's Lovers' is about a lovely lady who wanted to marry a poor man who loved her, then a rich man loved her too and killed the poor man and she died of grief."

"I'll have The Earl's Will! I don't like 'em dying. I think it better to get married in the end—don't you, Hattie?"

"Sometimes—but 'The Earl's Will' is lovely—about a rich earl who wanted to marry a poor girl, but he had to marry a rich lady, so he left all his money to the poor girl he loved. I mustn't tell you, though. Our new girl says it is like eating an egg without salt when you know what happens. Where will we put the candles?"

"We'll have a candle each."

The fire burned brightly and the candles shed a soft light over the old school. There was a blissful silence except for the merry bubbling of the pudding and the occasional cracking of a peppermint. The minutes changed into hours; all too quickly it was six o'clock.

TRAGEDY:

"My goodness, Hattie—there's the Allgelus ring!"

"Norah Mary, did you put any water in?"

"No—did you?"

"Norah Mary, we'll be murdered! Do you smell anything?"

"Hattie—the pudding is burning!"

"The Duchess's Lovers" had proved too dangerously fascinating. The water had boiled itself gaily into nothingness. The poor plum pudding was stuck to the plate. The plate had divided itself into three uneven parts, and the large iron pot was almost red through.

Slowly and sadly the girls lifted the heavy boiler off the fire, more slowly and more sadly they lifted the pudding off the broken plate; slowest and saddest of all were their trembling voices:

"Oh, Norah Mary, we'll be shot."

"Oh, Hattie, we'll be killed—Oh!"

The mocking firelight danced on Norah Mary's big tears, which were rolling down her round, red face. The candles shone on the empty benches, as the girls gazed round seeking for some unknown help to right the great wrong.

"Lock the door, Norah Mary—I'll run home now and I'll get another pudding cloth. Our new girl is good natured. I'll tell her everything and I'll see if I can get a plate like that. Give me the bits. The girl will bury them down deep. Turn the key when I'm gone."

"You'll alligell!"

THE SOLUTION:

Norah Mary sat down with her sad thoughts. The deserted schoolroom seemed to close in reproachfully round her. The pudding, like a pale ghost of some former jolly plum pudding, stood stiffly on the rostrum. The pot was cooling itself on a large slate.

"Rat tat tat!"

"Who is it?"

"Quick—the others—are coming."

Hattie rushed in panting, speedily unfurled her pinafore and disclosed a new pudding cloth and a plate of the same willow pattern as the broken one.

"Like lightning, pour in the boiling water and fill the kettle again. Burn that old cloth, push it far into the fire. Good job the others are such slow coaches. Good job, too, the pot isn't busted."

"Rat tat tat!"

"You're a mighty hurry."

"So would you be if you were standing out shivering in the dark cold night."

"Funny smell, do you notice it, Bridgie? Anything burning, Norah Mary?"

"The fire is—"

"Smartie! Your face, Norah Mary—looks as if you were crying."

"Yes, because we thought you weren't coming."

"Witty—that queer smell! We thought we saw you talking to the new girl as we passed your door."

"Talking to our new girl! Good job I wasn't, for you are ten minutes late, and in ten minutes the pudding might be spoiled, and the cloth burned and the plate broken and the pot busted."

"Yes, indeed, only we waited."

"Come on, Norah Mary. I'm hungry."

VERDICTS:

"That pudding is an utter failure, cuts like lead; the raisins are missing, the candy peel is absent and that funny burnt looking patch there! Still, a pudding couldn't burn. No use trying to sell such stuff. I'll have to cut it up and give you all some. Norah Mary, you come and help to share it out."

"That was the very best Christmas pudding I ever tasted in my whole life long—Well, I never tasted one before," said Pad Sheehan, as he licked his lips.

"The 'll ill-falls! Yes, they must have a bit. Hattie isn't this splendid!"

"Another weasly bit, Norah Mary, and I'll do all your trains and clocks."

"Yes, Frall—that's yours."

"Go on—another bit."

"No illided, the 'll ill-falls."

"You old pudding face!"

"Next time we make a plum pudding 'ill—"