

HORACE ANNESLEY VACHELL.

# Fast and FEAST

Some reflections on a war-time Christmas by the famous author of "Quinnys," who has seen eighty Christmases.

Long ago I asked a famous Arctic explorer, an exceptionally clever man apart from his achievements, to answer one question. He had spent the previous Christmas with one other European not far from the North Pole. What did those bold adventures talk about when they sat together huddled up in the perishing cold and darkness?

He laughed, bless him! "We had," he replied "one inexhaustible theme of common interest: Food and drink. God's Good Creatures denied to us. We turned the great festival of Christmas into a Barmecide's Feast.

We had no lordly dishes to pile high with delicious food, no out-glass decanters to fill with aged and noble wines, no appointments and adjuncts of the dining-table, no laughing dames, flowers, service, shining glass and silver. None the less we achieved astounding feats and feasts of the imagination.

And you won't believe this—when imagination became reality, when together we sat down to a perfect dinner on the night when we reached London. I give you my word that the authentic feast was not so exciting as its counterfeit presentment. Our menus in our igloo were as varied as the dinners served by Francatelli to the Great White Queen. Turn and turn about, my friend and I spent happy hours submitting our bills of fare; we called ourselves the Barmecide Brothers Limited."

Salt this statement as you may, it rings true. Next Christmas, if Adolf, the eternally Drimmed, imposes on us a fast instead of a feast, I shall amuse myself by presenting on paper the dinner I cannot provide. We shall eat our ration, humbly grateful that we are alive; we shall talk of happier days

to come when satan's scourge is chastening bad German in Hades.

Fast, my brethren, if you wish to enjoy a feast. Face to face with abhorrent ugliness, think and go thinking of beauty. There was chaos on this planet, unmeasurable disorder, till order finally and inevitably took its place.

Dooties assure us that rationing has bettered the health of all and sundry, particularly the rich and well-to-do. There is less dyspepsia than before the war. Thousands of too well-nourished persons have been constrained to stop digging their graves with their teeth. Enforced abstinence has been a blessing in disguise.

Millions are being instructed in the crafts of cuisine. The right treatment of vegetables (preserving their essential vitamins) has been a giant's stride upward and onward; the drying of peas and beans is another culinary triumph. To make much out of little is a new gospel to extravagant housewives. Many of the leaders of the Kitchen Front deserve to be made Dames of the British Empire.

Hitler, imp of perversity, axe in hand, has cut down a sort of immemorial elm, the tree of Comfort. The asp of the Tyas furnishes arrow-poison to the Philippines. The cult of comfort in Britain saps initiative and resource. As a nation we have encouraged comfort to take a stranghold in all classes. Now the dogs of war have assailed it.

Probably it will never quite recover from its maulings. Peace, when it comes, cannot restore the easy-going leisure of yesterday. The reconstruction of a shattered world will engross the energies and activities of all survivors, be they gentle or simple. That is the beacon-

light which brightens the gloom of the black-out.

Christmas brings with it seasonal thoughts and aspirations. How can we best welcome Santa Claus? A child said to me: "He can't come down our chimney; 'cos Daddy has just put a cowl on it." The suggestion that a saint could remove the cowl provoked a nod and a smile.

When we change a fast into a feast? Many will have no stomach for gormandising; many will have to sit down to a Barmecide's banquet. Last year's crackers will decorate the table; the be-whiskered family jokes will once more enliven us; the children, especially those who are nearing second childhood, will have to profess (how they love "pretending") that enough is as good as a feast. We are promised enough, no more. Accordingly we must kid ourselves that enough is good enough. In that spirit we shall enjoy Yule-tide.

A last word. An urchin, the bright boy of a Sunday School class, was asked by his teacher to name the two outstanding qualifications for the Sacrament of Baptism. He replied promptly: "Water and a baby." Had he been asked to mention the outstanding features of a Christmas dinner, he might have said: "Turkey and p't'n-pudding."

But the great spouse to the Gospels, had he posed the question, would have said "Yes, yes, if you can get them. If you can't, substitute spiritual fare: Faith, Hope and Love. Make a feast of them."

## There's Got To Be A Santa Claus!

(By Channing Pollock in the December) Rotarian Magazine)

When she was a very little girl, my daughter asked, "What would you do if there weren't any trees?"

"Why," I answered, lightheartedly, "we'd have to invent some. We couldn't get on without trees."

There are quite a lot of things — food, shelter, clothing — we couldn't get on without, and a number of wise men have made my suggestion — we'd have to invent them. What we must have even more than these are food for the mind, shelter for the spirit, that which clothes the nakedness of mere animal existence, and gives warmth to human contacts.

We celebrate Christmas as a religious festival, but a Christmas was celebrated hundreds of years before Christ. The ancient people of the Angli, in what is now Britain, had in December a Modranecht, or "mothers' night." There had to be a day set aside for kindness, and generosity, and remembering those we love, and those less fortunate.

Before and since Dickens wrote his immortal A Christmas Carol, there have been a few Scrooges who cried of Christmas, "Bah, humbug!" I have heard modern Scrooges call it a shopkeepers' holiday, and a nuisance, but for the overwhelming majority of us, as for Scrooge's nephew, it is "a good time; a kind, forgiving, charitable, pleasant time; the only time I know of in the long calendar of the year when men and women open their shut-up hearts freely.... I say God bless it!"

There is a certain magic in a day when even strangers bid us be merry; when the mail and telephone and telegraph and all the means of communication commonly de-

voted to a business bring cheery wishes for "Merry Christmas!" Shopkeepers' holiday? Bah! Humbug! It isn't a necktie or a dollar bill that we slip into the hand of the janitor or the postman; it's goodwill and thank you for a year of service. It isn't a toy train that we put under the tree for Junior, or a muffler that we wrap in red tissue for Aunt Julia, but the knowledge that Junior has always wanted a train, and Aunt Julia has needed a muffler, and the loving desire that, just this one day, they shall have what they want and need, and that we shall see the pleasure in their eyes, and feel the warmth of their joyful kisses.

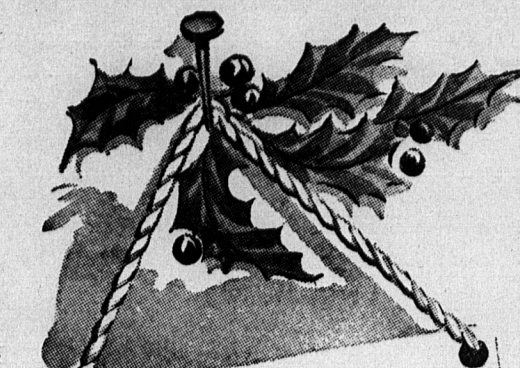
Believe it or not, and smile if you like, but, at well, say 60, my wife and I still hang up our stockings. What a lot of love and laughter and tenderness goes into the trifling gifts we select for those symbols. We trim our little tree with bright stars and tinsel, and for days ahead, in secret, we write messages, and wrap things in gay paper, and hide them from one another until the morning of mornings.

Shopkeepers' holiday! Was it only a shaving kit I could have got for myself that went into that starry package, or was it my daughter's heart (that remembered the time, ages ago, when I said, "Damn that old razor! Some day I'm going to have one that fits into my hand properly!")? What about the crate of oranges that comes every Christmas from a colored elevator boy in Florida? I can buy better oranges, but I can't buy what comes with these.

We dine every day, but there is only one Christmas dinner. For years that was a family festival, with all our dear ones about the table. Most of them are gone now, and our Christmas guests are people who, whatever their means, have no home of their own. Why? Well, when I was 19, and away from my home for the first time at Christmas, a very lonely lad, the mother of a chap employed in the office with me asked me to her home. I never saw her again; she has been dead nearly 40 years, but she and that dinner live in my

memory.

Last Christmas my wife and I had half a dozen old actors, forgotten now, and we talked of the great days in the theater, and lived them again until long after midnight. Irene Franklin, who had been the idol of vaudeville, sang several of her best songs to us, and a very old Shakespearean actor repeated—and how!—the soliloquy from Hamlet. It took Christmas to restore their heyday for an hour or two, and that memory goes on our golden pile of Christmases.



### A BLESSING

O, tender Christ, bless Thou this year.  
Bless Thou its dawn, and bless  
Its noontide and its evening, Lord;  
And let each heart confess,  
As days and weeks and months go  
by  
To help the year grow old,  
That of Thy glory, King of Kings,  
The half not yet is told.  
—Mary D. Brine.

### Saxon 'Waes Hael,' Meaning 'Be In Health'

Christmas fare has always occupied a big part in Yuletide celebration. Our Anglo-Saxon forefathers were excellent archers, men, and eating and drinking were a necessary part of every gala day. Stuffed boars' heads, mince pie, plum pudding—these decked the board. The turkey was unknown. That excellent fowl did not enter into the bill of fare until the discovery of the New World. Of course there was drink aplenty. Punch was the customary wassail bowl. This bowl takes its name from the Saxon words, waes hael, meaning "be in health." It was a great bowl of punch into which baked apples were thrown to enhance the flavor. Mince pie originated in 1596. It first was made from mutton. The Puritans condemned it as ungodly dish, and the Quakers would have none of it.

# Gifts



- ### —FOR LADIES—
- Roasters
  - Alarm Clocks
  - Serving Trays
  - Playing Cards
  - Carving Sets
  - Food Choppers
  - Silver Dishes
  - Boudoir Lamps
  - Electric Heaters
  - Clocks
  - Tea Sets
  - Electric Irons
  - Electric Grills
  - Chinaware
  - Kitchen Sets
  - Tea Pots
  - Pyrexware
  - Glassware
  - Bread Boxes
  - Carpet Sweepers
  - Dusting Mops
  - Candeliers
  - Screeners
  - Fans
  - Coleman Lamps
  - Coleman Irons.
- Coleman Heating Stoves
  - Fire Place Equipment
  - Copper Coal Hods
  - Brass Candle Sticks.
  - Complete Line Community Plate.
  - Complete Line Tudor Plate.
  - Silverware, Standard Pattern
  - Household Cutlery
  - Household Scales
  - Oven Thermometers
  - Stainless Poultry Shears
  - Electric Heating Pads.
  - Electric Toasters
  - Electric Coffee Makers
  - Electric Mix-Masters.
  - Electric Kitchen Clocks
  - Silver Flower Baskets
  - Simms Kitchen Brushes
  - Large Utility Cabinets
  - Fancy Shopping Baskets
  - Christmas Tree Lights
  - Individual Candle Lights
  - Christmas Wreaths
  - Extra Christmas Tree Lam



- ### —FOR GENTLEMEN—
- Shaving Brushes
  - Pocket Watches
  - Playing Cards
  - Pocket Knives
  - Skates
  - Coleman Lanterns
  - Individual Tools
  - Fool Sets
  - Flashlights
  - Smoker Sets
  - Golf Balls
  - Golf Clubs
  - Golf Bags.
  - Ash Trays
- Shot Guns
  - Auto Defrosters
  - Razor Sets
  - Straight Razors
  - Hunting Knives
  - Camp Axes
  - Lunch Kits
  - Rifles
  - Auto Heaters
  - Yankee Ratchet Screw Drivers
  - Sleigh Bells
  - Cocktail Sets
- ### —FOR YOUNG FOLK—
- Wagons
  - Pocket Knives
  - Scout Hunting Knives
  - Pocket Watches
  - Skating Outfits and Skates
  - Baby Spoons
  - 3 Bath Thermometers
  - Piece Baby Sets.
  - Colored Lunch Tins
  - Cup and Plate Sets
  - Silver Mugs
  - Child's Dust Pans and Brooms
  - Sleighs
- Shovels
  - Air Rifles
  - Hockey Outfits
  - Flashlights
  - Tool Kits
  - 22 Rifles
  - Skis and Harness
  - Scout Pocket Knives
  - Toboggans
  - Boy Scout Flashlights
  - Boy Scout Lanterns
  - Hockey Sticks
  - Pucks
  - Bob Skates

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