

The Origin Of The Christmas Cracker

(By Emmeline Vyner)

When you throw a box of wood on to the fire on a winter's evening and then sit back and watch it burn, you will have noticed that it emits occasionally a tiny bang and explosion, much louder than a "Puff!" uttered under the breath. It was this sound that was the origin of the Christmas cracker as we know it today. From the very small crackers, priced sixpence a box of a dozen, to the giant creations standing six feet high, decorated with tinsel, ribbons and artificial flowers and containing a valuable gift—all have sprung from the chance incident of a log of wood emitting smoky, tiny bangs! That, and the keen observation and tireless thought of the man who sat watching that log burn away.

Eighty-five years ago, when crinolines and antimacassars ruled the quiet Victorian day, a certain Briton on paid a visit to the Continent—and saw for the first time French bonbons. These were miniature sweets wrapped in tissue paper of various colours, they were bought mostly for weddings to throw to the happy couples, much as we now use confetti.

Our visitor liked the idea and thought it capable of development, so he brought a supply of bonbons back with him. After meditating on how he could improve them, he had a quantity of brief motives printed on tiny slips of white paper. He folded one motto round each sweet inside the wrapping paper, to which he gave a tiny twist at either end. The output was very limited, so the shopkeepers were glad to invest in a supply of this attractive line. But the sale of it was slow, though, steady, for people at that time did not eat sweets as they do today. The traders stated that unless the product could be improved and made more original it would be no use

Merry Christmas

continuing to offer it for sale. So that is how the inventor of mottos came to be sitting by the fire one night, watching the logs burn, thinking and wondering and racking his brains, trying to evolve something that would make his sweets sell better. And then one night, right out of the fire he was so intently gazing at, came the inspiration! One of the logs spluttered and fizzled and seemed to have in its composition something that could be discharged, accompanied by a sudden sound. He sat up, his attention riveted on that particular log. His problem was solved.

He would make the wrapping of his sweets much larger and insert into each packet something that would result in a small bang. For close on two years he worked and experimented with his "cracking bon-bon" to make it suitable for acceptance by the very decorous society of that early Victorian era. He must have drawn notice and made other people want to try one, and be sudden and a trifle startling, yet he must consider the sensitive nerves of the ladies, old and young, of that swooning age. If his invention didn't suit the ladies it would not be successful financially. Children were not catered for in those days as they are now.

At last he made his invention so satisfactory that it could be sold and used anywhere. Already it was long in shape, as we see it today, and has been dubbed by many people—the Elongated Squib. It was made in only one type and wrapped up in coloured paper packets containing a dozen or half dozen. They were called "Crack-

Christmas In The Air

Old Mr. Saddler had the most unique and delightful ideas. Unquestionably he was the happiest man in town, though he hadn't much money, and lived in quite a modest way in quite the smallest house. People loved to drop in for a chat. Old men came for a smoke by his fireside. Women brought their children to spend the afternoon when they were busy. Mr. Saddler welcomed everyone as if he were a king in a palace.

One snowy day when every footstep creaked underfoot, and the whole world looked buried under white wool, several people on their way here and there dropped in to see Mrs. Saddler. A bright fire crackled on the hearth. A green wreath hung above the mantelpiece. There was a distinct smell of a rich pudding having been recently cooked.

"This place has more Christmas about it," declared one guest. "Than any place I've seen. How do you do it? After all, there's only one green wreath."

"Well, I hardly know how to tell you," said the host. "I guess

it's just that I feel Christmassy—and maybe it sort of fills the room like steam from a pudding. I know," he smiled at them, "you think me peculiar at times, but it's what goes on in your heart that makes the outside you live in, pleasant. And here's another thing. Laugh if you like, I shan't mind. I like to think that all the happy chimes of church bells at Christmas keep traveling around the world until it's time to ring them again. Why not? And the fine songs and anthems and all the joyous laughter of children. We speak of planets being so many 'light-years' away from our earth, and sound taking this and that a time to reach a certain place. Well then," he smiled at them, "I guess I just sort of hear those things. Maybe I have a good receiving-set in my head. And perhaps I sort of," he waved a hand around, "broadcast my happiness here in this room."

The guests laughed. "Maybe you're a saint," said one. "Anyhow we feel like Christmas."

crackers' right away; but as they were more in demand at Christmas time than at any other part of the year, the festive word was soon added to the title, and they became "Christmas Crackers."

One thing the inventor had neglected to do, and that was to patent his amusing device. An Eastern merchant visited this country, on business as well as pleasure, and was at once intrigued with the new invention. He kept quiet, though, but when he returned to his own land he had a few packets of his own crackers made up. He quickly decided to make them himself and flood the home market.

The first shipment of these foreign crackers arrived in London about two months before the following Christmas. Distributions were quickly done and the shops were supplied, with more stock in reserve at the wholesalers. They were cheaper than the home product, thus offering another inducement to the traders.

But the originator saw what had happened and, though time was short enough, he instantly took up

the challenge. He commissioned certain factories to supply him at once with thousands of small goods—paper caps, rosettes, tiny toys and cheap jewellery. These he put into the crackers instead of sweets; into the dearest kind he put both. He hired designers and artists by the dozen to prepare attractive covers and wrappings; and he invited rhymerasters to send in their work in bulk and name the price. He and his staff worked night and day, with the happy result that by the middle of December he supplied the home market with eight different types of Christmas crackers! The foreign goods—all of one type—were swamped; and the Eastern merchandise, sharp practice was rendered a total failure. Thanks to British enterprise.

From that day to this Great Britain has led the way in the manufacture of Christmas crackers. As a proof of the ever-growing popularity of this attractive toy, we have only to notice how often the design of a Christmas cracker is adopted as a costume for a fancy dress dance.

A certain famous actress of last century was so intently gazing at crackers that at every party she attended at Christmas time she always asked permission to take away with her the cracker she liked best. She is said to have had a beautiful collection for some of the specimens were unique.

Early in this century a rich Russian who lived in a palace on the Nevsky gave a Christmas party to which he invited four hundred

guests. He had ordered a most elaborate display of crackers; and each one contained a present, the total value of them amounting to 200,000 roubles! The gifts were mostly jewellery, one gentleman receiving a lovely tie-pin of Australian opal. Later on he had it valued in Paris, and was told that it was worth 30 pounds.

On the shores of the Bosphorus

Answer:—There were only three people, although there were two fathers and two sons. But one of the sons was also a father. They were son, father, and grandfather.

Traps and Tricks

HIGH FINANCE

An old lady died and left the sum of £333. She stipulated that it should be equally divided between two fathers and their two sons. Each of them was to receive 111 pounds. How was it that the old lady's calculations proved correct?

Answer:—There were only three people, although there were two fathers and two sons. But one of the sons was also a father. They were son, father, and grandfather.

A FAR DIVISION

The secretary of a local Diddum Club found, on share-out night, that he had 1 pound and a farthing to divide equally among the members.

Answer:—Thirty-one members received 7 3/4 pence each.

THE HORSESHOE TRICK

Cut a piece of apple into the shape of a horseshoe. Stick six cloves in it to represent nails, then with two cuts, divide it into six parts each containing a "nail". The solution is simply this: By cutting off the circular part containing two nails, and rearranging the pieces, the knife can be so handled that one cut will divide the horseshoe into six pieces with a clove in each.

DO YOU KNOW THIS?

The question has frequently been asked—How many words in the English language end in dous; and the number is usually given as four—hazardous, jeopardous, tremendous and stupendous. In truth, however, there are five, and the word that is overlooked is hybridous.

FOR A Y.Z.

Ask your friend: "Why is the seventh of January?" He'll probably laugh and say "What on earth are you joking about?" Then you just say, "No, I'm not. January has seven letters, and Y is the seventh of January."

MENTAL EXERCISE

My first is half my second
And my third is half my first
My second and my third are good
To quench a mighty thirst.

This only needs properly punctuating, and reading with the proper emphasis, thus: My first is HALF, my second AND, my third is HALF. My first, my second, and my third are good to quench a mighty thirst. So the solution is HALF-AND-HALF.

at Christmas time the wealthy residents make an entertainment of the cracker. A huge one is designed and decorated with a butterfly on the wing and bespangled with the most lovely tints. The butterfly alone measures three feet across. The enormous cracker is carried into the dining-room on the shoulders of two strong Nubians, who lift it lengthwise on the table. The host and hostess each take a string that they see at the ends of the cracker. They pull, there is a bang with a tiny cloud of pink smoke, the fireworks break in the middle, and there emerges a pretty Circassian dancer! At the same moment the band strikes up, the girl steps on to a little platform and begins to dance before the delighted guests.

Yet, notwithstanding the picturesque ways in which Christmas crackers can be used, is not Cupid's message contained in the little motto or printed rhyme every one of the most telling and effective.

Dear's Christmas Doll

By Helen Galsford Waterman

Dear was really too big to play with dolls. Yet, when she said that all she wanted for Christmas was a really nice doll, of course mama and everyone gave in.

People always were nice to Dear, probably because Dear was so nice. That was why everyone called her "Dear" instead of by name.

Such a doll, on Christmas morning, with real eyelashes, and long curls, it could walk, talk and sleep. And it had a whole trunk of lovely dresses and shoes, and a little fur coat.

Dear dashed down to see it first thing Christmas morning, and then, when breakfast was over, she got her wraps, dressed the doll in its fur coat, and set out with its trunk under one arm, and it in the other. "She's so proud, she has to show it to her friends," smiled mama.

But when Dear returned, she had neither doll or trunk. "Why, dear," said mama, "where's your doll?"

"I gave it away," Dear answered. I hope that you don't mind. You see, I knew a little girl who had never had a doll in her whole life, and I wanted so to give her one on Christmas."

"But Dear, why didn't you say so? We could have bought one that would have been a good enough, and you could have kept yours."

"That's why, mama," Dear explained. "It had to be just the nicest doll ever to be just the best, mama," she cried, her face beaming with happiness. "Did you ever see a poor little girl with her first lovely Christmas present?"

Luke's Christmas Money

By Martha B. Thomas.

Little Luke, watching his father splice rope, was suddenly struck with an idea. "It's just one strand after another, isn't it dad?" "Yes, just one strand after another that makes the rope that holds the ship. It's the way most things are accomplished, boy, when you come to think of it."

A cold wind blew around the fish shed back of the wharves. Other men were busy, too, tying snood-knots on trawls, hoping a good day would come for fishing tomorrow.

Luke walked away and up the hill, Christmas coming in a week! He knew his father and mother had been busy planning something for his happiness then. But what had he done? Nothing at all. He stood stock still, his thoughts all mixed up in a queer way, with the strands of rope that made the line, the hundreds of snood-knots the fishermen were tying. "Just one thing done, and then another to make the whole," he reflected.

Then, walking slowly again he seemed to see two one-dollar bills folded away in his pocket-book, and trailing back from the money a row of different pictures of himself, working hard to earn those two dollars. Planting seed potatoes in the spring, hoeing them, weeding in the hot sun, even watering his own plot when the weather was dry. Then in the fall digging them up. Selling them for two dollars. One bit of work after another. What next? He took more steps. Money was earned by the work of one person to buy something which was the work of another. Luke smiled. He knew "what next," very well indeed.

So, on Christmas morning, though Luke was delighted with his own gifts, he had an almost dizzy pleasure in watching his father and mother unwrap a pair of bedroom slippers and an apron he had given them. "My potato money!" he shrieked. "I got it by doing one thing after another... just the way the rope grows, strand after strand."

Luke's father looked puzzled, but his mother kissed him and said "Merry Christmas, dear!"

The Spruce Tree's Friends

Down in the hollow close to the old rail fence lived a little spruce tree. He was round and bushy and very green because he had lived in the open all his life with no brothers or sisters to crowd against him. Was he lonely standing there all by himself? Oh, no. In the forest he had dozens of friends. For the forest folk love the spruce tree.

Before sunrise he was awakened by "Chick-a-dee-dee-dee." Soon the neat black caps of the chickadees bobbed up and down all over his branches, and the forest echoed with their merry calls. After the chickadee came Whank-whank, the nuthatch. Each morning he thoroughly cleaned little Spruce Tree's coat. How did he do it? Why, he ate every bothersome insect he could find.

Little Spruce Tree didn't fidget, he hoped he would understand and come again. And he always did.

LOTS OF CONES

When the sun was shining directly overhead, and that is dinnertime, you know, the red squirrel and his saucy friend, the chipmunk came. Little Spruce Tree saw them running along the top of the old rail fence. The chipmunk pounced on it, and sitting up on his hind

legs, ate every seed in it. He turned the cone round and round in his wee paws, just as you turn an apple in your hands. And when he had finished he threw away the empty shell, just as you throw away the core. Little Spruce Tree was glad that he had so many cones to share with the chipmunks and the squirrels.

When the sun grew tired of shining and dropped down behind the forest wall, a family of rabbits hid

under Little Spruce Tree's arms. There they slept all night long snug and warm. The cold north wind howled through the forest but Little Spruce Tree only drew his branches closer, and no wind reached his sleeping friends.

Then winter came, and the snow hung heavily on Little Spruce Tree's branches. The squirrel and the chipmunk found holes in a big oak stub and went to sleep. The rabbit dug a tunnel for herself in the snow. The Spruce Tree felt tired from holding up so much snow all day long. He was lonely too.

HERE HE IS

Suddenly he heard laughter and voices, and saw a crowd of children come wading through the snow. "Here he is!" they cried. "You can scarcely see him for snow, but he's the nicest spruce tree in the meadow!"

Whack Whack went the axe, and the spruce tree felt a great weight sliding off its arms. Over he fell to a merry shout. Mitten hands grasped his trunk, and he felt himself riding along over the top of the drifts. His first ride such a strange feeling away they went to the little house hiding behind the hill.

At night loving hands gave him a new dress. A beautiful dress of many colors—red and green, tinsel and gold.

"Here's a rattle for Baby!" called one voice.

"A train for Bobbie!" cried another.

"Something for everybody!" laughed a third.

In his heart Little Spruce Tree laughed too. For he'd learned a secret and it made him very happy.

What do you think it was? Why, he was a Christmas Tree! And all the boys and girls in the world love the Christmas Tree—Grace Fraser Malkin.

THREE CELEBRATIONS

Three Christmas are celebrated every year in the Church of Nativity in Bethlehem. The first occurs in the Roman Catholic section on December 25; 13 days later the Greek Orthodox church hold their celebrations, to be followed by those of the Armenian church in another 13 days.

A BIG STOCKING

Bobby—Say, ma.
Mother—What is it, my dear?
Bobby—It's good the foot of a mountain don't have a stocking to hang up at Christmas time.

Christmas Carols

Warren Elmore was mad—angry through and through. For the first time in his business career he had had a quarrel with his partner. Of course it had been all Peter's fault, but even that thought didn't help so very much. The old saying, "It takes two to make a quarrel" kept bothering him.

What was it that his wife had told him to get a Grant's? He asked himself the question as he entered the big department store. Peter had said that was it! Both Christmas shopping, anyway; why didn't Beverly tend to things herself?

As he walked down the crowded aisles, he was conscious of music from the balcony. An orchestra was up there playing Christmas carols. Warren Elmore forgot his grievance against the world; he hurried up and joined the happy crowd. His voice joined in "O Little Town of Bethlehem." It was followed by the glorious "Adeste Fideles." Then came "Silent Night."

And man-like, he was conscious that all anger was disappearing from his heart. He wanted to get back to the office, to slap old Peter on the back, and tell him they were a pair of fools for letting such a small thing interfere with their friendship.

Then winter came, and the snow hung heavily on Little Spruce Tree's branches. The squirrel and the chipmunk found holes in a big oak stub and went to sleep. The rabbit dug a tunnel for herself in the snow. The Spruce Tree felt tired from holding up so much

ghostly Christmas bells. Amongst the bells which will ring out to greet the coming Yuletide will be many ghostly bells, heard on no other night in the year; for tradition says that the bells of all buried churches join the chorus every Christmas eve.

There are the bells of Raleigh, once a prosperous village in Nottinghamshire, now only a country valley. All sign of habitation was swallowed up many years ago by an earthquake. It is said that every Christmas eve the bells of the old church were heard to ring again. A legend of this kind is told of a country church near Preston the very name of which nobody knows.

In Holland the story of the city of Beem is told every Christmas. This wonderful place was famous for its magnificence and beauty and also for its wickedness and shamefulness. One day the whole city was swallowed up by the sea.

The submerged bells of Dunwich, now covered by the sea, are said to join the ghostly chorus.

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The Legends Of Christmas

There are almost as many Christmas legends and superstitions as there have been Christmases. Countless customs from the old world have been absorbed through the centuries into the celebrations that we participate in today. A few however, have been passed down from one generation to another, remaining always the same.

The Indians of Canada, for example, believe that the deer kneel in prayer each Christmas Eve. An early missionary probably is responsible for the idea, but it still lingers and wily Indian have always attempted to catch the deer in the act.

In England, it is believed that the bees express veneration for the nativity by singing in their hives at midnight. The bee hives are always adorned with holly sprigs for the Yuletide season.

In Europe it was custom for a young girl to creep to the family woodpile on Christmas Eve and pull out the first stick that her hand touched. If the stick was a straight one, with no knots, tradition said that she would have a good husband.

Farmers in Europe also gave torches to their children and sent them singing into the apple orchards and the fields. The mice, cat-

pillars and moths were said to flee before the approaching songsters.

In early Germany it was a belief that water turned into wine during the hour before midnight on Christmas Eve.

THE DEVIL'S KNELL

Seven hundred years ago in the English town of Dewsbury, Yorkshire, a boy was murdered and his body thrown in a nearby stream. The crime was discovered and the murderer, a rich man named Thomas de Southill, presented as a penance a tenor-bell to Dewsbury Church. The bell, became known as the Devil's Knell and every Christmas eve it is toll ed once for each year of the Christian calendar.

May the Spirit
Of Christmas
Bless you and yours!

THOS. H. MILLS
MEAT MARKET
Prop. T. F. Mills
135 Hillsboro St. Charlottetown

Ring out, gay
bells, our wish for
a Merry Christmas to all!

F. N. KAYS
19 HILLSBORO ST. DIAL 6113

Our Yuletide wish—
that your heart be gay
and your path be lit
with peace and joy!

PATTERSON'S JEWELLERY STORE
130 Gt. George St. Dial 6732

NOEL!

The old fashioned greeting still holds—
May your Christmas Day be merry and bright!

SINGER SEWING CENTRE
164 GREAT GEORGE STREET DIAL 4551

WEATHERBY'S GROCERY
CORNER DOUGLAS AND UPPER QUEEN

Just a friendly wish that under
the glittering ornaments on your
Christmas tree you may find a
double measure of happiness.

To you and your loved ones—
A VERY MERRY CHRISTMAS!

THE ROGERS HARDWARE CO. LTD.
CHARLOTTETOWN

HI THERE!

We're popping in with
friendly wishes that
your Christmas may be
filled with joy and
happiness galore!

PALMER ELECTRIC LTD.
96-100 Fitzroy St. Dial 8543

Just a friendly wish that under
the glittering ornaments on your
Christmas tree you may find a
double measure of happiness.

To you and your loved ones—
A VERY MERRY CHRISTMAS!

THE ROGERS HARDWARE CO. LTD.
CHARLOTTETOWN

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