

# "CANDLEMAS DAY"

By MRS. EMILY MOORE

Candlemas day is a church festival on 2nd February, in honor of the purification of the Virgin Mary. Sunday was Candlemas Day and the writer's birthday.

"It's Candlemas Day! Just half the meat, and half the hay, and the winter is half gone away." So swings an old bit of Canadian prophecy concerning the 33rd day of any ordinary year. Just how true and how old this little jingle is, could be anyone's guess. But scores of country people, especially those of the older generation, set a great deal of 'stock' by the time worn rhyme. "Half the meat!" simply meant that the big, wooden barrel containing the family winter supply of salt pork was, or at least should be, at just about the middle hoop if the barrel had been full to start with. But then, that depended on whether the barrel was one of the one or two pig capacity, as well as how long those aunts and cousins had stayed when they came for a visit.

Half a century ago, half hour visits were yet unborn. No one dreamed of going anywhere unless they could stay for dinner or supper or more often both meals. And luckily, your host expected you to remain. They wanted the chance to show off their special brand of smoked ham, an original pickle recipe and other delicacies of a well-stocked cellar and pantry. Quite often the day was not long enough to get caught up on all the family's doings, so the 'brief visit' was extended to another 24 hours. Several days often passed before every item of news had been told.

And too, of an evening there was a quilting bee, or an old fashioned house party, and there were always occasions for plenty of eating. Of course all this time, old Dobbin had holidayed too. He had been given the best stall in the stable, the choicest of hay, a daily scoop of grain and blanketed every night. More care, no doubt, than had he received when at home.

So it was, on Candlemas Day — though 4 days short of the actual halfway winter mark — hopeful anticipation of an early spring and release from deep, snowbanked, bumpy roads, caused this inspection of the pork barrel and the hay barn. And how the family and stock had fared, and would fare until 'green-up' time in April and May was gauged by the salt mark on the barrel, and the 'space of daylight seen through the end boards of the barn just above the topmost reaches of the hay mow.

Another old folks Candlemas jingle went something like this:

If candlemas morn dawns dull and gray,

The winter is half gone away,  
But if Bear and Groundhog their shadows see,

Stock up on meat and wood,  
For six more winter weeks there'll be.

Some folks now claim it's if they see their shadow, some if they don't, we will have 6 weeks more winter. But I say that's neither here nor there, we get it anyway. And here's some advice to everyone.

Don't forget in February chill,  
To take your "one a day" vitamin pill.

This will help the sniffles to shake,  
And keep you free from pain and ache.

Though Methuselah ate what he found on his plate,

And never as people do now,  
Did he note the amount of the calorie count.

He ate it because it was chow.  
He wasn't disturbed as at dinner he sat,  
Devouring a roast or a pie.  
To think it was lacking in granular fat,  
Or a couple of vitamins shy.  
He cheerfully chewed each species of food,  
Unmindful of troubles and fears  
Lest his health might be hurt,  
By some fancy desert;  
And he lived over 900 years.

## A FEBRUARY SUNSET

Is lands of blue in a sea of gold  
Shimmer and shine in the sunset sky,  
Casting a glamor o'er hill and wold  
Where stark trees hold their branches high;  
Silent the twilight shadows fall,  
Over the winter waste of white,  
Heart responds to the spirit's call  
In the luring thrall of the sunset's light.  
Sunset dies and the light grows dim,  
Slowly the landscape fades from sight,  
Like blue of sea the horizon's rim  
Shading the snow with purple light,  
Beautiful hour when the daylight dies!  
Soothing the peace of the sunset time!  
Tranquil the glow of the twilight skies  
Stirring the hearts to thoughts sublime.

—(Poem by Helen B. Anderson).

(Taken from a Birthday Book given me at Sunday School 1905. "Cleanse thou me from secret faults". February 2nd, 1905).

## THE PLEASURE OF GREETING CARDS

Taking one last look at my Christmas cards before putting them away, I can hardly realize that more than a month in 1969 has passed. Looking at a picture on one of the cards, of a horse and cutter waiting at a railway station, the ladies with their hands in muffs, I am taken back to a Christmas of over 60 years ago. The little county post office, Gilbert's Mills, was in the home of J. Lester Doxsee, father of the late Curtis Doxsee. Our home was over three miles from the post office, which was a long walk on a cold winter's day. So Mr. Doxsee used to bring the mail for families on Ben Gill St. and road to Bethel cheese factory, to the home of his brother and sister Jasper and Susan Doxsee, and children would pick it up on their way home from school. One day a parcel and letter came for mother, from Aunt Eliza, mother's sister in England, also a letter for me from my cousin. In my hurry to get home with them, I left my mittens on the table. They were very much darned woollen mittens. Though a very cold day I did not miss them till half way home, as I had a muff to put my hands in. Hugging my treasures tightly I continued on my way. The next time I went for the mail it was paper day, the Picton paper and Family Herald. After enquiring if I had left my mittens there, Miss Doxsee handed them to me, also the papers neatly tied together saying, she thought they would be easier for me to carry. Arriving home and untying the papers a small parcel containing a new pair of mittens the exact replica of the old ones when new, were found inside, with a little note saying they were for me. Mr. and Miss Doxsee had taken my old mittens to town to be sure of the right size and pattern. I think this was one of the nicest Christmas gifts I ever received.

# MEMORIES

By MRS. EMILY MOORE

## CRANES' NESTS RECALLED

I wonder how many county folks know that the Big Swamp was at one time the nesting place for two or three hundred cranes?

These birds, I believe, are now considered almost extinct. These long necked, long legged birds would return from the south, about the same time as the geese and ducks. Their nesting place was at the top of a group of tall elm trees. Every spring they returned to the same nests, of which some were two and one-half to three feet wide. Made of sticks criss-crossed, piled on top of one another, and lined with long soft grass, and perhaps some horse hair. These cranes used the nests year after year, but they always house-cleaned the old lining and replaced it with new.

Those nests in winter, high in those elms, after a fall of snow, would make those elms look as if they had huge, white flowers on them, the size of a dish pan or wide brimmed hats, with a big pile of meringe in the centre.

And, what a noise they made at nesting time. While the young were in the nest, from early morn till late at night, it was like the sound of a dozen threshing machines all running at once. That caak, caak sound from that many birds. And then some folks complain of a little old rooster crowing! Cranes very rarely laid or hatched more than two eggs. And it was said they mated for life.

When Dad drew peas to the canning factory, with horses and a steel tired wagon, if he had to wait and was late getting home, mother and I would listen for the sound of the wagon wheels over the road. But he always arrived without us hearing him. Between the noise of those cranes, and millions of frogs, we had an orchestra all its own. I always waited up with mother till Dad got home on those nights, to have the lantern ready to take the team to the barn.

One summer, my brothers and I found a crane with an injured wing, tangled in the long timothy and clover in a hay field. Worried that it might get killed, when Dad drove around with the mower, we endeavored to take it from harm's way. That crane standing on its long legs, and stretching its long neck, was nearly as tall as we were. It fought and squawked and we each got a peck in the face, and believe me that bill sure hurt. Finally getting it to the swamp where we thought it could at least get food. But not before we were liked to have got our eyes pecked out.

About the year 1915 or 1916 the late Sylvester Church bought the swamp where the cranes nested. He cut many of the tall elms, and sold them to Mr. Woods on Talbot Street, for making cheese boxes. My Dad, Wm. Broadbridge, bought the farm and swamp in 1918. There was still quite a number of tall elms there, and the cranes came back for a number of years. Gradually as the trees were cut down they returned in lesser numbers.

In the early 1930's a reporter and photographer for the Family Herald came from Montreal and asked

Dad's permission to go into the swamp to take pictures of these birds and nests. He came equipped with high rubber boots and cameras for the task. Dad told him anyone who would risk going in there and putting up with black flies and mosquitos, was welcome to all the pictures he could get. A few weeks later these pictures were in the Family Herald with the story of those cranes, their nesting habits, etc. I kept that paper for years in a trunk, till such a time as I would have time to put it in a scrapbook, but I can not find it now.

The last time I saw cranes was in the spring of 1959. I saw six cranes flying south-west towards the swamp and reported it to the Picton papers, as I knew there were so few seen at that time.

The answer I got was, lady you must be mistaken, these birds are nearly extinct, I replied, I know; that's why I am so excited about it. But nothing was mentioned about it. Two years later I saw two whoopers come down in a field near the house. This time I was more excited. A snow squall had come up, and one could hardly see. Those birds sat there waiting out the storm, then when the storm cleared those beautiful birds took off towards the swamp. This I reported also and was told I must have seen geese. I told them, if they were geese, it was the first geese I'd ever seen walking on stilts!

Till I recorded it in my diary, I did not guess why perhaps they did not believe my story. The date was April 1st, perhaps they thought I was trying to pull an April fool joke.

Another beautiful bird that is extinct or almost here is the bluebird. Their song similar to the robins was also a joyous harbinger of spring. A pair of bluebirds came for a number of years, and built their nests in a large post in front of the kitchen window, mother and I got great pleasure watching them and listening to their song. The last time I saw a pair of bluebirds in that post was 1957. After that the post swallows took over.

(Editor's Note: There are some areas of Ontario where bluebirds abound and conservation groups build nesting boxes for them.)