OBSERVING OUR GRACIOUS HOLY-DAY

BY RAE NOLAN.

Some folks have solved the problem of having a really enjoyable home Christmas minus worry and much of the work and also minus the fretful children and the tired and sick digestive organs that make real trouble. They have achieved this beautiful result by a strict adherence to certain well-thought-out rules.

There is first the necessity of emphasizing the unselfish side of the Christmas season. Contributing to the comfort of others is the first step. It is great training for John and Hazel to buy the raw material with their dimes and quarters and make their good-will offerings, much better than for them to buy gifts with money their parents have given them.

It is as bad to indulge to excess during the Christmas season as at any other time and violates Nature's laws as truly. It is just as bad to be gluttonous in food or drink as in gifts. Unless these things are guarded against, children may be really injured in both their physical being and their character building. If they think about indulgence, they are sure to forget service and good will and thoughtfulness and self-restraint.

Blanche and Jimmy do not need to have and should not have bursting stomachs really to have a good time on Christmas. Everything that we do at Christmas time that over-emphasizes eating, drinking and receiving of gifts, positively injures the finer development of our little men and women. It would be better to have no Christmas-celebration at all, than one given over to mere selfish, physical indulgence.

There must be some feasting, according to custom. Eating together in joy is a deeply significant act—a sort of sacrament. In choosing the bill-of-fare for Christmas meals, a mother can give prominence to foods that will appeal to the aesthetic sense and which will gratify the palate while not overloading the system and over-stimulating the animal which lives in all of us.

I once attended a Christmas dinner where we were served with soup, roast turkey, goose, baked ham, tongue, both sweet and Irish potatoes, four kinds of vegetables, half a dozen varieties of pickles and preserves, pumpkin pie, mince pie, plum pudding, cake, fruit, nuts, candy, coffee.

Similar meals, although perhaps not quite as "bad," are not at all unusual. Is it any wonder that long-suffering stomachs rebel and that the post-holiday season is marked by numerous cases of dyspepsia and doctors' visits? A strange way indeed, to celebrate the birth of Jesus of Nazareth!

A sane bill-of-fare makes vegetables and fruits more prominent than meats in the Christmas dinner and in all dinners, for that matter. A normal child will not be likely to over-indulge at any meal in which vegetables and fruit play a prominent part from start to finish.

There is need to guard against too much sweets. Cakes and cookies seem to be demanded by custom but they can be sweetened by currants, raisins, dates and other fruits, thus avoiding an excess of refined sugar.

If parents could take their children through the Christmas season without giving them candy, it would be better for them and for everybody around them. The delicate digestive system becomes clogged and irritability and "naughtiness" result. Nuts and fruits covered with milk chocolate make the best kind of candy for anybody.

One way to give pleasure with less over-eating is to have the table attractively decorated. It will be much better to have flowers and other decorations in excess than to have meat and sweets in excess. The use of decorative lights, candles, may take the place of so many dishes. The table must, of course, suggest plentifulness and it can do this by having appropriate decoration as well as food.

I have this story of a happy, sane Christmas-keeping from a mother of my acquaintance. She says:

"We save our Christmas tree decorations, and at convenient times during the year I help the children to make others. We also make a little celebration of trimming the tree and we all do it together. This means that the tree spells nothing but pleasure and costs no more than a few pennies now and then, during the year.

"I fill the stockings early—a month beforehand if I can. To accomplish this somewhat surprising feat, I made pretty, bell-trimmed, good-sized red-and-white stockings, which are used every year. I fill them when I can, with inexpensive odds and ends.

"On the shelf by each stocking I place a strong pretty basket used only at Christmas, full of fruit, nuts and little oat-cakes and no candy. Oranges, apples, nuts, bananas, figs, dates and oat-cakes make a first rate breakfast for each child, eaten with a hilarious sense of independent unusuainess.

"Their father and I have our basket lunch like the rest and my morning work is cut just in half.

"The presents are put—wrapped up—in a washtub or clothes basket and one of the boys or girls acts as Santa Claus dressed in a big adjustable suit. We all sit in the library awaiting the jingling of bells. He distributes our gifts to each of us. There is this rule, however, that each gift must be opened and looked at by the recipient before another can be presented; so each anxious little giver sees his long-planned offering properly appreciated by everybody. These presents represent weeks of enthusiastic planning—and I see that they should have the staging they deserve and be featured by themselves.

"After the tree and church and dinner there is the afternoon when the children can entertain their friends and go to their friends' homes. In the evening, we all get together for a regular program of Christmas pictures on the screen. One of the boys tells the Christmas story. This is an honor, for it is told each year. We cannot afford not to keep alive the heart and spirit of Christmas by yearly recalling the Old Story.

"We make three distinct celebrations over the Passing of the Tree. We all get together to dismantle it and put everything away. The tree is then taken to the yard with various ceremonies and there trimmed with ears of corn, netted chunks of suet and little boxes of wheat and oats for the birds. In early spring with song and dance it is burned. Everybody helps at our house with Christmas."

Christmas Eve.

Oh, hush thee, little Dear-my-soul,
The evening shades are falling,—
Hush thee, my dear, dost thou not hear
The voice of the Master calling?

Deep lies the snow upon the earth,
But all the sky is ringing
With joyous song, and all night long
The stars shall dance with singing.

Oh, hush thee, little Dear-my-soul,
And close thine eyes in dreaming,
The angels fair shall lead thee where
The singing stars are beaming.

A shepherd calls His little lambs,
And he longeth to caress them;
He bids them rest upon His breast,
That His tender love may bless them.

So hush thee, little Dear-my-soul,
Whilst evening shades are falling,
And above the song of the heavenly throng
Thou shalt hear the Master calling.

—Eugene Field.

A Fireside Talk.

The main thing to remember about Christmas is NOT to keep it to ourselves. If Christmas is anything, it is the season of the open hand and the warm heart.

When one thinks about it, one feels that it is the only time in the course of the year when the Christian world really gets anywhere near the pattern it is supposed to be always copying.

Christmas does one thing; it brings us all up to scratch. It says: "Look here! For 364 days you have thought mainly of Self—for one day think of Others."

If we could only spread Christmas out a bit, we should arrive presently, without any fuss, at that pleasant hostelry "The Four P's"—Permanent Peace and Perpetual Prosperity. It sounds simple, and given Goodwill, it is simple.

Our Best Holiday.

If all the children were entitled to a vote in a referendum upon the most popular of our holidays, surely Christmas would pile up a remarkable majority; and, while it makes its strongest appeal to the boys and girls, Christmas is not without a compensation to every member of the family from grandmother down to the mite that coos in its crib.

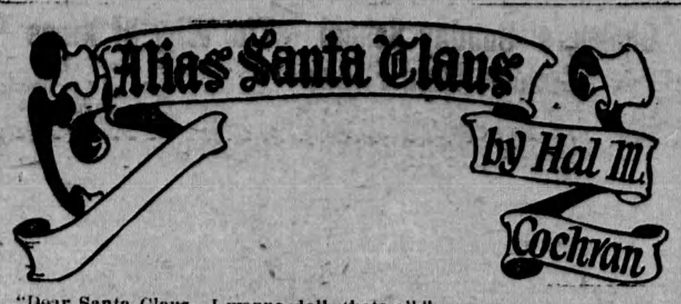
Of course, those occasional outcroppings of ill humor, those Scrooge-like bursts of temper at annoyances, come when our digestion is a little off and we are in the swirl of the Christmas mob. The pushing, crowding, twisting and squirming one is obliged to pass through to get even a glimpse of the face of some cheerful but overworked clerk is indeed trying. But all this, when compared with the sum total of anticipation and realization on the part of those within the family circle and among the close relatives and friends, makes the joy of Christmas time the greatest joy of all.

Then, too, as we look back over the Christmas festivities of the years gone by and reflect upon the joyous family reunions when we sort of cut loose from the workaday world, gave freedom to the spirit of love and friendship within us, got real close to those of our own neighborhood and blood, yes, and when this very spirit was everywhere in the air, it had a compensation that could not be reckoned in dollars and cents.

And so, we feel strongly that the strengthening of family ties and the actual building up of that bond of brotherly love among folks make Christmas really the best and most valuable of all our holidays and the one fullest of the real joy of life.

For somehow, not only for Christmas,
But all the long year through,
The joy that you give to others
Is the joy that comes back to you;
And the more you spend in blessing
The poor and the lonely and sad,
The more of your heart's possessing
Returns to make you glad.

—Whittier.



"Dear Santa Claus—I wanna doll, thats all."
Now does it seem that that is asking much?
For thus it is that tiny little tots fingers scrawl
A plea that's based on Santa b'lief and such.
A ragged little urchin who has never come to know
That money brings our fondest wishes true,
Just writes, in wonder innocence, a jagged line or so!
Her faith in Santa Claus is up to you!

"Dear Santa Claus—I kinda like an engine and a car."
The note is printed—letters large and bold!
The youngsters mother reads it and it leaves a heartache scar;
Somehow, it seems, the urchin must be told
That Santa's only mystic and that wishes fade and die;
And yet it hurts to kill a child's belief.
So mother waits—so hopeless—as the shopping days pass by;
It's up to you! Real happiness, or grief!

"Dear Santa Claus—Please don't forget my mama and my dad."
The parent-love of childhood's centered there.
Such plea alone is quite enough to make the parents glad,
It simply means, to mom and dad, "I care!"
But Santa often fails to heed the note an urchin writes;
That fact, it seems, should interest you and me.
For we can save the wishes of the world of needy mites,
Making Christmas spirit what it's meant to be!

Santa Claus is coming to visit you to-night.

After you are sound asleep he will slip down the chimney or maybe through the front door, and he is going to leave you presents.

And he will leave hurriedly, for he must see all the millions of little boys and girls who are waiting for him to come.

All year long he has been waiting for the time to pay you this vsiit. In his home in the far north he has worked day and night to have a well-filled pack of joy for little boys and girls.

He knows that he will make you happy. And to-morrow, when you see what Santa has left for you, you must be happy.

It will be impossible for him to see every little boy and girl and there will be some who will pass their Christmas without the happiness you will have.

Even though he may not bring you everything you have wished for, he will leave you everything that he can.

He must save something for the other little girls and boys. Little Jimmy Thompson must have a sled and Mary O'Toole would cry if she didn't get a big doll to play with.

So to-morrow when you go out to play, remember that Santa Claus has been very good to you, and if you see a little girl or a boy whom Santa missed, give them some of your candy.

Or let them play with your toys. For if you do Santa will like you And when you grow to be a great big man Santa will bring you joy for having remembered to help him spread Christmas happiness.

For Santa loves those who love others.

HOMES WITH WINDOWS AGLOW WITH CANDLES INVITE CHRISTMAS SPIRIT

Windows should be bright and shining before Christmas preparatory to the candle light illumination. It is pleasant to realize that this idea of having candle-lighted windows on Christmas eve is becoming a nation-wide custom. This year homes far and near, in cities throughout the length and breadth of our country, will have the windows illuminated.

THE BEAUTIFUL LEGEND.

Like most customs, this one, of the candle light in the window on Christmas eve, has its legendary origin and significance. The candles are typical of the Star of the East that so unerringly led the three wise men to Bethlehem, where the Christ child lay on that glorious holy night long centuries ago. The years since then have come and gone, yet the spirit of love is still sought to-day. The legend assures us that wherever even one lighted candle shines out through a window on Christmas eve it guides the Christmas spirit to that home to dwell there throughout the year. This beautiful idea back of the custom makes it doubly attractive. So let us remember to have lighted candles in our windows. It is a happy thought as well as a decorative one.

AVOID DRAPERIES AND DRAUGHTS.

All draperies should be either taken down from the windows where the candles are to be lighted, or else they must be pushed far back and be fastened securely. Also there should be no draughts, for even a gentle breath of air will make the candles burn unevenly and far more quickly than they otherwise would.

WITH AND WITHOUT CANDLESTICKS.

No candlesticks are essential. The end of each candle may be softened just a trifle over a flame and then pressed into position on the window-sill or frame. When candlesticks are used they are featured and not used in any haphazard way. For instance, seven, five or three branch candelabra are frequently placed on window-sills or tables drawn close to windows. The light from the candles and the graceful sticks form the complete window decoration.

SOME ARTISTIC ARRANGEMENTS.

There must be symmetry to have the lighting of the windows artistic and well balanced. All windows should be treated alike, unless the ones that are different are introduced as motifs in a complete scheme. For instance, a homemaker would scarcely have enough candelabra for every window where several were to be lighted. The sticks could be used either in the first or the second storey windows. Or if there was but one candelabrum, it could be put in the centre window where there were three windows in a row. If there were two candelabra they could be at each side of a central window, etc.

There is a beautiful legend connected with putting lighted candles in the windows on Christmas eve.

During the window illumination there should be no other lights in the rooms to spoil the artistic effect. The room will be sufficiently bright from the windows.

CANDLE LIGHTS INVITING.

Candle lighted windows on Christmas eve are inviting. Passers-by stop to see their friends within the houses. A cordial welcome awaits them. Hostesses expect callers and are prepared with Christmas cakes, confections and hot coffee. There is nothing approaching formality about this hospitality, but a hearty Christmas cheer prevails. The whole custom is appealing in its legendary significance and in its beautiful development.

The Holiday Cake.

Use any good cake recipe that will make three large layers. Bake one layer in a pan at least two inches larger in diameter than the other two layers.

When the cake is done, put together with your favorite filling, using the largest layer on the bottom. Cut the centre out of the top layer to within one and a half inches of the edge all around, thus making a ring and leaving a hollow place in the centre of the cake. Ice the whole with a cooked white icing.

With a pastry tube filled with ornamental frosting make roses by forcing the icing through a medium "rose tube" and twisting slightly around at the same time. Before the icing begins to set, thrust a smooth white or red three-inch candle firmly down into the centre of each rose.

If the cake is to symbolize the New Year, space nineteen of these roses and candles in the hollow in the centre of the cake. On the rim at the bottom of the cake, made by the first layer extending beyond the others, space twenty-five more roses and candles. On the ring on top of the cake space tiny Christmas trees, each may have tucked into its branches a little slip of paper on which has been written a wish, greeting or a New Year fortune.

The Christmas trees are made as follows: Procure very small pine cones and dip them into cooked icing that has been melted over hot water and tinted a soft deep green. When the icing begins to harden sprinkle on a little granulated sugar to resemble snow crystals and touch the ends of some of the branches with red fruit coloring. A bit of fresh icing placed on the cake, and the tree pressed down firmly into it will hold it tightly upright to the cake.

A good ornamental frosting is made by beating an egg white slightly, adding a tiny pinch of cream of tartar and enough powdered sugar to make the icing hold its shape when forced through the pastry tube.—Elizabeth Reat.

Christmas Prayer.

Greatest Babe of every age,
Teacher, Prophet, Monarch, Sage;
Send a vision now, we pray,
For rampant sin beclouds our way.

While we celebrate Thy birth,
Blind confusion sways the earth;
So we kneel and humbly pray,
In compassion guide our way.

Most gracious God, Lord on high,
Spread Thy light and come Thou nigh;
Help us tide our fiery day,
Lift us from the miry clay.

Lift us up and out of self,
Cure us of our love of pelf;
Still the din and fearsome strife,
Teach us of that higher life.

Great Jehovah, only King,
Throne secure, Thy praise we sing;
Hearts illuminate again,
Let good will forever reign.

—Anna Wall Edwards.

The Shepherds and the Holy Child.