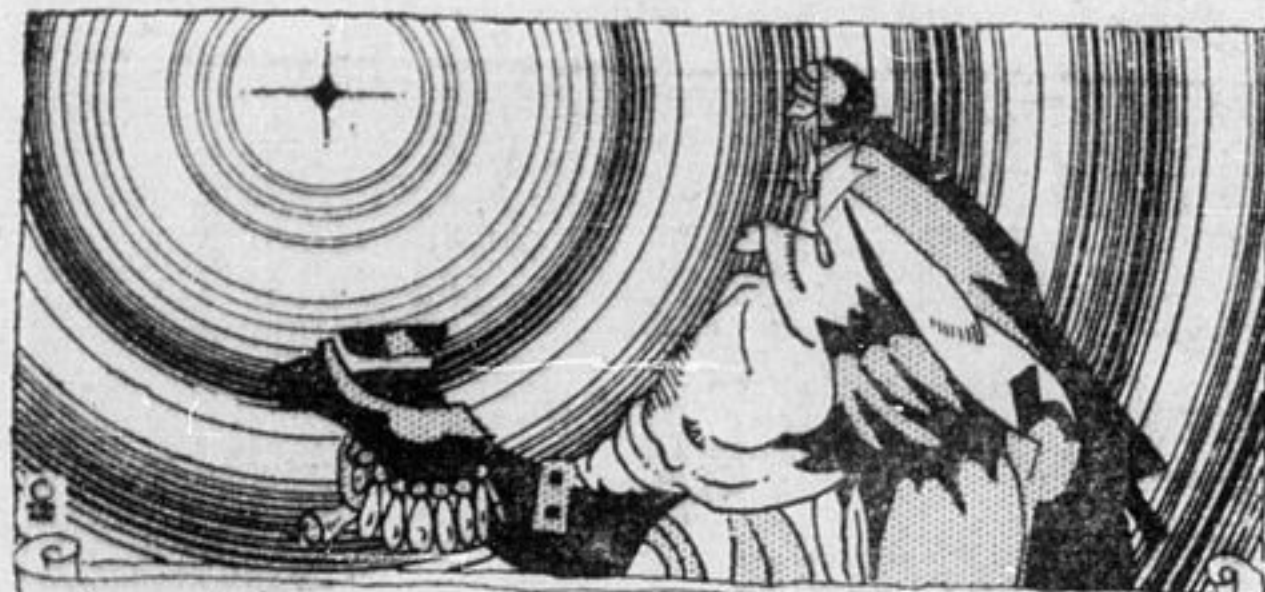


MERRY CHRISTMAS

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In every cheery way,
And New Year bring you happiness
Increasing day by day!

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Christmas and a Happy New Year.

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out Christmas and Prosperity
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Christmas in Books and with Booklovers

Charles Dickens was the
Great Writer About the
Season, but There Were
Many Others.

(By R. L. Megroz)

"Christmas" means different things to different people, but to nearly every- body it means a good time of good feel- ing, the good feeling being partly a remembrance of those less fortunate than oneself. There are both pagan and Christian elements in the feast of Christmas, but probably the pagan tradi- tions are more obvious, since they ac- count for the warmth and colour of the festive side of the celebration.

To the book-lover Christmas is one of the richest of subjects to pursue in a mood of browsing enjoyment. And by pursuing it in the native literature one soon realizes the fallacy of attributing Christmas to some particular phase and period, such as the "Dickensian." You will often see the statement that Charles Dickens invented the British Christmas. He certainly wrote about it with a richness all his own. Take his picture, for instance, of the family gather- ing:—

"It is the annual gathering of all the accessible members of the family, young or old, rich or poor; and all the child- ren look forward to it, for two months beforehand, in a fever of anticipation. . . . As to the dinner, it's perfectly deli- cious. Nothing goes wrong, and every- body is in the very best of spirits and disposed to please and be pleased. Grandpa relates a circumstantial ac- count of the purchase of the turkey, with a slight digression relative to the purchase of previous turkeys on former Christmas days, which grandmamma corroborates in the minutest particu- lar. Uncle George tells stories, and carves poultry, and takes wine, and jokes with the children at the side-table, and winks at the cousins that are making love, or being made love to, and ex- hilarates everybody with his good hu- mour and hospitality; and when at last a stout servant staggers in with a giantic pudding, with a sprig of holly in the top, there is such a laughing and shouting and clapping of little chubby hands, and kicking up of fat dumpty legs, as can only be equalled by the applause with which the astonishing feat of pouring lighted brandy into mince-pies is received by the younger visitors. Then the dessert!—and the wine! and the fun!

Dining at Home

But, after all, Dickens was only one of several good writers who described Christmas with gusto in the same age, even his austere contemporary, Walter Savage Landor, could write: "Permit me to be quite vernacular, and to say, instead of 'the compliments of the sea- son,' 'a merry Christmas!' How well that sounds—there are the village bells in it." And again, Thomas Love Pea- cock's Dr. Opimian expresses himself in this wise:—

"I always dine at home on Christ- mas Day, and measure the steps on my children's heads on the wall, and see how much higher each of them has risen since the same time last year in the scale of physical life. . . . I like the idea of the Yulelog, the enormous block of wood carefully selected long before and preserved where it would be thor- oughly dry, which burned in the old-fashioned hearth. It would not suit the stoves of our modern saloons. We could not burn it in our kitchens where a small fire in the midst of a mass of black iron roasts, and bakes, and boils, and steams, and broils, and fries by a complicated apparatus which, whatever may be its other virtues, leaves no space for a Christmas fire. I like the fes- toons of holly on the walls and win- dows; the dance under the mistletoe; the gigantic sausage; the baron of beef; the vast globe of plum pudding; the true image of the earth, flattened at the poles; the tapping of the old Octo- ber; the inexhaustible bowl of punch."

The Good Old Days

That reference to the "old-fashioned hearth" and the modern stove is a good antidote to still more modern pessimism about Christmas for it was written about a hundred years ago. "The Good Old Days" have always been in the past, for it is well known how distance lends enchantment to the view. In connec- tion with Christmas, however, I came across an amusing old book in the British Museum reading-room called "Round About Our Coal Fire, or Christ- mas Entertainments," dated 1740. And this is what the eighteenth-century pessimist says:—

"There was once upon a time Hospi- tality in the Land; an English Gentle- man at the opening of the Great Day had all his Tenants and Neighbours enter'd his Hall by Day-break, the Strong-Beer was broach'd, and the Black-Jacks went plentifully about with Toast, Sugar, Nutmeg, and good Che- shire Cheese; the Rooms were embow'd with Holly, Ivy, Sypress, Bays, Laurel, and Misseito, and a bouncing Christ- mas Log in the Chimney glowing like the Cheeks of a Country Milk-maid."

If you want further evidence to dis- prove this pessimism turn to the seven- teenth-century poets such as George Wither:—

"Now all our neighbours' chimneys
smoke,
And Christmas blocks are burning;
Their ovens they with baked meats
choke,
And all their spits are turning.
Without the door let sorrow lie;
And if for cold it hap to die,
We'll bury't in a Christmas pie,
And ever more be merry."

In the Time of Charles I

You can go just a little further back, and hear Nicholas Breton describe Christmas in Charles the First's time:—
"It is now Christmas, and not a cup of drink must pass without a carol;

the beasts, fowl, and fish come to a general execution, and the corn is ground to dust for the bakehouse and pastry; cards and dice purge many a purse, and the youth show their agility in shoeing of the wild mare; now, good cheer and welcome, and God be with you, and I thank you; and against the New Year provide for the presents—the Lord of Misrule is no mean man for his time, and the guests of the high table must lack no wine; the lusty bloods must look about them like men, and piping and dancirg puts away much melancholy; stolen venison is sweet, and a fat coney is worth money; pit- falls are now set for small birds, and the woodcock hangs himself in a gin; a good fire heats all the house, and a full almsbasket makes a beggar's pray- ers; the maskers and the mummers make the merry sport, but if they lose their money their drum goes dead; swearers and swaggerers are sent away to the ale-house, and unruly venches go in danger of judgment; musicians now make their instruments speak out, and a good song is worth the hearing. In sum, it is a holy time, a duty in Christians for the remembrance of Christ and custom among friends for the maintenance of good fellowship. In brief, I thus conclude: I hold it a memory of the Heaven's love and the world's peace, the mirth of the honest, and the meeting of the friendly."

Elizabethans Croakers

Go back to the Elizabethan Age, and you will find croakers lamenting the decay of Christmas. Middleton the dramatist, in "Father Hubbard's Tales", utters a common lament of the time:—

"Do you imagine now what a sad Christmas we all kept in the country, without either carols, wassail-bowls, dancing or Sellenger's Round in moon- shine about Maypoles, shoeing the mare, hoodman-blind, hot coekles, or any of our old Christmas gambols; no, not so much as choosing king and queen on Twelfth Night."

This sounds pathetic, does it not? But just consider the greater weight of evidence that the common people, whatever the mood of the nobleman when Queen Bess was in a bad mood, still concentrated a great deal of cheer- ful feeling and cheerful feasting into the Yule-tide period up to Twelfth Night. By the way, the tormentors of Malvolio on Twelfth Night seem to have been merry enough!

As for carols, they are among the earliest examples of English literature, for at Christmas, as we read in Chau- cer's "Franklin's Tale," "Nowel crieth every lusty man."

In hurrying backward through the centuries in this way, in the cause of optimism, I have necessarily omitted mention of any amount of rich literary fare, but let no bookish browser forget to look in Mr. Pepp's diary for Christ- mas Day, 1662, the appropriate songs of Robert Herrick, and a dozen other native poets, and the good things by essayists and novelists right up to the present day.

Indeed, if you consider the writers of his century there will be no more room left for croaking, because if Robert Bridges' "Christmas Eve" and Mr. Chesterton's crusading do not seem enough, we have Mr. J. B. Priestley, who bids fair to become the Dickens of our time, and what he has written about the Christmas and Christmas moods in his essays is so good that nothing of its kind in this age is likely to excel it until he brings Christmas into one of his own mature novels. Ladies and Gentlemen, A Merry Christmas!

Bells Across the Snow

O Christmas, merry Christmas,
Is it really come again,
With its memories and greetings,
With its joy and with its pain!
There's a minor in the carol
And a shadow in the light,
And a spray of cypress twining
With the holly wreath to-night.
And the hush is never broken
By laughter light and low,
As we listen in the starlight,
To the "bells across the snow."

O Christmas, merry Christmas,
'Tis not so very long
Since other voices blended
With the carol and the song!
If we could but hear them singing,
As they are singing now,
If we could but see the radiance
Of the crown on each dear brow,
There would be no sigh to smother,
No hidden tear to flow,
As we listen in the starlight,
To the "bells across the snow."

O Christmas, merry Christmas,
This never more can be;
We cannot bring again the days
Of our unshadowed glee,
But Christmas, happy Christmas,
Sweet herald of goodwill,
With holy songs of glory
Brings holy gladness still.
For peace and hope may brighten,
And patient love may glow,
As we listen in the starlight,
To the "bells across the snow."

Christmas the Time of Hospitality, Merriment

"Christmas, the season of hospitality, merriment, and open-heartedness is here again; the old year is preparing like an ancient philosopher to call his friends around him, and amidst the sound of feasting and revelry to pass gently and calmly away.—And numer- ous indeed are the hearts to which Christmas brings a brief season of hap- piness and enjoyment. How many fam- ilies whose members have been dis- persed and scattered, far and wide, in the restless struggles of life, are then reunited, and meet once again in that happy state of companionship and mutual goodwill which is a source of such pure and unalloyed delight, and one so incompatible with the cares of the world."—Charles Dickens.



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From the warmth in our hearts to
the warmth in your homes, we wish
you one 'big joyous Christmas and
a happy and prosperous New Year.

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household during this Christmas
Season and Good Fortune be with you
throughout the Coming Year.

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Our greeting is an old one, but
Christmas is the time for old
songs, old wishes and old
friends. So again we say,
Happy Christmas.

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