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Christmas Day Once Was a Forbidden Celebration

Cromwell's Soldiers Hunted Out Bakers of Mince Pies, Roasters of Fowl and Makers of Other Delicacies. Eventually Public Opinion Revolted Against Measures.

(By W. R. A. Browne)
To hear some people talk about Christmas one would suppose that there had never been a time in the history of Christian civilization when Christmas Day was not a day of feasting and revelry. Indeed, the "common people" (using the phrase in the Scriptural sense, which does not convey any imputation of commonness) sincerely believe that this annual sequence of festivals (midsummer in South Africa and Australia and mid-winter in the northern latitudes) has been unbroken since the morning of Christ's Nativity.

Some will even claim Scriptural authority for the roasting of turkeys and the boiling of plum-puddings. "We must do what the Good Book tells us," said a Lancashire housewife, "and we must bake and make for Christmas." There are others who will justify the expenditure of the equivalent of a week's wages or more on a single day's eating and drinking by an appeal to immemorial custom and a Providential pre-ordination.

"It must be right to keep up Christmas," said a hardy country-woman, "or it 'ud never been allowed for 'undreds and 'undreds of years." Where, of course, these remembrances of unwritten history are wrong is in assuming that there was never a break in the sequence of Christmas feasts. Whereas the Puritans, as every enlightened schoolboy now knows, succeeded for a time in disestablishing Christmas Day. The plum-pudding and even plum-porridge and currant-loaves were denounced by the wearers of steeple-crowned hats, and impounded at sight.

All Hearts Softened
Writing of these times Macaulay, the historian says: "Perhaps no single circumstance more strongly illustrates the temper of the precisians than their conduct respecting Christmas Day. Christmas had been, from time immemorial, the

season of joy and domestic affection when families assembled, when children came home from school, when carols were heard in every street, when every house was decorated with evergreens, and every table was loaded with good cheer.

"At that season all hearts not utterly destitute of kindness were enlarged and softened. At that season the poor admitted to partake largely of the overflowings of wealth of the rich, whose bounty was peculiarly acceptable on account of the shortness of the days and the severity of the weather.

"Where there is much enjoyment there will be some excess; yet, on the whole, the spirit in which the holiday was kept was not unworthy of a Christian festival.

"The Long Parliament gave orders, in 1644, that December 15th should be strictly observed as a fast, and that all men should pass it in humbly bemoaning the great national sin which they and their fathers had so often committed on that day by romping under the mistletoe, eating boar's head, and drinking ale flavoured with roasted apples." Carol-singing was suppressed.

Naturally the community did not appreciate these hard and fast rules. Many a turkey was surreptitiously killed and many a plum-pudding quietly boiled. But woe betide the unfortunate offender against the Act were he luckless enough to be discovered. Men, women, and children were imprisoned for the crime of Christmas-singing.

Soldiers Hunted Pies
Soldiers were sent to search the houses of those suspected of harboring such delicacies as mince pies, and many were the pitched battles between disagreeing sections of the public. To quote Macaulay again:

"No public Act of that time seems to have irritated the common people more. On the next anniversary of the festival formidable riots broke out in many places. The constables were resisted, the magistrates insulted, the houses of noted Puritans attacked, and the prescribed service for the day was read openly in churches."

One thing for which we have to thank the Restoration is that it restored Christmas to something like its pristine festivity.

Yet there have been Puritans of much more recent date than the Cromwellian period. The late Sir Edmund Gosse tells in his fascinating book, "Father and Son," how strict his father, member of a very narrow sect, was about Christmas. An incident which he graphically describes took place on Christmas Day, 1857. Sir Edmund Gosse says:

"My father had given strictest charge that no difference whatever was to be made in our meals on that day; the dinner was to be neither more copious than usual nor less so. He was obeyed, but the servants, secretly rebellious, made a small plum-pudding for themselves. Early in the afternoon the maids kindly remarked that 'the poor dear child ought to have a bit, anyhow,' and wheedled me into the kitchen, where I ate a slice of pudding.

"Offered to Idols"
"Slowly I began to feel that pain inside which in my frail state was inevitable, and my conscience smote me violently. At length I could bear my spiritual anguish no longer, and bursting into the study I called out: 'Oh, Papa, Papa! I have eaten of flesh offered to idols!' It took some time, between my sobs, to explain what had happened.

Then my father sternly said: 'Where is the accused thing?' I explained that as much as was left of it was still on the kitchen table. He took me by the hand, and ran with me into the midst of the startled servants, seized what remained of the pudding, and with the plate on one hand and me still tight in the other, ran till we reached the dust-heap, when he flung the idolatrous confectionery on to the middle of the ashes, and then raked it deep down into the mass."

It must be admitted that the Puritans, who purged the nation of many corruptions, did not disestablish the ancient holy day, though they squeezed most of the joy out of it. A revival of the festive spirit set in, and an awakened Church perceived anew the spiritual meaning of the ancient celebrations.

Into this revival, which long preceded the present generation, the Salvation Army has fully entered with its music, its singing, its feasting of the poor, its giving of comfort to the sick and aged, and its telling forth of the message which the angels brought to earth.

Where Hams Replace the Turkeys at Christmas

Hams take the place of turkeys in the British West Indies as a Christmas delicacy. Sales are most extensive in the few months preceding Christmas although merchants report that consumption is increasing throughout the year. In reporting to the Department of Trade and Commerce this particular liking for hams in Trinidad, Barbados, British Guiana and other territories in the Eastern Group of the British West Indies, G. A. Newman, Assistant Canadian Trade Commissioner at Port of Spain points out that certain brands of English ham are well established in these mar-



Horse Owner—I'm afraid that I must ask you to pay in advance for the use of the horse. Amateur Rider—What's that for? Are you afraid that I shall come back without the horse? Horse Owner—No sir. But the horse might come back without you.

A young woman who went to the university to take her degree of doctor of philosophy married her professor in the middle of the first semester. When she announced her engagement, one of her friends said, "But Margaret, I thought you came up here to get your Ph.D.?" "So I did," agreed Margaret, "but I had no idea I would get him so soon!"

kets, but within the past three years Argentina has become the chief source of supply on account of the low price of its products. Of total imports of hams and bacon into Trinidad in 1937 amounting to \$142,739 (\$103,333 in 1936). In Barbados, Canada supplied \$888 out of a total of \$89,973 in 1937 (\$3,193 out of \$75,333 in 1936). In British Guiana, hams and bacon are not shown separately from other meats. Out of a total of \$33,440 under this classification in 1937 (\$28,528 in 1936) Canada supplied \$188 (\$1,276 in 1936). Thus while imports of hams and bacon into these territories increased considerably last year, Canada's share of the market was smaller in the case of Barbados and British Guiana

but greater in Trinidad. In the case of barrelled or pickled pork however, Mr. Newman reports that imports from Canada have progressed steadily during recent years until the Dominion is now the main source of supply with the United States and Argentina as keen competitors. Imports of pickled pork from Canada into Trinidad increased from \$21,015 in 1935 to \$39,026 in 1937, into Barbados from \$88,420 in 1935 to \$144,100, and into British Guiana from \$27,444 to \$41,112. Of total imports of all meat products into Trinidad, Barbados and British Guiana, amounting to \$13,022,454 in 1937, pickled meats accounted for 61.4 per cent. In the Leeward and Windward Islands, with total imports of all meats in 1936 amounting to 685,622 pounds, 70.5 per cent. consisted of pickled meats.

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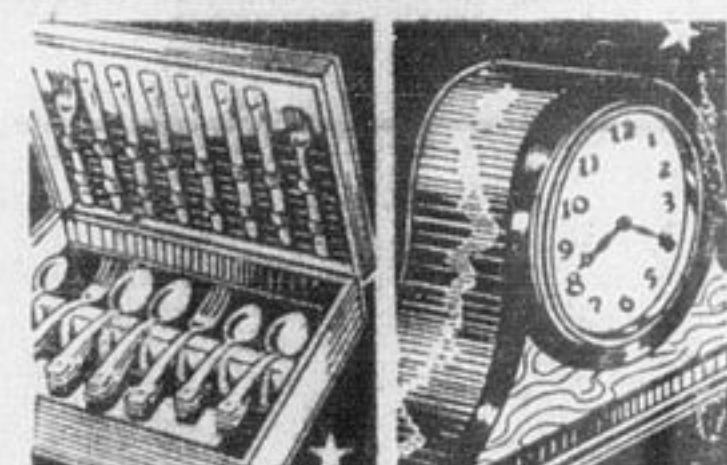
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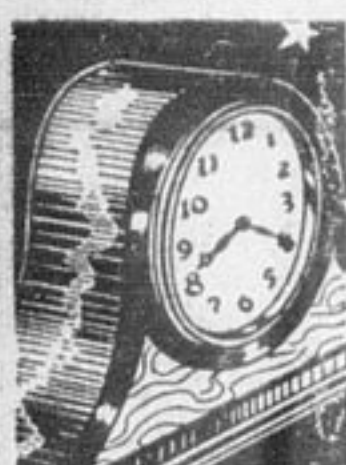
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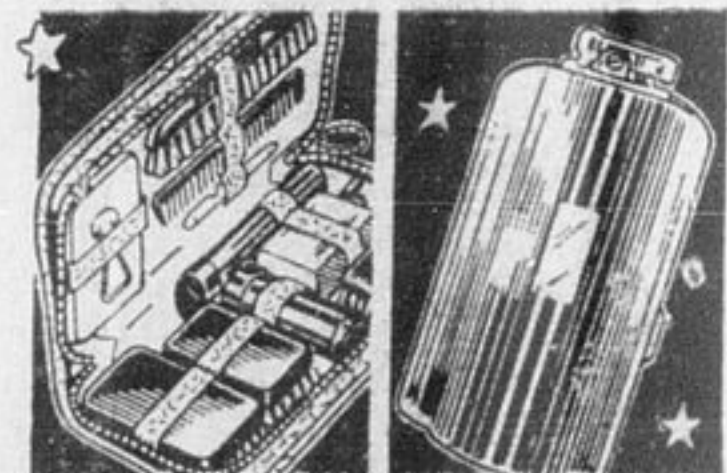
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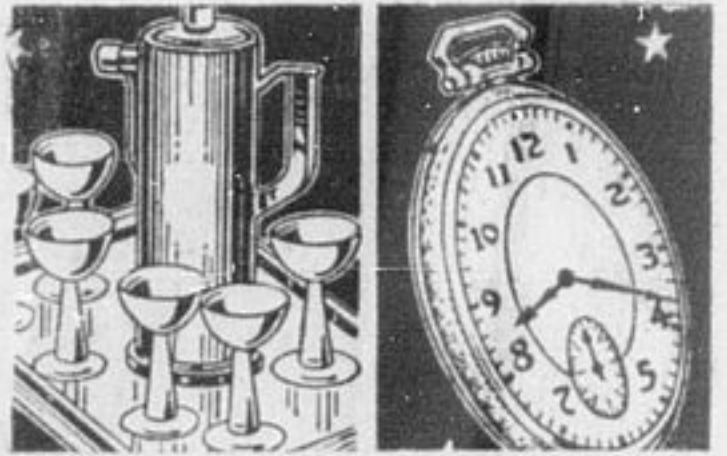
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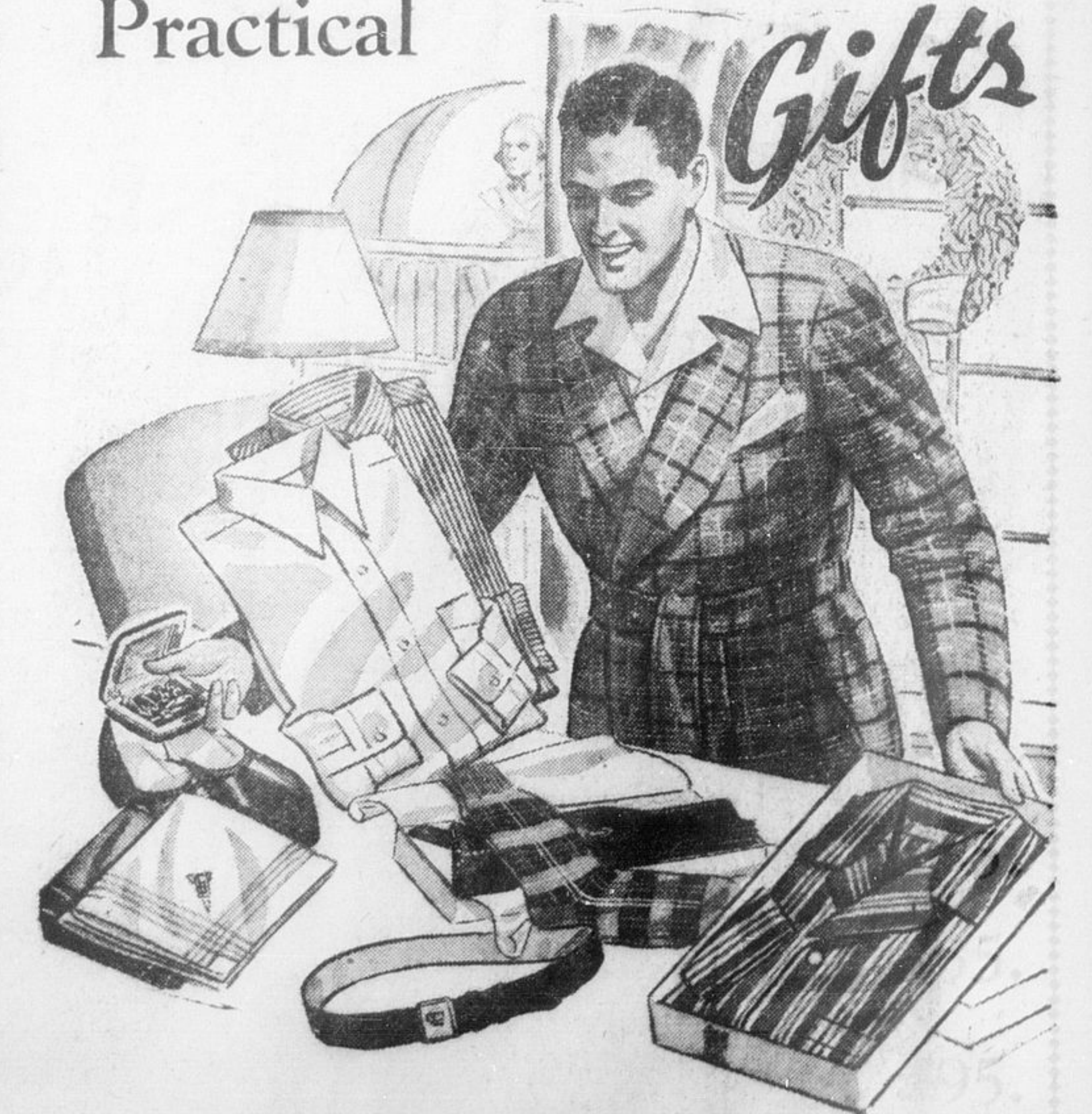


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