

## Christmas Fruits

By EUSTACE MILES

ONE of the pleasantest associations of Christmas is the fruit. Besides the sugary, crystallized fruit (of which perhaps the less said the better), there is always, at least in upper and middle class families, the fresh fruit and the dried fruit and nuts at dessert, to say nothing of the dried fruit in the Christmas pudding and mince-pies.

And from the humanitarian point of view the fruit is the least objectionable part of our food: the taint of the shambles is not about it; it is in harmony with the highest ethical ideals of Christmas Day. And perhaps from the health point of view the use of fresh fruit does something to counteract the excess of other foods, and to keep the body less clogged than it would otherwise be. From the aesthetic point of view nothing could be more admirable than the array of fruit—the oranges, apples, bananas, raisins, figs, dates, and, in the plum-pudding, the sultanas and currants, and so on.

Today the above mentioned small range of producing countries would not nearly supply the enormous demand. We draw now on the whole globe, and still we need more than we can get at a moderate price. Take apples as an example, in 1870 two-thirds of the entire stock of apples in the country were exhausted at Christmas. At the present time the supply of marketable English apples, except for a few varieties used at dessert, is exhausted long before, and at Christmas we are drawing on American and Canadian apples. In 1870 we had none of these, only Normandy pippins, which sold wholesale in Covent Garden at ninety-five shillings a hundredweight at Christmas-time. Again, as late as 1886 bananas did not find their way into England regularly; they only reached here irregularly from time to time. Now, although their best time is July and August, they are to be found also at Christmas. They are among the cheapest and most popular of all Christmas fruits. Some of the best prunes come now from California and Oregon. Trade with these countries is comparatively recent. California also gives us excellent bottled fruits.

The first consignment of Jamaica oranges, which form an important part of

the better and the inferior classes. For instance, the ordinary grocer will perhaps be unable to tell you that the best raisins are the Malaga, very dark and thin-skinned muscatels, beautifully sweet. These raisins have to be dried in the sun, artificial drying experiments having proved a comparative failure. Probably in part because of the abundance of sunlight, Australia and the Cape will soon become important countries for raisins. The fruit is prepared for packing. It is dipped for an instant in boiling water for the sake of sterilization, and then it is dried on straw in the sun, when it shrinks to a half or a third of its original bulk. The ordinary raisin of the grocer is a cheaper kind—larger, redder, and coarser.

Figs begin to come in in November. The figs from Turkey are the best. The unpreserved are better than the pressed; they are more fleshy and juicy. Two harvests are gathered each year in the Levant. We get the second or summer crop. The commoner varieties are sulphured before they are dried in the sun, and the sulphur tends to destroy the flavor.

The finest sultanas are the Greek. The commoner kinds are highly sulphured, so as to produce a clean color. In Asia Minor sultanas are still brought into

and the peel cooked and crystallized in a sugar-solution here.

Bananas are not naturally at their best at Christmas-time; they are artificially ripened, and therefore dearer. Still, they are a most popular fruit, and are indispensable in fruit-salads, etc.

Turning to the dried fruits—apricots, apples, peaches, etc.—we find that they are all of fairly modern growth and chiefly from America, which does the best trade. The same applies to bottled fruits. California is now bottling fruits in distilled water. There is no doubt that the bottled fruits have come to stay.

The origin of the canning of fruit is interesting. Years ago, when the excavations of Pompeii were beginning, some Americans discovered many jars of preserved figs in what had been the pantry of a house. One of these jars was opened, and the figs were found to be fresh and good. The hint was taken, and the very next year fruit-canning was introduced in the United States. An interesting account is given in Food for September 15, 1884.

A word may be said about the food-value of these fruits, so that we may consider how far they are likely to take the place of other Christmas foods; certainly the other Christmas foods are not likely to take their place! First and foremost come the nuts, which, as a general rule, can take the place of any flesh-foods, especially if they are properly prepared. Already many families use Brazil nuts or pine-kernels or other nuts freely in the Christmas plum-pudding. Nuts are the only fruits that have any considerable body-building value.

In an entirely different class come the dried fruits, which are comparatively poor in body-building elements or proteid, but are rich in a kind of sugar which is generally very easily digested. Figs, dates, prunes, and sultanas have a reputation as aperients; they were and are an important part of the ancient dietary of many peoples.

The fresh fruits, excepting the banana, which stands as distinct from them, have scarcely any body-building value, their chief value is because of their pure water and natural 'salts.' Different fruits have different effects, some being useful for one purpose, others for another; but among the most honored of all fruits for their health-value are apples, grapes, and melons. Almost every healing virtue has been attributed to the apple—for instance, the power of dissolving uric acid; and the grape-cure is familiar, by name at least, to every one. Lemon is well known to be a cooling fruit and a preventive of scurvy. It would be easy to devote page after page to the subject of the curative effects of various fruits.

Here, however, it must suffice to ask, what will become of the orthodox roast-beef and turkey-and-sausages a century hence? Will they still generally survive, or will they have given place to a non-flesh dinner, not necessarily of fruits only, for that would be unwise, but with fruits as part of the healthy elements in the meal, and also because of old associations with Christmas-time? For when we see side by side at Christmas-time, in the poorer districts or in the richer districts, the stalls or shops of the butchers, poulterers, and fishmongers on the one hand, and of the fruiterers and greengrocers on the other hand, we cannot hesitate for a moment as to which is the pleasanter sight, which is the one which we should prefer that our children should associate with the idea of Christmas.

### UNDER THE MISTLETOE

YOU had no business to kiss me," said she, poutingly.  
"But it wasn't business; it was pleasure," he responded.

IT IS the human touch which gives to the Christmas story its perpetual charm. Not the song of the angels, which the shepherds heard as they were watching over their flocks; not the star which appeared in the far east and led the Wise Men across the plains to Bethlehem. It is the little Child cradled in a manger and the loving mother bending over Him, by which all hearts are touched anew as often as the beautiful is told.

—Edward B. Coe.



How the Christmas Dinner Came to Canada Three Hundred Years Ago

The orange itself has always been invested with romance, perhaps because the Crusaders, who first met with the fruit in the Levant, fostered the theory that it was the golden apple of the Hesperides. "Psychic" people set the orange high among fruits. Then there is the date, which was an object of peculiar veneration in prehistoric times; it was a symbol of helpfulness, and we need not wonder at this when we consider its value to the Egyptians. The fig, besides its well-known health-properties, carries us back to the days of Greece when athletes used figs as an important part of their dietary.

It is very pleasant, from whatever point of view one looks at it, to find fruit taking a more important place than ever before in Christmas fare. This change has been steady during recent years. For instance, a quarter of a century ago we used not to have bananas at Christmas. Our oranges came (and very sour they were as a rule) from Spain and Italy, our prunes from France, our figs and dates from a few ports in Asia Minor and Northern Africa, while our apples and pears were almost exclusively home products.

Think also of the prices twenty-five years ago. Boxes of about three hundred St. Michael oranges cost from sixteen to eighteen shillings a box wholesale in Covent Garden, Egyptian dates fifty shillings a hundredweight, apples twelve shillings a bushel, and pears from threepence to ninepence each.

the present trade of Jamaica, was in 1867. The first consignment of Jaffa oranges to England was as recent as 1885; these had to be transhipped at Alexandria, since no English steamer was then running direct. Today oranges are also grown largely in Florida and elsewhere.

It was the Indian and Colonial Exhibition of 1886 that first drew colonial fruits to England in any quantity. Australian apples reached us then for the first time; but Tasmania, the great apple and pear country, was, I believe, not represented at all. In 1874 some apples had reached Vienna for the International Exhibition from New South Wales; they were packed in cotton-wool, and this was thought a wonderfully clever idea. In 1886 Messrs. Scrutton & Sons began to bring fresh fruit from the West Indies in cool chambers specially fitted up for the purpose, and I believe the Elder Line has recently put on special ships for the banana-trade.

It must be noticed that we do not get the best of all these fruits from the ordinary grocers. Some specialist in fruit, like Mr. Bilson, of Gray's Inn Road (to whom I am very much indebted for some of the information here, and who has had twenty years' experience of the trade, and has grown up with it), will give much better samples of Christmas fruit than one who is not conversant with the differences between

port on the backs of camels, and are re-packed before shipment.

The best currants are the small black, rich and fleshy kind; the ordinary provincials which are commonly used are far inferior. There has been an enormous growth recently in the currant-trade with Greece; it has been advertised freely. Let us hope that Australia will experiment with currant-growing, and reap some of the harvest of this advertising.

Of prunes the French no longer hold the decidedly best kinds. California and Oregon compete with France, the Oregon variety being stoneless.

The best Canadian and California apples begin to arrive early in November, and are actually at their best about Christmas-time. The Newton pippins and northern spy (a variety like the Baldwin, and excellent for table and cooking) are among the best kinds.

Pears come from the same districts, but of course are more perishable.

Oranges are sweeter and riper now than they used to be at Christmas. Valencias are the finest kind to use at Christmas—Valencia oranges and Messina melons.

As to dates, Taflets come first (from Algeria) and Egyptian second. The common date, the Tunis or honey date, is dressed with syrup before it is pressed; hence its sweetness.

Candied peels are brought over in brine-pickle; then the salt is washed out,