



THE ART OF KEEPING CHRISTMAS



I am sure I have always thought of Christmas time, when it has come round—apart from the veneration due to its sacred name and origin, if anything belonging to it can be apart from that—as a good time; a kind, forgiving, charitable, pleasant time; the only time I know of, in the long calendar of the

year, when men and women seem by one consent to open their shut-up hearts freely, and to think of people below them as if they really were fellow-passengers to the grave, and not another race of creatures bound on other journeys. And therefore, though it has never put a scrap of gold or silver in my pocket, I believe that it has done me good, and will do me good.

If, as sometimes happens, one finds oneself out of harmony with the Christmas spirit, one can hardly do better than read again that evergreen story, 'A Christmas Carol.' Holly, mistletoe, red berries, ivy, turkeys, geese, game, pies, puddings, fruit, everything good to eat and in its Christmas dress; people hurrying to and fro in a pleasurable excitement and jostling each other in the greatest good humor; fathers laden with mysterious parcels, mothers very busy getting ready for the festivities, and children 'basking in luxurious thoughts'—all the Christmas abundance and cheer, the holiday re-unions and family affection, gladdening the homes of the poor as of the well-to-do—come before one in the vision of the all-pervading Christmas spirit. The scenes it pictures have their counterparts in every time and place.

'In the city streets on Christmas morning'—this might have been written of almost any Canadian town in the early morning of many a Christmas—the people made a brisk and not unpleasant kind of music in scraping the snow from the pavement in front of their dwellings, and from the tops of their houses, whence it was mad delight to the boys to see it come plumping down into the road below and splitting into artificial snow-storms. The house fronts looked black enough, and the windows blacker, contrasting with the smooth white sheet of snow upon the roofs. . . . yet there was an air of cheerfulness abroad that the clearest summer air and brightest summer sun might have endeavored to diffuse in vain. For the people who were shovelling away were jovial and full of glee, calling out to one another, and now and then exchanging a facetious snowball. . . . But soon the steeples called good people all, to church and chapel, and away they came, flocking through the streets in their best clothes and with their gayest faces.'

And then, the famous dinner at Bob Cratchit's! Even in prosperous Canada there are many families who, like the Cratchits, have little to make merry on, and one would wish for them all the Christmas spirit which blessed Bob's little house. They were not a handsome family; they were not well dressed—Mrs Cratchit was in a twice-turned gown but brave in ribbons, which are cheap and make a goodly show for sixpence—; their shoes were far from being waterproof; their clothes were scanty. But, they were happy, grateful, pleased with one another, and contented with the time.'

And more than contented with the dinner! When Bob has reached home, with poor crippled Tiny Tim upon his shoulder, the dinner is forthcoming, and such a bustle ensued you might have thought a goose the rarest of all birds. Mrs. Cratchit made the gravy; Master Peter mashed the potatoes with incredible vigor; Miss Belinda sweetened up the apple sauce; Martha dusted the hot plates; Bob took Tiny Tim beside him; the two young Cratchits set chairs for everybody, not forgetting themselves, and mounting guard crammed spoons into their mouths lest they should shriek for goose before their turn came to be helped. Everything went off

beautifully. The pudding turned out to be a great success, notwithstanding Mrs. Cratchit's doubts as to the quantity of flour; everyone had enough, and when Bob proposed the toast 'A merry Christmas to us all, my dears! God bless us,' it was echoed by the whole family, even Tiny Tim.

Can we not all see, in imagination or in memory, how as it was getting dark and snowing pretty heavily, 'along the streets the brightness of the roaring fires in kitchens, parlors, and all sorts of rooms, was wonderful. Here, the flickering of the blaze showed preparations for a cosy dinner, with hot plates baking through and through before the fire, and deep red curtains, ready to be drawn to



An Original Tea Gown

That fashionable material, chiffon velvet, builds this indoor robe, the bodice and sleeves being all draped in one piece. It is in silver-grey with a chou of gold tissue at the bust, and gold-rimmed enamel buttons on the shoulders.—Black and White.

shut out cold and darkness. There, all the children of the house were running out into the snow to meet their married sisters, brothers, cousins, uncles, aunts, and be the first to greet them. Here, again, were shadows on the window-blinds of guests assembling; and there a group of girls, all chattering at once, tripped lightly off to some near neighbor's house. If you had judged from the numbers of people on their way to friendly gatherings, you might have thought that no one was at home to give them welcome when they got there, instead of every house expecting company, and piling up its fires half-chimney high. And what a jolly time they had at the parties, with music and games of forfeits, like blind man's buff, and 'How, When, and Where!'

The 'Carol' ends with a joyous burst that is surely infectious. As Scrooge, the hard-hearted and grasping materialist, after hav-

ing been shown the true value of things, awakens determined to honor Christmas in his heart, and try to keep it all the year, he is checked in his transports by the churches ringing out the lustiest peals he had ever heard. It was Christmas morning. No fog, no mist. Clear, bright, jovial, stirring, cold; cold, piping for the blood to dance to; golden sunlight; heavenly skies; bells ringing gloriously, and presently people pouring into the streets with many 'A Merry Christmas to you!'

'A Merry Christmas to you!' One need not be afraid of saying the time-honored old phrase too often, so long as it is heartily said and heartily meant. And let us not reserve all our greetings and acts of good will for our own circle, but extend them to the Mrs. Cratchits, and the Tiny Tims, and even the Scrooges as we meet them. To know how to keep Christmas well is a great knowledge.

THE YULE LOG

When the Yule log burns upon the hearth,
With carol, chime and Christmas cheer,
A fire should kindle in each soul
To gladden all the coming year;
A flame to brighten heart and home,
And shine as well for other eyes,
Fed by good deeds which still glow on
When dim and cold the Yule log lies.

No life so poor but it may know
A spark of this divinest fire,
No life so beautiful and rich,
But still, flame-like, it may aspire.
Then kindle Yule logs far and wide
To burn on every happy hearth,
Fit symbols of the faith and love
That purify and bless the earth.

—Louisa M. Alcott.

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