

## Sheer Necessity of Feasting

BY SIDNEY DARK  
(Joint Editor of "John O'London's Weekly.")

FEAST and the world feast with you, fast and you fast alone! It is easy to find companions when the stalled ox is consumed, but the dinner of herbs is, as it should be, a solitary meal. Since, therefore, comradeship is of the essence of Christianity, it might seem that it is more Christian to feast than to fast, and, in a sense, this is true, for the only reason why the wise man fasts is that he may feast with keener ardor and a clean heart. One fasts in loneliness, that the body may learn that it is the servant of the spirit. But it is entirely impossible to feast except in company. Never since the world began have covers been laid for one at a genuine feast. The unthinkable solitary feast would be of necessity an offensive orgy.

Every real feast is a love feast. The clinking of glasses, the good wishes, the forgiveness of injuries (most of which are probably imaginary, or of no account) are of infinitely greater importance than the skill of the cook or the excellence of the wine cellar. Better, indeed, the dinner of herbs where love is greater than the stalled ox and hatred therewith. But best of all the fat stalled ox consumed in an atmosphere of affection. For this reason, it is good at this Christmas time to remember that the story of the Christian Church began at a supper party.

### A SOCIAL FUNCTION.

Feasting is a social function, but is an exclusive social function. A public dinner is a bad dinner, loved only by eccentrics and by cynics who joy in other people's dullness. The best feast is the family feast, and there can be no feast at all if others than intimates and near neighbors are given seats at the table. I do not forget that most of us find our families trying and our neighbors annoying, but it is the primary purpose of the feast to remind us of their attractive virtues and to make us forget their shortcomings. Before we have eaten the first course, Cousin Kate's singing would be unbearable and the stories told by the man next door a ghastly infliction. But in the mellowness induced by feasting we honestly applaud Cousin Kate's rendering of "Dear Heart" and laugh like any thing at the involved chestnuts told by the man next door. How Christian is this result! The indifferent singer tearfully dreams of the applause that her ballads never evoke. The bad story teller yearns for the laughter that he never hears. Forgiveness is among the greatest of the virtues. But it is far easier to forgive Cousin Kate for "Dear Heart" than to fill her arid soul with the sincere demand for an encore and, since the world is full of Cousin Kates who insist on singing "Dear Heart" but who, otherwise, are among the elect, how essential is the feasting that compels us to hand out happiness in this way.

### "DRESSING UP"

It is, too, of supreme importance for us to have extraordinary meetings with the people who are the companions of everyday worries and commonplaces. "Dressing up" is part of the proper tradition of feasting and it is amazing the difference that "dressing up" makes to the people whom we know best but know most of the time in workaday drab. A white waistcoat makes Uncle William quite distinguished and a lace collar miraculously changes a homely splinter sister into good-looking and almost skittish young woman. It is one of the life's tragedies that we know so little of the men and women whom we see most often, and another of the beneficent results of the occasional feast is that it reveals them to us and to them. When at the end of the

day, the host remarks that "even George has been genial," he does not realize, perhaps, that poor George always wants to be genial but that he needs the spiritual strength afforded by a feast to enable him to break through the outer crust of diffidence or cantankerousness.

### BEWARE THE BRIBE.

Feast giving must be a single-hearted business. The turkey must be spitted, the pudding must be stirred and the wines must be decanted with the one idea of having a good time. If the giver of the feast begins to think of Aunt Jane's possible legacy, it is all over. The feast becomes a blatant bribe. I have been at dinners given to collectors by barristers eager for briefs. I have been bidden to banquets offered by manufacturers to possible customers. They were offensive and inhuman occasions, to be recalled with a shudder. Dickens, who loved feasting and realized its supreme value, has described in his picture of the Yencrings' dinner parties in "Our Mutual Friend," the horror of the soup that is a mere bribe and the entire that is nothing but the demonstration of a bank balance. Mr. Wardle was a mighty master of the feast and the poor relations were always present at the Wardle feasts, highly considered and honored with the liver wing. To give the others is to give to oneself. Nothing in this world has quite so fine a flavor as the leg which the carver keeps for himself, when all the other plates are piled and he, hungry and a little weary, looks round the table at his handiwork and sees that it is good.

All feasts, and the Christmas feast above all, must be approached with a certain reverence and a due sense of their immense significance. They demand best clothes and best manners. Neither host nor guest must be puffed up. Everyone must feel that it is the other fellow's right to have the place of honor. And the Christmas feast will lose most of its savor unless there is some thought of the Babe of Bethlehem, who made feasting possible because He taught that all men are brothers, and bade us eat, drink and be merry not because tomorrow we die, but because tomorrow there is for us, if we will, a finer and most adventurous life.

And, of course, there must be no speeches at the feast (better a thousand times Cousin Kate's ballad)—only Tiny Tim's "And so God Bless us all!"

### Irony.

(William McFee in The Bookman.)  
Irony, like quicklime, burns what it touches, and although the result may be hygienic, you can raise no flowers of fancy where it has been strewn.  
Cracked human bones found in England, craves apparently indicate that cannibals in England survived into the period of Roman occupancy.

## Is There a Santa Claus?



THERE are some things that cannot be told too often.

One of these is Francis P. Church's famous Christmas letter to Virginia O'Hanlon, a girl reader of the New York Sun, written in 1897 when that newspaper was edited by Charles A. Dana.

This newspaper delights in reprinting this, the most noted of all Christmas letters:

### THE LETTER

"Dear Editor,—I am 8 years old. "Some of my little friends say there is not a Santa Claus.

"Papa says 'If you see it in the Sun it's so.'"

"Please tell me the truth, is there a Santa Claus?"

"VIRGINIA O'HANLON, "115 W. 95th street."

### THE REPLY

Virginia, your little friends are wrong. They have been affected by the scepticism of a sceptical age. They do not believe except they see. They think that nothing can be which is not comprehensible by their little minds. All minds, Virginia, whether they be men's or children's, are little. In this

great universe of ours man is a mere insect, an ant, in his intellect, as compared with the boundless world about him, as measured by the intelligence capable of grasping the whole of truth and knowledge.

Yes, Virginia, there is a Santa Claus. He exists as certainly as love and generosity and devotion exist, and you know that they abound and give to your life its highest beauty and joy. Alas! how dreary would be the world if there were no Santa Claus! It would be as dreary as if there were no Virginias. There would be no childlike faith then, no poetry, no romance to make tolerable this existence. We

## THE TOY MAKER :-

By Lillian Harkness

IF IT WERE POSSIBLE to jump into another man's skin, I know whose skin I should jump into—that of a toy maker. For what a happy vocation his must be.

Think of it: a lifetime spent, not in discovering the delectableness of man, the boredom of amusement, the transiency of fame, but ever at the portals of life there to give welcome to the little people as they enter.

The showman, he, whose part it is to make them in love with his ancient show, who must see it, that they do not merely suck a thumb at it, turn in dismay at the prospect of run away—not, at least, until they have forgotten which starry way they came.

"Stay with us awhile, my dears;

See, here in Punchinello, hurry with tinkling bells—such a good fellow when you know him. Here are juggling balls—up they go, up to the sun. And crocodiles—crick, crack, cur-rrr—that gape such jaws and run across a room faster than your eager fat limbs can chase, and grasp them. I'll be bound!

"Now, reach me down, if you can, this gay bird that swings inside a ring. Well! that was bravely done. Now we'll thump on a drum just to show what fine fellows we are! Rump a dub dub! Rump a dub!"

Think, too, of the toy makers' Christmas—each one a milestone marking his way with happy memories.

Christmas—the mid-winter fruition to which the whole sap of his energy works.

As the flowers (so we like to believe) blossom, to delight his eyes, when the Eternal Child was born so now each year the toy makers harvest, bursting into splendor on the trees, makes the eyes of innumerable children sparkle with anticipation when Father Christmas comes along to light up the candles. It is those bright eyes and happy faces that are the toy makers' guide and inspiration.

Shouts of delight in the early darkness of Christmas morning. Furtive glances and shy smiles of tiny children at their first party. The fat finger pointing. These are his incentives to the work of another year.

See the toy maker rub up his spectacles; see him produce a well thumbed notebook.

"Alas!" he cries, "I know that the plain wooden cart would please, but it was all right to paint the ninepins and put toadstool hats on them. Note—Next year go one better—stand on heads."

"What does Joyce say? Note—She wants ten lanterns very teeny weeny so the dolls can use them when they walk home from parties."

"Kitty has the Dutch doll, I see. Will she object to the thorny style of the nose? Note—Seems to think it quite spirited. Suppose it's to prick the nasty people with when they kiss her. Quite right. Bless me! They'll soon have the inner workings of that parrot gone. Note—Parrot, stronger bellows."

I cannot think that a lover would be

more eager to please his mistress than the toy maker to win the smiles of children. And how great a reward is his for his pains; no less than to share with them the eternal spirit of childhood, for he can neither have time to forget to be a child nor to learn to be grown up.

Yes, poor old boy. Your dachshund with the grotesque ears; your lady that kicks high as she balances on the edge of the mantelpiece; your long necked doll with the wink may be quite too clever, but they don't go down with the children, thank the Lord.

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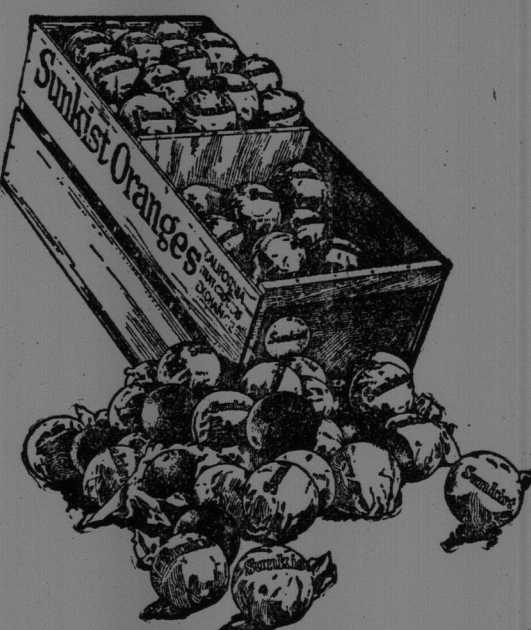
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