

THE QUIET HOUR.

The Three Torch-Bearers.

Three Children in a vision did I see
Threading the crowd that thro' a city rolled;
Torches unlit they bore, and ceaselessly
Asked fire to kindle flame in sconces cold.

They sought the Altar of the Unknown God—
Its whitened ashes could not yield a spark;
To Vesta's shrine the weary way they trod;
But dome and hallowed precinct all were dark.

Towards Salem's towers the eastern sea they sailed,
But desecrated Zion mocked their prayer.
To proud Benares many a mountain scaled—
But found no lamp to light the people there.

"The nations crave the light: yet still they lie
Shadows by death in tower and marble street;
No sword can win them, and no gold can buy
The beacon guide for tired and erring feet."

Thus they complained, and from the arch of night
An angel came and beckoned; and the three
Followed with anxious haste his radiant light
O'er many a rocky path and misty lea.

He led them to a gleaming palace gate;
The doors flew wide, and lo! upon a throne
One like the Son of Man exalted sat,
And round His head a dazzling nimbus shone.

"Light of the World am I," He gently said;
And at His word upon the Children's sight
The cressets flashed to flame, and round them shed
An incense cloud of praise, a stream of light.

He waved His hand: "Now fare you on your way;
So shall the earth with faith, hope, love, be bright;
Changing its cloud of darkness for the day;
I will be with you still; I am the Light."

The vision faded as the morn drew near:
And ever true are visions of the morn;
I heard the bells of Christmas loud and clear
Hailing the happy day when Christ was born.

The Christ!—The Sun of Righteousness is He;
And, ever since that Light of Light was given,
The world is guided by the torches three—
To trust in God, love man, and hope for heaven.

After Christmas.

The great question when one receives a gift of any kind is, "What will he do with it?" The beautiful or valuable object, the privilege, the friendship, whatever is given or received, becomes at once a new opportunity. Many a great gift has become a snare and a temptation; many a noble beneficence, instead of aiding, has degraded those for whose good it was planned; many a privilege has been slighted or abused. There have been many to whom the angels' song of peace and good-will has been a perpetual music in the heart, and out of whose vision the new star blazing over Bethlehem has never faded; there have been many, also, to whom the heavenly chorus and the star have been but passing impressions. The song and the star have been, and the great fact of divine love which they reveal stands forever written in the deepest history of the world; but to some life is as bare and heaven as mute as before the birth in the manger. The gift is freely offered, but it is forced upon none; the thirst-quenching stream flows silently through the busy earth, but only they who drink of it are refreshed. The great sin of humanity is neglect or misuse of opportunities and gifts; the Christ is crucified, the truth is denied, the blessing is ignored. What we all need is not more resources, but wisdom to use those we already possess. The men and women are few who realize the depth and power of their own natures, or who understand and value adequately the possibilities which surround them. Most of us go through life blind and dumb; flowers bloom and birds sing, and earth is fruitful and heaven fair, and we bemoan the narrowness of our means and the lack of variety and interest in our surroundings. The days come to us veiled, in Emerson's fine image, and we have not wit enough to see how beautiful they are, and how laden with gifts, until they are receding in the distance. While hosts of people were talking about the Christ and longing for His coming, He came, and passed their way so that they could have touched Him, and they did not know Him! The divine truth, for which the whole world had waited, not only came to men, but dwelt among them and touched them, as a man lays his hand on his fellow, and they did not recognize it! Strange and terribly significant, that blindness of the Jew and the Roman! But are we not equally blind? Do we know our gifts when they urge us to growth, use our opportunities when they solicit the seed? Do we shelter the Christ when He comes our way? And when He has passed, do we break for others the bread of life which He has left in our dwellings? After Christmas—what?

For Christmas Day.

"Unto us a Child is born—unto us a Son is given."
(BY A. K.)

No beacon star burns in our sky
Whilst softly sleeps the silent earth,
As when a thousand years ago
It knew the Blessed Christ-child's birth.

No pure maid-mother bends above
Her baby, laid in manger bare;
No wise men journey from afar,
Star-led and bearing presents rare;

No serried ranks of angels stand,
To sing their praises from the sky;
No God-sent wonder give us sign,
As on that holy night gone by.

Yet Christmas peace broods o'er the earth
And Christmas love fills hearts of men,
And Christmas joy wakes everywhere,
At His glad coming—now as then.

MINNIE MAY'S DEPARTMENT.

MY DEAR NIECES,—

In view of the lovely Indian Summer weather we had so late in the year, it seems difficult to believe that another Christmas is close upon us. Again shall we celebrate the Holy Christ-child's coming. Again shall we look back upon past Christmases with that feeling of comparison which generally comes upon most of us at these anniversaries. There are usually some changes—too often that saddest of all changes—some dear one gone who was with us last time. But, dear girls, I am not going to write you a sad letter at this twice blessed of all seasons. Grave thoughts will naturally come to us all, but thankfulness and joy should be our dominant feeling.

I often think of how the good old customs are gradually dying out—customs of which you young people know but little; but just ask your parents and grandparents and they can tell you of old-time usages which are unheard of now. I am sure the former generation must have had a fine lot of fun at Christmastide. How one can picture the sitting round the Yule-log fire. To think, too, that this same Yule-log has an ancient superstition! The Anglo-Saxons worshipped the sun, and believing that the lengthening of the days in December meant that the sun was smiling upon them, they burnt huge sacrificial logs, as the blaze was typical of the sun's warmth and approval.

What tales, too, of superstition and romance could be told by holly and mistletoe! Well, some of the old customs have survived in a way. We do not look upon them with reverence, and for the same reasons as the ancients did, for gradual civilization has done away with such reasons, but some of us still hold to them and love them for "Auld lang syne."

I wonder if any of you know what "waits" are? Again ask the elders; they will know if they are Old Country folk. In England, a few nights before Christmas little bands of street musicians go about discoursing music, often of a most melancholy character. Formerly the "waits" meant something totally different. Here is one explanation found in an old dictionary: "The 'waits' (signifying 'watch') were minstrels or musical watchmen who attended great men and sounded the watch (that is, calling the hour). They have for many years degenerated into wandering musicians who give notice of the approach of Christmas." I can tell you, girls, that a very creepy, weird sensation pervades you when you are roused at two or three on a winter's morning by the sound of some wretched flute or fiddle, or cracked voices wheezing a Christmas carol, and you feel somewhat inclined to grumble at "old customs" when they assail you in this wise. Once I had a strange experience. I was in London (the old), and one Christmas eve, or, rather, Christmas morn, was awakened by "waits" of a very different character. A quartette of horns played some part songs most beautifully. The peculiar sensations which beset me I can scarcely describe. A sort of awe seemed to fall upon me, and I lay and listened with a full heart until the sweet music ceased. I discovered afterwards that the quartette was composed of four gentlemen who lived on that street and always celebrated Christmas in that way. The remembrance of that night has never faded from me and always brings back thoughts of so much that is gone into the deep oblivion of the past.

I wonder if Santa Claus will ever quite die out! All the children now are getting so old and wise that I am afraid they will soon teach even the tiny tots to look askance at us when we enlarge upon the wonderful capabilities of the dear old gentleman. I suppose that many of my nieces are puzzling their brains over presents. Yes, it is a difficult matter in so many cases to choose just the right thing, but always bear in mind that the spirit of the gift should ever be the chief aim. Often a little gift made by yourself is valued far more than something which costs ten times as much money, but where there are many presents to give it is not always possible for a busy girl to make them all herself. In such cases a little tact should be exercised so that the recipient may feel that a personal interest has been shown in the choosing of something especially suitable. All these things serve to keep alive in our hearts that peace and good-will which should ever be a characteristic of the Christmas season.

Now, dear nieces, I send you all loving wishes for a bright Christmas and glad New Year.

MINNIE MAY.

Christmas Is Coming—Prepare.

"Christmas comes but once a year,
And when it comes it brings good cheer."

"Meat and drink comforteth the stomach; a comforted stomach enlargeth the heart; an enlarged heart expandeth the soul; an expanded soul seeketh higher things: Wherefore, if you would rise, partake ye all of good cheer."

How many burdened housewives dread the coming of Christmas, with the extra work it entails. Would it not be possible for such to disregard the traditions of our grandmothers and omit a few of the rich plum puddings and pastries and serve something simpler which the children also may be allowed to enjoy. Make the dinner-table look just as pretty and cheery as possible with flowers and your daintiest dishes. If you have no flowers use your finest house-plant for a centerpiece, draping the pot with a delicate shade of China silk or crinkled paper.

A young housekeeper considers the preparation of the Christmas turkey her hardest task, and for such full directions are here given:

To Clean and Truss a Turkey or Fowl.—Pick dry, being careful not to break the skin, and remove pinfeathers with a knife. Singe the hairs off with a lighted roll of twisted paper over the stove. Cut off the head; cut the skin down the back of the neck, and loosen it from the bone. Cut the neck off close to the body, leaving skin enough to fold over on the back; loosen the windpipe and crop, which, if empty, can be drawn backward with the intestines, being careful not to cut the skin of the breast. Cut through the skin of the leg about half an inch below the joint and break the bone; then pull the sinews out one by one with a strong skewer or a wire nail. Remove the oil bag and cut a small opening to remove the intestines, liver, heart, gizzard, lungs (which lie close to the ribs), and the kidneys (close to the backbone), and wash the inside thoroughly with cold water and wipe dry inside and outside.

To Make the Stuffing.—Rub fine bread crumbs from the inside of the loaf, season with salt, pepper, powdered thyme and summer savory. Stir with a fork while you add one-quarter cup of butter melted for each cup of crumbs. If to be served cold add an egg slightly beaten. Fill out the breast to look plump, when the skin of the neck is fastened to the back with a skewer, and put the remainder in the body. Sew or skewer the opening close, then put a long skewer through the thighs and another through the wings, so the ends will stick out on both sides. With the middle of a long string tie the legs together and bring up close to the tail. Bring both ends of the string over the back, cross it from side to side, winding it around the ends of the long skewers and tie over the back. This leaves the breast free from strings and yet holds the legs and wings close to the body.

Place the bird on a rack in a large dripping pan, brush over with soft butter, and dredge with flour. A piece of beef suet may be laid on for a while and serves to baste with. Have the oven hot at first and baste with the hot fat often; this forms a complete crust over the surface and prevents the escape of the natural juices. If the gravy is in danger of being burned, a little water may be put in the pan after this crust has been formed, or a separate pan of hot water may be set in the oven beside it.

Before serving, remove all skewers or strings, put a little frill of white paper around the ends of the drumsticks and keep hot on a large platter while you make the gravy. If there is too much fat in the pan, remove some of it, and to the remainder add an equal quantity—by measure—of dry flour, cook a minute, stirring carefully, and add hot water, a little at a time, still stirring all the time. The giblets and neck may be put on to cook in cold water, and use this in making the gravy. Lay around the platter small moulds of jellied cranberries and potato croquettes, alternately, and use a little parsley to garnish.

Jellied Cranberries.—Cook 1 quart of carefully sorted and washed cranberries, with $\frac{1}{2}$ pint water, 20 minutes; add 1 pint sugar, and cook 10 minutes; pour into little dariole moulds or small egg-cups to cool.

Potato Croquettes.—To 1 pint of hot potatoes, mashed through a ricer, add 1 tablespoon butter, $\frac{1}{2}$ saltspoon white pepper, a speck cayenne, $\frac{1}{2}$ teaspoon salt, $\frac{1}{2}$ teaspoon celery salt, a few drops of onion juice, 1 teaspoon chopped parsley, and the yolk of 1 egg. When slightly cool, shape into smooth round balls or rolls, roll in sifted dried bread crumbs, dip in beaten egg, and roll in crumbs again. Fry in smoking hot lard to a golden brown, drain, and serve hot.

A Plain Mince Pie.—One cup of cooked meat, 2 cups chopped apples, $\frac{1}{2}$ cup raisins, $\frac{1}{2}$ cup jelly or marmalade, juice of 1 lemon, 1 cup brown sugar, 1 teaspoon salt, $\frac{1}{2}$ teaspoon cinnamon, $\frac{1}{2}$ teaspoon allspice, $\frac{1}{2}$ nutmeg. The meat may be remnants of steak or other cooked beef, stewed until tender, and chopped fine. The lemon may be omitted if an unsweetened jelly be used. Mix all thoroughly, and bake between two crusts.

Will the progressive farmer, who "never can think what to get his wife for a Christmas present until too late," please think earlier, and consider that for his own use he eagerly buys any and all kinds of labor-saving machinery, while his delicate, overworked wife is allowed to worry away with the stove that smokes, the back-breaking iron pots and teakettle of her grandmother's time—fit only for giants to lift. She rolls her pastry with a glass bottle, and does not own a saucepan or modern convenient utensil of any kind, unless the leaky two-quart basin, in which she cooks all her fruit, may belong to this happy class.

Now, be "generous" this year, and make her happy, not with showy trinkets, but with some useful labor-saving utensil, such as a meat-mincer (costing about \$2), a grating machine (about \$1), suitable for grating suet, cheese, nuts, etc.; a nickel-plated or agate teakettle, a set of agate saucepans, a beautiful large agate preserving-kettle, or a whole set of wooden mixing spoons, egg beaters, jelly moulds, lemon squeezers, and other little things too numerous to mention and too convenient to do without.

Custard Pie.—Take a quart of hot milk, six eggs well beaten, about a cup of white sugar; make a good rich crust and line two soup plates, put in the mixture and bake, using white of egg for top.