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- WOMEN'S SILK BLOUSES.
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My Five War Christmases.

By ERNEST SMITH, the Famous War Correspondent.

The character of Christmas has changed so much since the war that you never know if you are right in wishing a friend a Merry Christmas. However one may be reconciled to separation from those nearest and dearest, with Christmas Day come memories of past associations which, in the circumstances, must leave a feeling of sadness. I have always found a War Christmas more happily spent by those who are out in the thick of things than by people at home, whose thoughts are divided by reflections on what it was a year ago and anticipations of what it may be next Christmas.

Bombarded With Puddings.

One of the most curious Christmas-eve ever passed, by 12,000 Britishers was when we were besieged in Ladysmith, with only two doubtful plum-puddings between the lot of us. Yet we spent as joyous a day as was possible on half-rations, our only one concern being the worry we knew our imprisonment was causing the old folks at home. The puddings came as a present from the Boers. Soon after daylight a couple of 100-lb. shells hurtled into the town. They did not explode, having been considerably plugged with wood in place of the fuses, and they were chalked "Compliments of the Season."

But for a long time Tommy was very suspicious of them. After he had drawn the plug he was not at all satisfied with the mixture inside until he had brought out a beautiful, fat raisin on the end of a pointed stick. There were the materials for two good-sized puddings in the shells; but as the senders had not thought of scalding the interiors and removing the bursting-charges, the batter did not look appetising, so the recipients of these seasonable attentions contented themselves with the fruit alone.

Fatal Thirteen.

In our own camp we made Christmas a red-letter day by eating two four-shilling eggs each! We had laid in a dozen at forty-eight shillings at the Christmas Eve auction of delicacies. It was in the composition of our menus that we shone, rather than in the wealth of our dishes, quite the contrary to what happened at a recent historic hard-times banquet in London. All the garrison, except the men in the trenches or with the guns, had an afternoon off. We ran the Ladysmith Derby, competed for by Tommies on mules, and afterwards, by some ghastly mischance, our little party sat down thirteen to tea. Six were killed or mortally wounded in the battle on the following January 6th, and I know that four of the seven survivors have since died. Tragedies like this make Christmas such a landmark in life.

I have already spent five Christmases during the present war, and am looking forward to the sixth, whilst most people at home are preparing for their fourth. It has happened in this way. In 1915 we kept up the first Christmas after Italy's entry into the war with some officers and members of the Italian Parliament at a hotel behind the front. I contributed a plum pudding, but it proved a failure, because most of our Allies pretended they did not like it, and more than half was left on their plates.

Not the Genuine Article.

To tell the truth, it was a bought one, which had not improved by travel, and was not like "what mother makes." Anyhow, the exchange of very cordial entente speeches made amends. Within a few days of this warfeast I was ordered to Greece, and reached Athens on the Greek Christmas Eve, in time to join in an English dinner which several of my colleagues had arranged in order to escape the greasy Greek cooking.

Last Christmas was also kept in duplicate. Following the defeat of the Allied troops outside Athens on December 1st, and the sanguinary repression of the Venizelists the next day, the British colony was ordered to leave the capital, and took refuge on the Vasilief Constantine, a large Transatlantic liner, chartered by the Home Government as a temporary floating hotel. Here we had to spend the season of good will and good cheer.

As we blockaded Greece there was not much good-will towards us, and still less good cheer, as the Greeks had already started getting a little of their own back by preventing our fresh milk and vegetable supplies from leaving the shore. But the Fleet came to the rescue. Not content with conveying fresh provisions from loyal islands, it supplied us with the ingredients for plenty of Christmas-pudding for the whole British colony. I can truthfully say that the Greek cooks got the same results out of the

material that an English housewife would have done. They were too generous with the fruit, for one thing, and seemed to have been afraid of overbolting the puddings, for another. Still, for war plum-puddings they must have satisfied everybody except a professional grumbler.

The Hidden Future.

It must have been a unique Christmas dinner for the whole British colony of a foreign capital to sit at table on a foreign ship under the protection of the Allied Fleet. My recollections of last Christmas will be saddened this year by the thought that my immediate neighbour on the right was Mr. George J. Stevens, the Athens correspondent of the "Daily Telegraph," who, while on a brief visit to London in September, was killed by an air-raid.

I am certain that during the meal we had speculated where Christmas, 1917, might find us, and on the prospects of peace coming within the year. The Greek Christmas found us still at sea. And to please our Greek crew, and especially our cooks and waiters, who welcomed a second opportunity of sending round the hat, we celebrated their festival by partaking of a national dish they prepared.

The first Christmas of the war was quite uneventful. I was with the French, who prefer to reserve their break in the monotony of days until the New Year. When this came I happened to be at a Swiss post overlooking the Alsace plain, which had been the scene of much heavy-fighting during the early days of the war. Trench warfare had commenced, and the French and German lines faced each other at a few hundred yards' distance right up to the Swiss frontier.

The Voice of a Child.

Just before midnight on New Year's Eve the band of a Swiss cavalry corps took up a position right on the border, midway between the belligerents' trenches, to play the New Year in. It seemed that the music was being wasted on empty space, but by-and-by heads appeared above the trenches, without attracting the fire that they would have provoked in ordinary times, and before the serenade ended the occupants of both sets of trenches were standing in the open enjoying the unexpected treat.

This scene recalls an incident of the Franco-German War. Paris was preparing to pass its siege Christmas, and at midnight a little English chorister went over the top of the fortification, within a few hundred yards of the German rifles, and started singing "While Shepherds Watched Their Flocks by Night." The effect was magical. The Germans left their lines to press forward to listen to the youngster, and the French soldiers came out of their defences. Encouraged by the applause from both sides, the little chap kept busy singing carols into the early hours of the morning, carrying a touch of Christmas-tide, with all that it means, into the hearts of men which had been steeled into bitterness by the terrible ordeal of war.—Answers.



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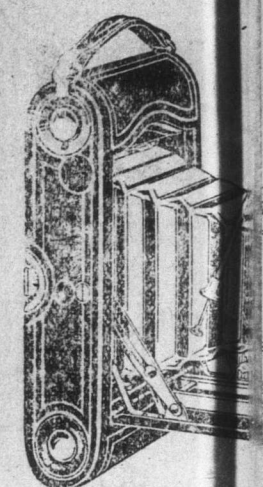
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