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## JOYS OF CHRISTMAS: A LOOK AT CHRISTMAS CUSTOMS AND TRADITIONS

Virginia Mescher

When I first decided to write an article on Christmas for Virginia's Veranda it sounded like a great idea. Then I started looking through my files on Christmas and received a surprise of mixed blessings; I suffered from an embarrassment of riches. My references filled two four-inch thick expanding files plus numerous books on Christmas. Rather than write a lengthy article of my interpretation of Christmas customs in the nineteenth century or rely on secondary sources describing Christmas celebrations and customs, I decided to let the authors of the time period speak for themselves. Below are excerpts from various primary sources and each entry is followed by the source.

In reading these entries, keep in mind that even though they are taken from primary sources, this does not mean that each description of Christmas customs should be taken as an universal celebration of Christmas in a specific manner. Then as now, each family celebrated Christmas in their own manner according to belief, circumstances, and family traditions.

## CHRISTMAS AND NEW YEAR GERMANY AND IN FRANCE

By Francis J. Grund

There is nothing so beautiful in this world of bright hopes and sad realities, as superstition. It is the vein of poetry, which runs unheeded and often unperceived through our lives, and tinges our earthly existence with hues of the unknown future. It is the dream of the heart in the midst of our presumptuous pursuits of knowledge — the magnetism of the mind, which deflects it continually from science to faith, from arrogant self-sufficiency toward the dusky regions of the unseen powers.

...

... One of the prettiest superstitions I know, is that of children in Germany, and the whole north of Europe, on Christmas-day. They are then taught to believe that our Saviour, on the anniversary of his birth, travels all over the world to visit children that love him and their parents, to bestow upon them some token of his affection. "Blessed are the little ones," he said; and there is not

a little heart in Germany which does not, on that day, feel the truth of it in its own childish manners. From Whitsunday to Christmas the days are counted with great care, and as the nights grow longer, the approach of the holidays becomes the subject of children's conversation. At last snow begins to cover the ground, and it is now certain that the great day is near at hand. The eve preceding the festival every child is on its best behavior, in breathless expectation of the great event, and the favors that are to be shown it by Him who loved 'the little ones.' Towards dark the family are all united at the thanksgiving dinner — the tapers burn with more than usual lustre, and the father looks anxiously for the figures on the wall; for it is an ill omen to see one's shadow obscured by the intrusion of a strange object, and portends either sickness or death during the following year. Neither will he allow them to sit down in odd numbers, for that is very unlucky; rather would he invite a stranger or a distant relative to make the number even. After dinner the children, young and old — though the latter may be let into the secret, after having pledged themselves to keep it religiously — are conducted into a darkened room, where they are left long enough to think and guess at the gifts which await them. At last the door opens, and father and mother announce 'that the little infant Jesus has paid them a visit, and left them tokens of His love.' They are then conducted into another room, where the Christmas tree is dressed for their reception. It is a large evergreen with many branches, fantastically lit up with tapers and lamps, with its branches gilt or silvered over, as in the fairy tales, and suspended from them are the beautiful presents, all inscribed with the names of the donees.



THE CHRISTMAS TREE.



For a moment all gaze in breathless silence on the brilliant spectacle; then comes the rush into the parents' arms; the mutual embraces of father, mother and children, and, at last, a single bound to the tree itself. The boys have seen, from a distance, that the wooden horses and huzzars, the tin soldiers, the drums and trumpets, and the swords and muskets, are intended for them; while the girls look tenderly on their sweetly dressed dolls, the little tea and coffee sets, and the imitation articles of furniture, which are to constitute their little household for the ensuing year. Fruits and cakes, neatly dressed with gold leaves, are divided equally among them; but it is a rare thing for the boys—who always cherish some gallantry for their sisters—not to give up their share to the girls; and new embraces and tokens of tenderness among the little ones, follow the new division. Where the families are large, it often happens that each boy has his pet sister who receives his share of the sweet things, which she requites by some needlework especially adapted to his use. For an hour or more all are lost in joyful contemplation of their riches, and their happiness knows no limits. But the clock has struck ten, and it is time for the little ones to retire. They quit with reluctance their boundless wealth, and are long kept awake by speculating on its application. At last, nature asserts her rights—and they fall asleep still dreaming of their riches. The evening prayers at Christmas are deeply impressive, and every child repeats them with a grateful heart and in joyful accents. The elder members of the family remain together till a very late hour, and when all have retired to their chambers, father and mother indulge for a long time yet in prophecies as to the fate of the pledges of their love and fidelity.

Christmas dinner is a real love feast, at which the absent, and those who are departed forever, are kindly remembered, and at which every heart expands through the love of Him whose incarnation has made all mankind brothers and sisters, and the children of the great Parent whose throne is the Heavens. Early on the following morning the children creep out of their beds to survey their vast possessions, unmindful of the tree which the frost has painted on the windows; for their hearts are so warm, and their fancy so bright, they scarcely know it is winter. Oh, for the recollection of that merry Christmas, and all the associations that have hallowed it in our memory! Where is the man, who, on that day, does not wish to be a child again, to nestle confidingly in some heart that loves him? Who, that does not wish back his childish superstitions and the faith that constituted his happiness? Is there a joy which knowledge has given him that equals the blissful ignorance of his early days, when his childish enthusiasm grasped the stars, and his fancy was equal to the world it conceived? There is no moment in after life at all approaching to it, if it be not that when ourselves are witness of the happiness of children, and the blessed means of bestowing it.

Quite differently from Christmas is New Year's day ushered in 'sunny France.' It is the great conventional gala of the nation, and long and brilliant are the preparations for the festival. A hundred million francs are supposed to change hands on that day, and the shops and bazaars of the great capital—the capital of the world, as the French proudly call it—are for weeks previously dressed in their gayest attire. The gifts bestowed on that day embrace young and old, and are selected from every department of human art and industry. The French are remarkable for the taste and skillful

construction of their toys, though the machinery of their steamboats is often imported from England. No people in the world dress dolls more prettily, or are more fanciful and expert in childish contrivances. Their dolls all but move — their wooden horses are almost alive, and fit for the exercise of a young voltigeur. There are field marshals, uniforms for children, tin sabers and carbines, drums and fifes, cannon and battlements, and whole fortresses constructed out of wood. Dogs, horses and elephants, lions and tigers almost as large as life, though made of pasteboard, form a very good stock of a menagerie; while fanciful pigmy carriages, with Lilliputian coachmen and outriders, and chasseurs behind, impress the mind at an early period with the state and magnificence of this world. . . .” [Due to the length of the article, the description of New Year’s was excluded.]

*Godey’s*, January 1848

### “COCK-CROWING AT CHRISTMAS EVE.

It was formerly a belief that cocks crowed all Christmas eve, which doubtless originated from the circumstance that the weather is then usually cloudy and dark, and cocks, during such weather, often crow nearly all day and all night. Shakspeare alludes to this superstition in Hamlet :—

‘Some say that ever ‘gainst that hallowed season,  
At which our Saviour’s birth is celebrated,  
The Bird of Dawning croweth all night long.  
The nights are wholesome, and no mildew falls;  
No planet strikes, nor spirits walk abroad  
No fairy takes nor witch hath power to charm,  
So gracious and so hallowed is the time.’”

*Godey’s*, December 1854

### “THE CHRISTMAS TREE

The birthplace of the Christmas-Tree is Egypt, and its origin dates from a period long antecedent to the Christian era. The palm-tree is known to put forth a shoot every month; and a spray of this tree, with twelve shoots on it, was used in Egypt at the time of the winter solstice as a symbol of its year completed. The palm-tree spray of Egypt, on reaching Italy, became a branch of any other tree (the tip of the fir was found most suitable, from its pyramidal or conical shape), and was decorated with burning tapers lit in honor of Saturn, whose saturnalia were celebrated from the 17th. to the 21st of December, the period of the winter solstice; the lighted tapers, the presents given (*saturnalia*), and the entertainment of the domestics on a footing of equality, date from this age. After the *saturnalia* came the days called the *sigillaria*, when presents were made of impressions stamped on wax, which still form part of the furniture of a Christmas-Tree. To the *sigillaria* succeeded one day called the *juvenalia*, on which everybody, even adults, indulged in childish sports, and hence the romping close of our Christmas festivities.



With the Germans the greatest Christmas festival is our Christmas-eve, the *helige abend*, which has the more propriety, as, whatever doubt attaches to the date of His birth, it is certain that our Lord was born in the nighttime. The festival itself is called *weihnacht*, or night dedicated to the commemoration. As Christmas-eve always falls on the evening of Adam and Eve's day, an orthodox Christmas-Tree will have the figures of our first parents at its foot, and the serpent twining himself round its stem. By a bold stretch of theological fancy, the tree, with its branches and tapers, is, with the above-mentioned accessories, understood to typify the genealogy of our Lord, closing in the most luminous apex the sun of light and life, 'the seed of the woman that should crush the serpent's head.' The Romans had already affixed as the summit of their trees a representation of a radiant sun in honor of Phoebus Apollo, to whom the three last days of December were dedicated. In connection with this god, sheep



THE CHRISTMAS TREE.

were sometimes exhibited pasturing under the tree, or Apollo himself took charge of the herd, or taught the shepherds the use of the pipe. This was skillfully construed by the Christian clergy to be emblematic of the good shepherd, &c.; the *sigillaria* of the Romans were impressed with the images of saints and holy persons; the lighted tapers, also borrowed from the saturnalia, were retained here, as elsewhere, as portion of the religious ceremony. The giving of presents, another portion of the *saturnalia*, was understood to be expressive of Christian brotherly love; while the apples, nuts, and gingerbread- equally unmistakable remnants of the northern heathen mythology— have been kept in the service of the Christian festival, as accessories that sufficiently recommended themselves without typifying anything particularly holy.”

Godey's, December 1855

## “CHRISTMAS AND ITS CUSTOMS.

By Caroline White

There is something so congenial to human nature, so absolutely necessary to the health of mind and body, in the relaxation which festivals afford, that we do not wonder at the unwillingness which Sir Isaac Newton tells us the heathens felt to part with their holidays, on the introduction of Christianity amongst them; so that, in order to facilitate their conversion, by retaining their days of joy, Gregory, bishop of Neo Caesarea in Pontus, instituted annual festivals to saints and martyrs, corresponding as nearly as possible in date, if not in form, with those most popular amongst the Greeks and Romans.

The type of Christmas, the most honored, joyous, and beautiful of Christian holidays, existed long before Christianity, in the Saturnalia of the ancients, which took place about the hyemal solstice.

Nearly a century had elapsed from the birth of its founder, before the followers of Christianity introduced the observance of this day in commemoration of that event; and upon the second anniversary, when great numbers of them were assembled in the church, Diocletian, the Roman emperor, who at this time kept his court at Nicomedia, ordered the doors to be fastened, and the building to be set on fire! and thus lit such a yule blaze that the brightness there of spread throughout incipient Christendom, and the ashes of the faithful, thus scattered through the earth, seemed henceforth to have carried with them the germs of the new creed for which they suffered.

At this period, and for more than seven hundred years after, the Feast of Epiphany, Twelfth-day, or the Adoration of the kings — for so have the ‘wise men’ of St. Matthew, the simple shepherds of St. Luke, “keeping watch over their flocks by night,” been denominated— was regarded as one and, the same festival; and its very name, which amongst the Pagans signified the appearance of the gods upon earth, was singularly appropriate in reference to him whom the church regarded as Divinity-made man; at present the calendar links both, by a succession of holidays extending from the 25th of December to the 6th of January.

It requires but little imagination to construe the beautiful fable of the golden age, which the old Roman *Saturnalia* commemorated, into a prophetic myth of the universal peace and good will which the divine teaching of the Nazarite was calculated to effect upon earth, and which doubtless it will effect when the spirit of His precepts guides, in its simplicity and truth, the actions of His people.

During the continuance of this antique feast, every one interchanged presents with his neighbor; their houses were decorated with evergreens and laurel; no criminal was punished; no arms taken up; the very slaves were permitted to sit at the table with their masters, in allusion to the happy equality which was supposed to have existed during the reign of Saturn; nay, banquets were sometimes made for them, at which their masters served— a custom whose shadow still lingers with us in the yule feast once common in the baronial halls of England, and not yet quite exploded from them.



We know of hospitable hearths, whose yeomen-proprietors annually, preside at a supper given to their laborers, or, if this part of the business be deputed to their bailiff or foreman, at least make their appearance amongst them, to utter the old-fashioned but hearty ‘Much good may it do you!’ and to give and receive the gratulations of the season.

A friend, whose childhood was spent in a farmhouse, tells us that, besides the customary mince-pies and plum-puddings, there was a large cake called the yule-cake, overspread with leaves and ornaments; and that on Christmas Eve an immense candle, gaily decorated, and for which a candlestick used at no other period was brought forth, was lighted, and a huge block of wood, called the yule log, laid on the fire, both of which burnt till morning.

In the meanwhile a table was spread in the kitchen, covered with pork pies, bread and cheese, elder wine, and ale; and after the family had supped on furmity, all went to bed- not to sleep, it appeared, for about midnight the village singers, with the varied instruments that formed the choir of the church, in humble imitation of the ‘*Gloria in excelsis*,’ that primal carol sounding by night above the sheep-folds on the plains of Bethlehem, burst forth beneath the windows, and the master of the house rose up and let them in.

It was unlucky, according to local superstition, for any but a black-headed person to enter the house first, and on these occasions the veteran of the party, who had headed the musicians on the annual recurrence of the vigil for some thirty years, always took precedence, though his hair was white as the winter snow — but then, it had once been black!

In Ireland, the custom of burning gigantic candles still prevails amongst the Catholic community on Christmas Eve, and in the north of England it is also common. Light at all times appears to have been used on occasions of festivity and rejoicing — from the rude bonfire to the wax-lit drawing-room; but in these candles we trace another remnant of the ancient type of the season’s rejoicings, for it was the custom of the Romans, during the festival of the *Saturnalia*, to present wax candles to each other.

In the yule log, or huge block of coal, which in the North answers the same purpose, and is carefully reserved for the occasion, Brand sees the counterpart of the Midsummer fires, made within doors on account of the cold weather of the winter solstice, as those in the hot seasons were kindled in the open air.

Bede, in speaking of the observances of Christmas Eve, tells us that this was the very night observed in the land before, by the heathen Saxons. ‘They began their year,’ he says, ‘on the eighth of the calends of January, now our Christmas Day; and the very night before, which is now holy to us, was by them called; on account of its ceremonies, the ‘mother of nights.’

The yule log was one of these ceremonies, and seems to have been used by them as an emblem of the return of the sun.

Christianity, while clinging to these ancient customs, revised their symbolism to suit itself, and made the “feast of lights,” as Christmas was primitively called in the church, a type of the

Eternal; it was also said to represent the glory that illuminated the fields, and shone about the shepherds in their night-watch; and by others to refer to John the Baptist, whose advent was likened to a burning and a shining light, and to the going forth of the apostles, and to that light of the world, the Son of Man himself.

But the old leaven clung to the anniversary under its new name, and the festive spirit of the *Saturnalia*, rather than the fasting one enjoined by Gregory Nazianzen and the early fathers of the church, continued, and even still continues (if it does not adorn cross-paths) to feed the eye and delight the ear, to feast and drink, crown doors, and encourage dancing, just as in those days when the stern old father penned his exhortation on forbearance from them. Only Christianity has tempered excess with moderation, and the refinement of its teaching has softened down the fierce license of wild joy which the restoration of mercy, peace, and brotherhood to earth but for a few short days imparted to the pagans.

The burden of the angels' song for us is not for days, but to the end of time, and every year brings us more nearly to its full fruition. The same jubilant feeling, therefore, that hung the portals of the Roman houses with boughs indicative of victory and peace, that bound their brows with bacchanalian ivy, and their staffs with branches of the vine, may well deck Christian hearts and houses at this period; they read another myth in the bright evergreens than the immortal youth of the Boy-God (even their own), and in their practical translation of the angelic chorus — feeding the hungry, clothing the naked, and letting in the light of intellect on those who sit in darkness, even the thick "darkness of ignorance;" for, with Olivia's Clown, we believe there is no other — do honor to no fancied retrospect, no bygone golden age, but link the present days with brighter ones to come. Herrick has left us, in his fresh and racy rhyme, a lively notion of Christmas Eve in his days: —

‘Come bring with a noise,  
My merry, merry boys,  
The Christmas log to the firing;  
While my good dame, she  
Bids ye all be free,  
And drink to your heart's desiring;  
With the last year's brand  
Light the new block, and  
For good success in his spending,  
On your psalteries play  
That sweet luck may  
Come while the log is tending.’

What a picture these lines present to us, if we but follow the images they represent! the laughing, boisterous group, hauling to the wide hearth the mighty block, and raising it upon the massive andirons (the Romans, by the way, burnt whole trees)! We can see the smiling face of the good dame, on hospitable cares intent, and yet not so much so as to forget the remnant of the last year's brand, which, according to the formula, was only to be burnt in the next year's yule fire; and then the filling of drinking-horns, the interchanging of good wishes, the feasting on good cheer, and,



while the Christmas-log hisses and roars in the capacious chimney a chorus to their mirth, the pouring forth of such rude minstrelsy and merry songs as best befitted, the season and the singers.

In many parts of Yorkshire, and other places in England, to this day, furmity (a dish made of new wheat boiled in milk) is the usual breakfast and supper on Christmas Eve. Can this custom be related to the ancient offering of a sheaf of corn to Ceres, at the Saturnalia?

It is also common to give the women who go ‘a gooding,’ as the phrase is (that is, visiting for alms the farm-houses in their vicinities), wheat for their Christmas furmity, though they sometimes collect sufficient to repay them for having it ground; and in return for this, and whatever else they may receive, they present their benefactors with sprigs of evergreens to deck their houses.

In Essex this fashion is still retained; but instead of making their circuit on St. Thomas’s Day, which is elsewhere the custom, the good dames put it off until the eve of the great festival, when you may see groups of them in their well-kept red cloaks, and lace-trimmed black silk bonnets, wandering across, perchance, snow-clad fields, to the different homesteads at which they are in the habit of receiving dole.

Speaking of evergreens, by the way, reminds us of the beautiful superstition of druidical times, when, according to Dr. Chandler, the people were in the habit of dressing their houses with green boughs on the first of December, in order that the sylvan spirits might repair to them, and remain unnipped by the frosts and cold winds till the return of spring renewed the foliage of their beloved abodes.

We know that the Christmas-boughs of our own times have gentle influences— that the tenderest sympathies of human nature nestle beneath them— that round the yule log fire, the world-worn links of kindred affection are reforged, old covenants renewed, and friendships strengthened, and could almost deem this sheltering of the sylvan spirits of the past a type of the kindly gatherings and gracious feelings kept alive by this annual garlanding of our household hearths in the present.

May it long be continued amongst us, for these old-world usages are the pictorial embellishments of life’s book, and have in them a wordless poetry, full of refining and happy influences.”

*Godey’s December, 1855*

## “CHRISTMAS AND ITS CUSTOMS.

By Charles J. Peterson

Christmas is the festival of the year. With modern Christian nations it takes precedence of all and every religious celebration. Its blessings are for the old as well as for the young. The magnificent shows, which welcomed it, in the old baronial times, have, indeed, long been disused. We no longer see the boar’s head borne in, to the sound of violin and harp, to grace the overloaded table. We no longer behold the page, with the wassail bowl, preceded by the mimic trumpeter. We no longer hear

the shouting, the music, and the mirth of the jester, as crowds of sevitores drag the yule log into the great hall, where the baron and his lady stand, in state, to welcome it. The mimes, the games, the buffoonery, the noisy revels have passed away. But no the less hearty is our modern observance of Christmas. On the contrary, the festival is the more appropriately kept, in whatever it is more sedate than formerly. In thousands of happy homes, the Christmas tree is raised: in thousands of churches prayer and thanksgiving go up. All over the land, the hospitable board, at the old homestead, is spread for children and grandchildren. Once more the parental roof-tree overshadows the reunited family, and sheds down upon them its calm and peaceful blessing. Alienations are forgotten, jealousies disappear, heart burnings cease to be. The genial atmosphere of Christmas thaws out even selfishness itself. And the angels, who sang 'peace and good-will to men,' on that still, calm morning, eighteen centuries ago, seem even yet to referent minds, to usher in this sacred dawn. The last star is paling before the morning. Hark! Do you not hear seraphic voices?

In England many of the old customs still survive. On Christmas Eve, groups of singers rove about, from house to house, singing 'Christmas Waits;' and are usually rewarded, aft the ancient fashion, with a dole. The church bells are set merrily ringing. Many of the wealthy landed proprietors still keep up the habit of dispensing coals and blankets to the poor, at the door of the castle or mansion. Children go out into the woods, to cut holly, or look for mistletoe; and their mirthful laughter makes many a silent dell vocal with gladness. The churches are all decked out with evergreen. As in the United States, gifts are exchanged between husband and wife, parents and children, betrothed lovers, friends, sisters, and old acquaintances. Hampers of game are sent from country relatives, to cousins in the city. The poorest indulge, on Christmas day, in a good dinner. Hilarity everywhere prevails.

On this side of the Atlantic, Christmas is less universally observed; indeed, until within a few years, it was hardly kept in New England, except by the members of the Episcopal church; and even yet, over large portions of that intelligent section, it is regarded as of secondary importance to Thanksgiving Day. But in the middle states it has always been the chief festival of the year. In Virginia, where so much of the old cavalier spirit survives, Christmas has been kept, from the era of the first settlement at Jamestown, with more unanimity, perhaps than anywhere in the United States. As we go further south, we find it the national holiday, if we may use such a phrase, for the Anglo-African races. In Charleston, it is welcomed by the negroes, with the discharge of Chinese crackers, and all the uproar which distinguishes of the Fourth of July at the North. At Havana it becomes almost a Saturnalia, or to speak more strictly, an uproarious negro carnival.

Oh! blessings on Christmas! How the little hearts of children throb with delight, as it draws near; and how, week after week, the dear ones ask, 'Isn't Christmas 'most here?' Visions of plum-puddings, turkeys, and other delicacies, float before their imagination: they linger bout the kitchen doors, all Christmas morning, if not at church; and when the pudding is triumphantly taken up, they follow it, shouting and dancing, wild with glee. Ah! our mouth fairly waters at the thought: we are a child again; we taste, in fancy, the delicious dish, than which nectar could not be more exquisite. Will we ever again enjoy anything as we enjoyed the Christmas pudding?



OUR CHRISTMAS TREE.

But the Christmas tree is the crowning joy for children. With what rapt wonder they gaze on it, when it is revealed to them for the first time in their lives, with its golden fruit, its twinkling tapers, and its loads of tempting toys! As they grow older, they begin to doubt the fable, which they have been told, perhaps, of a certain Kriss-Kringle, who brings gifts for good children is the omnipresent architect of all Christmas trees. They understand, now, why their parents, on Christmas Eve, are so pertinacious in shutting them out the room where the Christmas tree is to appear, all glorious tomorrow. They peep under doors and listen on the staircase; they even, sometimes, steal in on the busy parents; till, at last, there is nothing left for it, but to put the inquisitive, excited little rebels to bed. So to bed they go, where they lie awake, talking of what they had, on last Christmas, and of what they would like to get, in this: and so gradually fall asleep, to dream of Kriss-Kringle, to wake at daylight, and to be filling the house, with glad uproar, an hour before their parents usually rise. But who would have a house, at Christmas, without children, even though the little

mad-caps deafen the ears with their noisy gladness? Alas! alas! For the homes, where, this year, no little feet patter about overhead, on Christmas morning, as they did a twelve-month ago."

*Peterson's* December 1858.

#### "RIVAL CLAIMS.—CHRISTMAS IN THE CITY AND COUNTRY.

The suburban life of our great cities is a marked social feature of the day; the taste for the quiet domestic pursuits, which naturally spring up in the abundant leisure of the country, contest their place warmly with the fashion and gayety of the town. Every year more families give up their city residences, and, save a month or two at some hotel, or with friends who are glad enough to return the compliment when summer comes, pass the year out of the sight of bricks and mortar. They certainly have fewer excuses, if they do not live "a sober, righteous, and godly life," than those who are drawn more or less into the vortex of "society," under which we include party-giving and party-going,



shopping, calling, the opera, the concert — all that envious people sum up with the convenient title of ‘city dissipation.’

City people, in the mean time, shrug their shoulders, and wonder what people can possibly find to do with themselves, and look on their ‘country cousins’ as the victims of routine, and narrow-mindedness, and general stupidity!

We present these rival claims in what may be supposed to be the chief enjoyment of each separate life. Christmas, the general holiday, has its charms for each. In town there is much consultation as to toilet, for though the children absorb the morning, and it is proper to be seen at church, it is not less certain that the intimate gentlemen friends of the family will make their appearance by the time a demi-toilet can be dispatched, a little rehearsal of the general reception that marks the New Year. There are symptoms of it in the well spread lunch table of the luxurious drawing-room, in the impromptu grouping of ladies of the house with the first tinkle of the door bell, and its enjoyment culminates in the entrance of ‘the coming man,’ who “takes the liberty of bringing his friend Marks,” already well known in society as “superb in the German.”

Their country cousins, meantime, have already dined! — unfashionable creatures — and enjoyed with keen appetites the ample bountiful Christmas dinner the barn yard, and the garden’s latest gifts of crisp celery, winter vegetables and fruit, have contributed to. The air is keen and clear, the sky unclouded sapphire, the roads in their prime of sleighing from yesterday’s travel over the last cheerful snowstorm. They, too, have “gentlemen friends” who are only too happy to pay their devoirs in the clear open air, and in much merriment the sleighing party is made up, to dash along with chiming bells, and song and laughter. An upset now and then is counted in with the amusements of the day, so that no one is hurt, and who ever is? — by a fall into a yielding snowbank!

We leave our lady friends to choose for themselves in which scene lies the best opportunity for amusement and — a proposal!”

*Godey’s December, 1860*

What is Christmas without a Christmas dinner? The following menu doesn’t mean that all these items were included in just one meal but was just a series of suggestions of foods in which the cook could choose as many or as few as desired.

#### “CHRISTMAS AND NEW YEAR’S DINNERS.

Boiled turkey with oyster sauce, roast goose with apple sauce, roasted ham, chicken pie, stewed beets, cole-slaw, turnips, salsify, winter squash; mince pie, plum pudding, lemon custard, cranberry pie.

Roast turkey with cranberry sauce, boiled fowls with celery sauce, boiled ham, goose pie, turnips, salsify, coleslaw, winter squash, beets; mince pudding boiled, lemon pudding baked, pumpkin pudding.

Mock turtle soup, roast turkey with cranberry sauce, boiled turkey with celery sauce, roasted ham, smoke-tongue, chicken curry, oyster pie, beets, cole-slaw, winter squash, salsify, fried celery; plum pudding, mince pie, calf's-foot jelly, blanc-mange."

*Godey's*, December 1863

We at Ragged Soldier Sutlery and Vintage Volumes wish you and your family a blessed and happy holiday season.

Sources of Illustrations:

Page 2 - *Godey's*, December 1861

Page 5 - *Godey's*, December 1865

Page 11 - *Peterson's*, December 1858