

CHRISTMAS COMES BUT ONCE A YEAR.

By MEDICUS.

"At Christmas play, and make good cheer,
For Christmas comes but once a year."

THAT is, I believe, the old couplet complete, though there are many versions of it. These differ somewhat in diction, but the inference from all is similar. Plenty of eating and drinking, "high jinks," and general jollity—these are what we are advised to lay ourselves out for at this season, because "Christmas comes but once a year."

For the time being common sense is to be thrown to the winds, prudence shown to the door, and discretion shut up in a band-box. There is a species of glorious recklessness about this advice, which would be simply amusing if it were not positively mischievous.

"At Christmas play." No matter whether you feel disposed to play or not, play you must. You must manufacture merriment for the occasion. Mirth must be assumed if it makes no signs of bubbling up spontaneously. Your face must be wreathed in ready-made smiles while you are putting the finishing touches to your toilet, and they must be worn all the evening. A real smile, remember, is as much the effect of reflex action from a tickled brain or mind, as a real sneeze is the result of a tickled nose. Well, we are not expected to manufacture sneezes in English society, but I sojourned once among a tribe of savages where, at the king's court, it was considered the height of good breeding for one lady to sneeze when introduced to another, or to sneeze over and over again when someone said a good thing, and the more a lady sneezed the more polished was she considered in manners. When the king strutted in, arrayed in peacock's feathers and a spear, all the court fell a-sneezing, and each lady tried to outdo her neighbour in the number and grace of her sternutations. The king was a comical old fellow; he cocked his head to one side and watched to see that no lady took snuff of any sort, or rubbed her nose, and finally marched off to dinner with the sable beauty who had "sneezed the handsomest." The whole scene was very funny, and very ridiculous, but after all perhaps there is no more reason to be ashamed of a ready-made sneeze than a ready-made smile. Commend me to the genuine article in either case.

The French say the English take their pleasures sadly. The English may retaliate by saying the French take theirs madly, and both assertions are as nearly correct as possible. There are differences, however, in our islands. Had the Frenchman stated that the British take their pleasures sadly, he would have shot considerably wide of the mark. John Bull is the individual whom the shoe fits, and neither Sandy, Paddy, nor Taffy can wear it. And the reason is not far to seek. John Bull is notably a sitting bull, as the Sioux would say; his pleasures are proverbially and truly those of the table; supple, athletic, and even agile when very young, he, as a rule, develops a figure before he is forty, that, to say the least, is hardly fitted for the floor. Your true Celt, wherever found, is a bird of quite another feather. He is far more merry and mercurial; he is not born to squat; mentally and corporeally, he must be ever on the move. Sitting is not his favourite position, nor is eating his favourite pastime. John Bull likes to sit still and hear a song, Sandy must join the chorus; John Bull likes to sit and look at dancing, Sandy must join the dance, and foot it, as right well he can, on the light fantastic toe, and if the music be to his taste, only the suasion of a double barrelled gun could prevent him. See him on the wide green links at golf in summer, or on the lake in winter playing "the roaring game" on the ice, you would say, "Here is a man who does not take his pleasures sadly." And after a day's "play" is over, though he might well be expected to be tired, the dinner that follows is, in his estimation, only a secondary matter; the dance, and that alone, is the correct conclusion of a day's enjoyment.

Now I believe I bear the character among my readers of being rather a pleasant sort of an individual than otherwise, and in this festive number of THE GIRL'S OWN PAPER I certainly have no desire to belie my good name. I would rather be condemned to stand for a given time on one leg, in a corner, than be considered the death's-head at the feast, the ghost at the banquet. Figuratively speaking, you will not find your Medicus going to an evening party with a bucket of cold water to dash over mirth and merriment, a box of blue pills in his waistcoat pocket, and a bottle

of black draught bulging out his dress coat tails. No, "that's not me," as the little old woman said. Nevertheless, I know I will be doing right and not offending anyone if I give a few words of advice concerning what is called Christmas cheer. I will be doing right, and I will probably be doing good too, because a large number of our girls, both those who are young and those who are no longer young,

MOONLIGHT ON CARISBROOKE CASTLE.

By ANNE BEALE.



THE moon is up behind the castle walls;
Aslant the ivied keep her pale light falls,
Like glance of pitying angel on the cheek
Of death. In full-orbed beauty, grandly meek,
She looks upon the ruin in its gloom
As heretofore on yonder prison-room,
Where an ill-fated monarch sighed alone--
Nobler in sorrow than on England's throne.

Say, Queen of Night, untroubled in thy reign
By rival courtiers or the restless train
Of envious subjects—didst thou, pitying, shed
Thy beams as tears upon the discrowned head
Of him who dwelt, a captive, in the hold
Of this, a whilom fortress, stern and cold?

Say, when our martyr-king surveyed the sky,
And prayed for strength to live or faith to die—
Didst thou allure his worn and wearied soul
Up yonder, where th' untiring planets roll,
And suns and systems multiply, and stand
Or move in mystic round, at God's command—
Thence to the eternal Throne where Christ doth lead
Alike for king and peasant in their need?

Oh, Moon! if thus to thee the charm was given
To raise his lonely heart from earth to heaven,
Thy calm and spiritual light we bless,
And thank and love thee for thy tenderness.

will have an opportunity of reading this paper before Christmas actually comes.

You will, I flatter myself, believe me sincere when I say I wish you all a happy Christmas and a merry New Year. What I mean is this; that I wish you to be quietly happy and perfectly temperate in every way, on and about the 25th, so that you may begin the coming year full of health and hope, and therefore as merry as the larks that soar and sing in cloud-land. Could I wish you anything better? I do not think so.

If at this present moment I feel inclined to rail at anything, it is the adjective "merry" applied to qualify the hallowed and gracious substantive "Christmas." We cannot be gay to order; manufactured merriment is like a cork leg, elastic enough, perhaps, but only a very poor substitute for the genuine article. Besides, that species of happiness and jollity which depends upon a good dinner for its actual birth, is as sure to be followed by a relapse and by depression as day is followed by darkness. If the Christmas merriness has been very artificial, if we have really made too free with the good cheer with which the table groaned, then most assuredly we ourselves will have to groan next, and the week that precedes the New Year will be the dulllest week of all the fifty-two.

Very serious accidents used to occur in the olden times by the upsetting of the coaches which conveyed our forefathers to scenes of Christmas conviviality; but in these modern days the upsetting of one's digestion may prove quite as serious a business for some. Many and many a lingering and painful illness dates back to Christmas Day, and no further; but for all that, excess at table during what is called the "festive season" is the rule with young and old rather than the exception. Well, the young being possessed of more vitality, get somewhat easily over the results of indiscretion at table, but the aged do not. To them such indiscretion means nothing more nor less than a cruel shock to the whole system, nervous and muscular, with debility of every organ. At any other time of the year this would be bad enough, but in winter, with the wild, cold, and uncertain spring of this country still to be got over, it is dangerous in the extreme.

By indiscretion I do not wish you to understand errors in quantity so much as in quality, though indigestion, with all its attendant horrors, may spring from either or both.

The young, on the other hand, who, to put it very plainly, make a somewhat hearty dinner, place themselves at a very great disadvantage compared to their sisters who have been abstemious. Physiologically speaking, the brain is deprived for a time of a due allowance of well-oxygenated blood, and the possessor of such a brain is dull, weary, and a little wee bit stupid. She does not feel her own bright, clever active self; her spirits have to be forced, and this makes matters worse. A restless night or a heavy lethargic night is sure to follow, and she will awake unrefreshed and wrinkled. Now, mark this, please: I am not referring to wrinkles about the eyes; these do not grow in a night. There are wrinkles that may come and go, according to the state of health, which are no more visible at a short distance than are the lines in a fine engraving; but which, like these lines, determine light or shade, and, therefore, beauty. These are the real wrinkles young ladies should be afraid of, and a slight attack of indigestion or a single restless night may produce a

very fine crop of them indeed, and the general effect, the *tout ensemble*, is hardly to be hidden by art. I do not mention the word "art" here in a sarcastic way. There are arts and arts, and for my own part I think a girl is not only quite justified in looking her very best for her own sake, but for the sake of those she mixes with in every-day life. In the matter of tight-lacing I am not even straight-laced. Support the figure by all means, but do not do so to the extent of displacing the liver and interfering with the action of the lungs, heart, and other vital organs; if you do so the health will speedily be deteriorated. And this deterioration will be first discernible in the complexion—the skin suffers; it becomes nerveless and starved, and as destitute of beauty of surface as a cake of hard dry soap; the eye becomes fishy, and gums and lips pale. Will art aid this state of matters? Well, cosmetics are tried, but they are nearly all poisonous, and eventually do harm that cannot be repaired. It has come to a pretty pass with any girl when she has to depend for her beauty on cosmetics. A little face-powder, however, is justifiable enough to protect the skin from atmospheric effects, such as frost or excessive sunshine, or even to hide natural defects, but certainly not to give false effect or to cover imperfections that attention to the health and fair play to the digestive organs would speedily remove. Dress well then, I say, by all means, and look well; a "dowd" cannot be perfectly happy unless she be deficient in self-respect; but on the other hand neither can a girl who depends entirely upon art or "get-up" for her personal appearance, for she must feel that she is—a—well, slightly succedaneous, so to speak.

Few of my readers, perhaps, have any adequate notion how much complete ease of mind has to do with female beauty. Self-consciousness means ruin to the nervous system, and if a girl cannot conduct her toilet in such a way as to be able to move in society without this haunting horror she had better stay at home for all the impression she is likely to make. But beautification means beatification to thousands, I am sorry to say, and in company the little morsels of minds such possess are centred all in self. If a man worth the name finds himself seated next one of these at a Christmas party, he will soon find out what she is. There she sits—every smile artificial, every action studied—as cold as a clay Samuel, as soulless as a draper's dummy, and he won't feel sorry when supper is over. "Christmas comes but once a year." Why, if he, poor fellow, is to have no better luck than this, he will hardly care if it doesn't come oftener than once in ten.

I give it as my opinion, then, that we will all enjoy our Christmas cheer much better if we are natural in dress and manners and all the rest of it, and if we determine to seek to please others more than to please ourselves, I do not mind a bit that our girls should have quite a gay time of it before Christmas comes, in getting ready their dresses and in shopping, etc., but they must not forget the health. It is just before Christmas we should begin to take extra care of ourselves. The cold weather has just begun, and moderate, temperate living, with reasonably warm clothing and plenty of exercise, are the *sine qua non* of comfort and happiness to come. What we desire specially to avoid is a chill. Of course the matutinal bath is the one and only prophylactic against colds. It traces the nerves, hardens the muscles, softens the skin, and

makes the mind as lightsome and happy as that of the lark. But every girl cannot stand such wholesome ablation, and others *think* they cannot and so don't try; but abstemiousness in eating often works wonders upon the health and spirits, and if a girl can only manage to be hungry twice a day and eat in moderation afterwards, it is surprising what sweet sleep will be her guerdon, and how light and refreshed she will feel in the morning.

As to the actual food-cheer with which tables are said to groan about Christmas-time, it is generally good, but there is only one way of enjoying it, and that is by being abstemious at table. Here is a hint all should remember: no one is likely to over eat who eats slowly. Indeed, you can hardly eat too slowly. The Christmas dinner should, above all other dinners, be a feast of reason and a flow of soul, and just enough food should be taken to enable the body to sustain this exhilarating flow.

Our appetites and tastes will naturally be the best guides as to how much and what to eat during the festive season, but at the same time the digestibility or indigestibility of certain viands should be borne in mind by those who wish to keep bright and well.

Well-cooked, rather underdone roast beef, if not cut too thick nor flooded with gravy, is exceedingly suitable for Christmas in England. It should be tender, long-kept beef, however, and not too much fat should be used.

Turkey and goose—avoid the fat—is very digestible and nutritious. Apple sauce and stuffing of all kinds are bad for the delicate, or those who wish to retain a nice complexion.

Pork is dear at any price; gross, and often unwholesome. Game is excellent, excepting hare that has been long kept.

Too much fluid should be avoided, wines especially; for even in moderation they delay digestion. Vegetables should be eaten but sparingly; particularly the larger-leaved sorts.

Pastry and cheese and fruit go all in the same catalogue. The wise will simply trefle with them.

What about plum-pudding, so called? Why, it is simply a huge, ungainly ball of indigestibility. A remnant of barbarism that has been handed down to us from the days when people could breakfast well on a cold boar's head and a flagon of sour ale. Of course, Englishmen will hang on for many years to come to the raisined roll of flour and fat, with all the tenacity of the bulldog. It is an institution which the bit of holly and the drop of blazing brandy tend to foster, so they stick to it; and in nine cases out of ten it sticks to them.

The plum-pudding is not an intellectual viand; it never gave rise to a single brilliant thought or bright idea; but it has been the occasion of many a nightmare, and laid a solid foundation for many an attack of dyspepsia. But I need say no more, for sensible people only partake of the thing sparingly, and for fashion's sake, and few, I dare say, would be sorry were it superannuated and relegated to the workhouse. Our editor comes quietly in as I write. He has read my last sentences. He has sighed.

"Medicus," he says, "you're a bolder man than I took you for. Your intrepidity knows no bounds. You have actually levelled a lance at Christmas-pudding. Heigho!"

Well, I trust, readers, that, nevertheless, my paper will be none the less welcome, for if I am a bold man, I trust I am also a good one. *Adios!*

