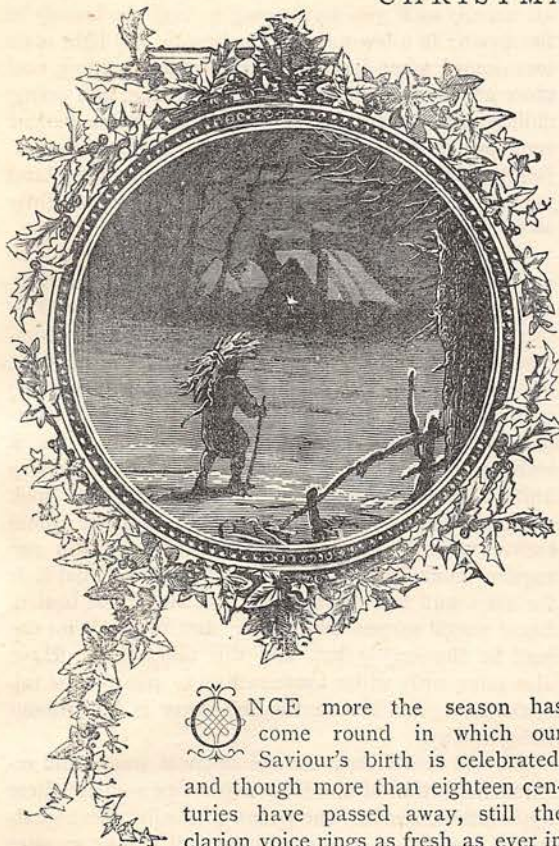


CHRISTMAS DINNERS.



ONCE more the season has come round in which our Saviour's birth is celebrated, and though more than eighteen centuries have passed away, still the clarion voice rings as fresh as ever in our ears—"Goodwill toward men."

From the highest to the lowest the sacred charm still works its magic spell. What child was ever sent to bed before its time, no matter what the crime, on Christmas Day? Oh, if we could only embed in our hearts throughout the year one half the charity that for very shame seems forced upon us on this great festival, how far happier should we be!

It is not, however, now my province to dwell upon the sacred character of the day, yet the whole subject is so deep, so unfathomable, that, like a still phosphorescent sea, the slightest touch is instantly surrounded by a halo of glory, faintly and dimly revealing to finite minds the infinite brightness that is hidden in its breast, and I cannot bear to enter into the practical details of the day's festivities without some slight allusion in honour of the Author and Founder of the feast.

Now—the higher duties of the season being of course left out of the question—Christmas Day without its dinner would be like the play of "Hamlet" with the part of Hamlet omitted. A genuine Christmas dinner, too, reveals our real national taste, and proves to ourselves and all the world that we have not yet acquired a French one. I wonder if it is possible for a statician to calculate how many huge sirloins of beef and immense turkeys are consumed on Christmas Day. Such substantial fare—so unkickshawlike. Nor must we

forget the goose of humbler life. Were it possible to calculate the exact amount of gratification given by mere eating, it would probably be found that the aristocratic sirloin and turkey fail to compare with the goose and sage-and-onion—we may add, especially the sage-and-onion.

We will suppose the happy morning to have arrived, and the children gathered round the table, with cheeks so flushed with pleasure and anticipation that they rival in colour the bright red berries that glisten in the holly on the walls. Bright eyes too match the bright cheeks, eyes that have sparkled more brightly when the well-known and looked-for chink has occurred, as the annual Christmas-box has been slipped into the hand by the grey-haired father or uncle, as the case may be—whose own eye is tinged with water when his mind goes back to the time, too, that he himself was a boy, without a care or thought of the morrow, and who, conscious of the joy which he is giving, walks away with a lighter pocket but a far lighter heart.

Happy, happy times! Is there one who at such a moment has an anxious care? Yes—suppose the beef should be raw, the mince-pie burnt, and the pudding all tumble to pieces the moment it is turned out? Were it known, I dare say tears have been shed upon such trifles, but then trifles make up life.

Perhaps the deepest anxiety is about the pudding. I will give the following recipe, which I have always found an excellent one. The ingredients required are—one pound and a half of muscatel raisins, half a pound of currants, quarter of a pound of sultana raisins, half a pound of mixed candied peel, three-quarters of a pound of bread-crumbs, three-quarters of a pound of suet chopped fine, nine eggs, quarter of an ounce of pounded bitter almonds, a table-spoonful of flour, a table-spoonful of moist sugar, and a quarter of a pint of brandy.

The first thing to do is to stone the raisins. Cut them into two pieces, and in taking out the pips or stones be careful not to take out the pulp. For this reason it is undesirable to leave the stoning of the raisins to young persons. It is more than human nature can bear, and the strongest-minded child is apt to suck his or her fingers during the process, which, in addition to being far from nice, is apt to detract from the rich muscatel flavour of the pudding. The currants should be bought some days before they are wanted, in order that they may be first washed and then dried. Spread them out on a large sheet of coarse paper before the kitchen fire, and occasionally stir them about. They will require picking, and this wants both care and patience; those little tiny stalks of the currants are very disagreeable to get into the mouth, and still more into a hollow tooth, for which they seem to have a natural affinity. The candied peel should be sliced into little, very thin slices, and not chopped up. The bread-crumbs should be made as fine as possible, and the suet chopped up very fine. Care

should be taken to get the very best hard beef-suet, that will chop properly, as some suet has a tendency to get into a creamy mass; when this is the case, it is impossible to make a proper pudding of it. The dry



TURNING OUT THE PUDDING.

ingredients should now be placed in a large basin, and thoroughly mixed together, care being taken to put in the pounded bitter almonds little by little. The eggs should be broken one by one into a cup, in order to see that each one is perfectly fresh. One stale egg will quite spoil a pudding. Beat up the eggs all together till they froth, and mix them in with the rest, and add the brandy. If the bread-crumbs were properly dried, it will not be found to be too moist.

Next take a new pudding-cloth, that has been well boiled in plain water, and butter it thoroughly, and then flour it. Turn the pudding into it and tie it, leaving room for the pudding to swell. The cloth must be fastened very securely, and it is as well to tie it in two places in case of accidents. This pudding must now be boiled for at least six hours. It will always be found best to make the pudding some days before it is required; hang it up in the cloth, putting something underneath it to catch the drops; and a pudding made as we have directed will keep good for months and months. It only requires warming up for a couple of hours in a large saucepan of boiling water, and then turning out.

Now that awfully critical moment—turning out. Care should be taken to peel off the cloth, and not pull it; the reason of this is self-evident. On Christmas Day a piece of bright holly, with some red berries on it, should be stuck on the top of the pudding, and some lighted brandy poured over and round it. If you take my advice, you will light the brandy in the room.

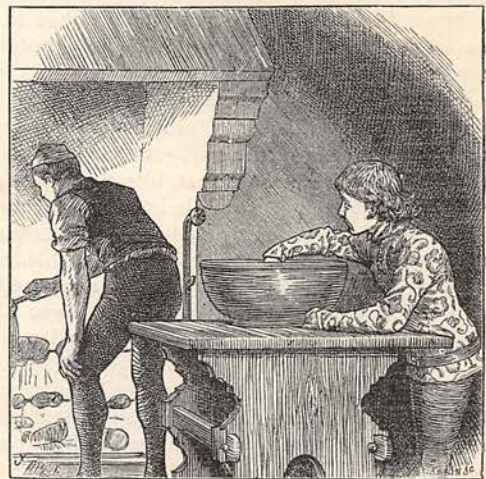
To carry a large flat dish with ignited brandy is extremely dangerous, and I have not forgotten that dreadful story which appeared in the papers one or two years ago, about the poor girl who was burnt to death by the lighted brandy from the Christmas pudding falling on her white muslin dress.

In order to light the brandy, get a large iron spoon

and fill it with brandy, get a lighted cedar taper or thin wood-shaving, or even a piece of paper rolled up, and act exactly as if you were going to boil the brandy in the spoon; in a few minutes the brandy will light of its own accord, when it can be poured on the pudding, and more added if required. If it is evening, and young children are present, it is as well to turn down the gas very low or remove the candle for a few minutes. Judging by my own recollections, the lighted plum-pudding was a great event in my early days—slightly awful, but intensely delightful.

With regard to the beef, I need say but a few words. It is a question between you and the butcher, and I will say butchers as a rule behave very well at Christmas time; and while I think of it, I would recommend you to give your carving-knife to the butcher-boy, and tell him to get it well sharpened for the occasion; a hint that will not be forgotten—the day after Christmas, will have its due effect. Sirloin of beef has a trying piece of gristle at the top, and without a sharp knife a very handsome piece will be made to look ragged. Have a good roaring fire. A piece about twelve pounds will take three hours. It will not require much basting, but remind the cook that it is the sides and not the fat part that should be basted. Some stupid women forget this. Let the dish for the beef be thoroughly hot, and this takes time. Have also some curly white horse-radish to pile on the top of the joint; and be sure the dish-cover is hot without being smoky.

We will next discuss the mince-meat, and would recommend a trial of the following recipe:—Take three apples, three lemons, one pound of raisins, three-quarters of a pound of currants, one pound of suet, quarter of a pound of raw beef, two pounds of moist sugar, four ounces of mixed candied peel, quarter of a rind of a fresh orange, one tea-spoonful of powdered mixed



STOLEN SWEETS.

spice composed of equal proportions of cloves, cinnamon, and nutmeg, half a pint of brandy, and one glass of port wine.

Peel the apples and cut out the cores very carefully, and then bake the pieces till they are quite soft.

Squeeze the lemons, cut away the white flappy part, and boil the lemon-peel till it is fairly soft. The raisins must of course be carefully stoned, and the currants well-washed and dried and picked, as in the



THE OLDEN TIME: BRINGING IN THE GOOD CHEER.

case of the pudding. Chop the suet very finely, as well as the raw meat and lemon-peel. Mix all the ingredients well together, add the brandy last of all, and press the whole down into a stone jar, and place a piece of paper soaked in brandy on the top. Remove the paper and stir up the mixture thoroughly every three days, replacing the paper; if this is done, the mince-meat will keep good a long time.

To make the pies, roll out some thin puff-paste, butter a small round tin, and line it with a piece of paste, then place in a generous quantity of the mince-meat, and cover it over with a similar piece of puff-paste, and bake it in a moderate oven. Mince pies are none the worse for being warmed up, but pray take care that they are sent to table hot.

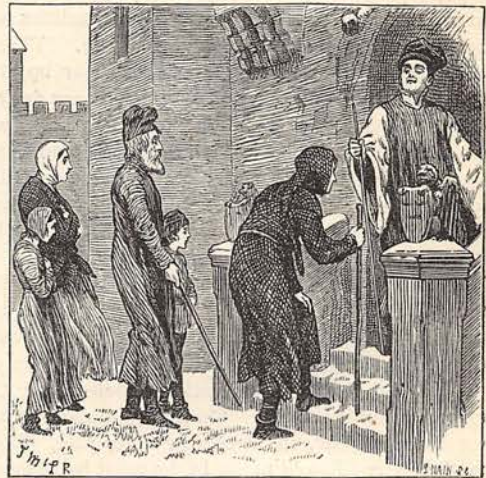
Let us next proceed to the goose. Now a fine, large, tender goose, with a sauce tureen of fine rich gravy, and another of hot apple sauce, with a nice large floury potato, is not to be despised, and to my mind is worth half-a-dozen turkeys. I am afraid the sage-and-onion, the necessary accompaniment, causes it to be considered rather a vulgar dish. Never mind, let us be vulgar, it's only once a year. The principal thing is the stuffing. Onions vary so in size that it is a little difficult to describe, but for a large goose you must take five large onions and ten fresh sage-leaves. If you are obliged to put up with dried leaves, you will want nearly twice the number. Take rather more than a quarter of a pound of bread-crumbs, about a couple of ounces of butter, and add some black pepper and salt.

Chop the onions very fine with the sage-leaves, and mix all up together; and the yolks of a couple of eggs may be added if you wish to have the seasoning very rich, but they are by no means necessary.

This will make the stuffing that nine persons out of ten really prefer, but do not like to say so. If, therefore, you really wish to have the stuffing mild, the only

difference must be that you must cut out the cores of the onions, partially boil them, and let them drain on a napkin; this takes away considerably the strong onion flavour, of which some persons are not very fond. Fill the goose with the stuffing, and roast it before a quick fire. Care must be taken that the goose is well tied up, to prevent the stuffing coming out at one end, or its getting filled with grease during basting at the other. A good-sized goose only requires one hour and a half to roast, and the general fault is that people will over-roast them, and dry them up. The largest goose I have ever seen would not take more than two hours, but try in the case of a very large one to have the stuffing off the chill before you put it in. Serve some rich brown gravy and apple sauce in separate tureens, as you will be sure to splash the gravy in carving the goose if any is put on the dish.

With regard to roast turkey I can only say that no possible time can be given for roasting, as they vary so, especially in the present day of plump prize birds, that even the weight would be no criterion. A small turkey will require one hour and a half; while a very large one may want five hours. One word of caution about the stuffing. Every one knows how unpleasant a tendency what is called veal stuffing has to "rise." This is, I believe, owing to too much lemon-peel being almost invariably used. When you use a quarter of a pound of beef suet, a quarter of a lemon is amply sufficient. To this quantity may be added a couple of teaspoonfuls of dried mixed stuffing herbs (which can be bought in bottles in Covent Garden Market), two ounces of lean ham, rather more than a quarter of a pound of bread-crumbs, two eggs, a little chopped parsley (about a teaspoonful or rather more), and a little grated nutmeg, salt, and cayenne



THE OLDEN TIME: RELIEVING THE POOR.

pepper. Mince all the ingredients very finely together, and pound them afterwards in a mortar.

A very nice stuffing for turkeys can be made from chesnuts, but space will not allow me to enter into further details.