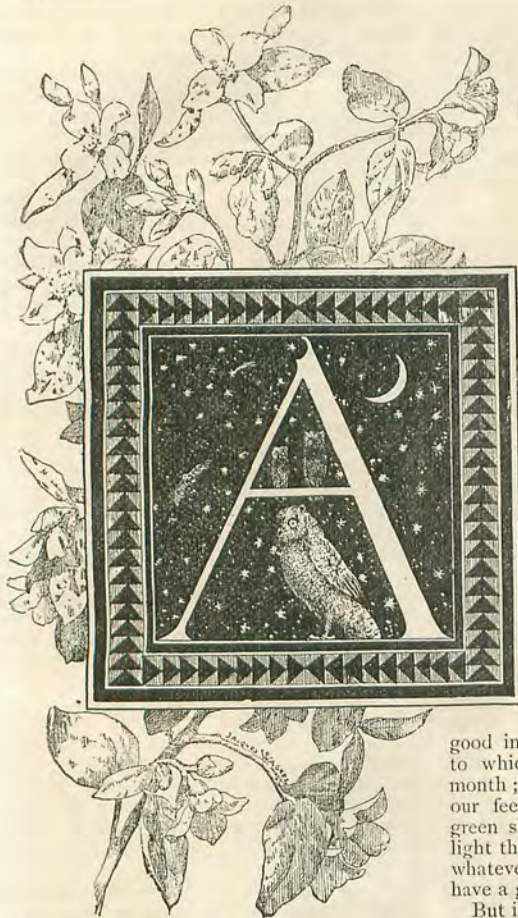


## CHRISTMAS-BOX FROM "MEDICUS."

BY HIMSELF.



HERE we are again, as merry as a May cricket and as happy as a sand-boy! And why shouldn't I, or why shouldn't you, or any of us, be happy in this bright world of ours if we feel like being so? For, mind you, nothing will ever make me believe that there isn't far more of joy than sorrow on earth, far more of good than bad, far more of sunshine and moonlight and star gleams, than of murky skies, darkness, or gloom. I don't care a bit what pessimists may tell me to the contrary. They may point to the wind-tossed rain-filled clouds, and ask me where the sunshine is.

"Away behind those very clouds," I'll answer; "and somewhere else as well—in the heart."

Well, now, girls, you'll be reading these lines some time in what is called "bleak December," but I am writing them in sunny September.

By-the-way, though, why should December always, or nearly always, be called bleak? I'm sure I for one never saw any very great amount of bleakness about it. In my opinion December is an honest month, and a very decided one to boot. December bears a bad character, but doesn't seem to break its heart on this account. It is a reckless, rollicking, happy-go-lucky sort of a month, and we have to take it just as it comes. And this is doing what we ought to do. Perhaps a cold Norland wind goes shrieking and howling through the leafless trees, or across the fields all waste and bare, when we first start out of a morning; but we can walk and keep warm. And thanks to our own industry, we are warmly clad and comfortably shod. Have we not also made an excellent breakfast, good digestion waiting on appetite, and bounding health on both?

What though it rains as well as blows! What though the breeze sweeps round the corners in gusts and squalls, and tries to blow

us off the foot-path! Battling with the wind on a December morning is the finest fun out, and if Boreas is determined we sha'n't hold up an umbrella, why, we can wrap our plaids or mackintoshes around us and laugh in his face.

Then at eventide, as we journey homewards, December may bring all his battery to bear upon us, and mingle sleet and hail with rain, and blow at us and roar at us from every direction of the compass; but even then, in the darkness and gloom, glad visions of a cosy fireside not far away, of a comfortable curtained room, of a well-laid supper-table, with a kettle on the hob and a cat on the hearth, will rise up before our mind's eye, and we will quicken our steps till imagination at length merges into reality.

But when December does make up its mind to be good, it is very good indeed. Think of the calm bright days to which we are often treated during this month; the ground so hard that it rings under our feet; the sprinkling of snow; the sea-green skies of the gloaming hour; the moonlight that follows; and the glorious stars. So whatever anyone else may say, I shall always have a good word to say for December.

But it is September with me as I write. Oh, of course there has been rain; I'm not going to think of that now it is past and gone. I am writing by the roadside on a wooden bench, in a wide space where three roads meet at upper Bognor. In the centre of this triangle is a large circular grass plot, from which tower skywards seven splendid trees, forming a dome far aloft, where their branches interlace like the roof of some grand cathedral aisle. Each of the roads that radiate from this space is a cool green avenue, or lovers' lane.

The trees above me are graceful as well as tall; the sunshine is shimmering and falling in patches all around. Every broad green leaf is a transparency in the marvellous light, and the breeze is making such sweet low music through the foliage that were I reading instead of writing I might be lulled to sleep. Just one little glimpse of the blue sea is needed to complete this picture; and lo! yonder it is. My faithful companion, Queen (the Newfoundland), is seated beside me, leaning her great honest head on the bench, so I am not quite alone.

Not far off is my camp; not an extensive one—simply the caravan "Wanderer," and a snow-white tent. But very pretty they look in that quiet green meadow surrounded by waving trees and hedges all trailed over with bramble. The greenery of the field is starred over with the orange of autumnal hawk-bit and patched with the purple bartisia.

But in a day or two, after I have finished this paper, I shall strike camp and go wandering homewards through the prettiest parts of Sussex, Surrey, Kent, and Berks. Is it not pleasant, reader, even in December, to look back to a summer holiday well spent, and while doing one's best to enjoy the winter, hug to one's heart the thought that summer will come again?

"Spring will return,  
And birds and lambs again be gay;  
And blossoms clothe the hawthorn spray.

The daisy's flower  
Again shall paint your summer bower;  
Again the hawthorn shall supply  
The garlands you delight to tie.  
The lambs upon the lee shall bound,  
The wild birds carol to the sound;  
And while you frolic light as they,  
Too short shall seem the summer day."

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But now to change the theme. For once in a way, then, I, your Medicus, am transformed. Hey! presto! and I stand forth in the garb and likeness of old St. Claus. I have donned a long white beard, a cap of fur, and a coat all covered with snowflakes. My cheeks, that are usually sickled o'er with the pale cast of thought, I have tinged with rouge and eke my noble brow, and I have assumed my jolliest smile. I have got into your house somehow—either down the chimney or through the key-hole. No matter—here I am, and here is my wallet, cram-full of good things for this joyous and festive season. There is no deception, mind you. I carry with me no nasty drugs—not even a pill. Physic for the nonce I have thrown to the dogs, and the dogs know better than to touch it.

Where did you hang your stocking, miss? I wish you wouldn't throw your boots down anywhere for poor St. Claus to tumble over and make a noise. I'm sure I don't want to be shot for a burglar by that big brother of yours.

Oh, here is your stocking! I declare you've hung out two. Never mind, I have plenty to fill them, and if you store up and make use of the receipts I am going to give you, they will aid you in becoming quite a little treasure of a housekeeper.

The receipts then are all useful and *seasonable*, so here goes.

1. I suppose you know that men folk often come in off the ice, or from a long winter's ramble feeling very thirsty, and that ordinary ale or beer is heating. Well, why not make some *spruce* beer. It is best made of the branches of the spruce, but for these in winter you have to substitute the essence. But all you want is, say, four and a half gallons of boiling water; in this you dissolve three pounds of treacle or sugar, and when cool, two ounces of spruce essence and about half a pint of yeast. Let it work as ginger beer does, and bottle off. This is not only a most refreshing drink, but it is also tonic and wholesome, and quite suited for Christmas drink.

2. Did ever you try making *Orange Marmalade*? Mind, you never know what you can do till you try. Take a sufficient number of Seville oranges and half the quantity of nice juicy sweet ones. Great care must be taken that they are clean and skinned, ripe and good. Peel them, take off the inside white skin from the peel, cut the peel in pieces, and boil till tender, then slice very thin. Meanwhile, squeeze out the juice and remove the pips from the pulp. Now put all together and weigh, and add the same weight of pure white sugar. Boil for half an hour, skimming well. Then put in jars, and cover down when it is quite cold. This is the Aberdeen plan. A little clear honey is sometimes added, and sometimes only the bitter oranges are used.

3. Sago, arrowroot, and tapioca are all very nice and nutritious, but receipts for cooking

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these you will find in any cookery book. *Iceland Moss* is also very good. Steep half an ounce of the best picked moss in hot water for ten minutes, strain, and boil in a pint of fresh water till it is reduced to four ounces; add some liquorice root, and boil a little longer.

4. *Gruel* is a very nutritious and wholesome drink, and will lie on a sick stomach sometimes when nothing else will. Yet few know how to make it well. Most people make it too thick or too thin. I think that which is made from good oatmeal is the best. The oatmeal ought to be the medium sort. When buying it, taste it. A shopkeeper may assure you it is fresh when it is far from it. Put a pinch or two in the mouth, and if it has the slightest "bite," or feeling of bitter warmth, it is unfit for human food. Mix two tablespoonfuls with four of cold water. Pour on a pint of boiling water, and boil the whole for three minutes, stirring all the time. Pass through a sieve, and add butter, sugar, and spices to taste. Serve hot.

5. *Beef Tea*.—When really good beef is not to be had, Liebig or Bovril may be used instead. Bovril is malted, and easily digested. Beef tea can hardly be made too strong. Remove every particle of fat from the meat and cut up or mince; put in a jelly jar and cover with cold water. Tie a piece of paper over the jar with pin-holes in it, and place the jar in a pannikin of boiling water. Let it simmer till well done. Any meat—chicken, rabbit, veal, etc.—may be used to make tea in the same way; but it should be served hot, and eaten with toast or bread-crust, for really the tea itself is little more than a stimulant.

6. Although I have made and cooked almost everything, I have never manufactured *Gingerbread*. The following, however, seems to me to be a good receipt. It is taken from an old medical book. Take half a pound of fine flour, and, putting it on the baking-board, thoroughly mix it with a quarter of a pound of treacle—golden syrup is best—working it into a paste. Add ground ginger to a portion of this according to taste; mix extra well, roll out, then bake till crisp. A little butter greatly improves the whole, and probably a dust of baking-powder would make it lighter.

7. *Curry Powder* is one of the finest and most wholesome condiments we possess. We seldom get a really good dish of curry set before us in this country. Like all officers who have served in India or the seas around, I flatter myself I can make a good curry. My teacher was an Arab in Zanzibar; he taught me also how to make coffee. One reason why curry in this country is seldom of great excellence is that the powder is not so fresh as it ought to be; another reason is that few cooks dream of adding cocoa-nut milk to it. I do not mean the cocoa-nut water you find in the green cocoa-nut. Let me tell you how Suleiman, my Arab, used to curry my fowl in the bush at Boo-boo-boo. He grew the turmeric in his wild wee garden, in his cocoa-

tree patch, and I think he also cultivated most of the other seeds, etc.; so everything was fresh as peas new-gathered on a May morning. Well, he solemnly cleaned and prepared the fowl by tearing it all in pieces. Meanwhile, the chattee was on the clear fire, and therein was floated a sliced onion in a well of butter or *gee*. When this was done brown he threw in the fowl, and stirred the pieces about until they were partially cooked, the aroma that arose causing my mouth to water. He had already mixed his curry ingredients, and he had grated down half an old cocoa-nut on a hair sieve; through this he poured water, and lo! rich, creamy milk was the result. Then he added the curry paste and this milk, and stewed the whole till tender. The little black girl had boiled the rice, and to complete the curry stew Suleiman thickened the gravy with a little flour. It was then ready to dish up. Mind you, the rice was placed on one dish and the fowl curry on another, not served up in the messy English fashion, with the rice all round the edge of the dish, to get cold and look ugly. So if ever you make curry, whatever you do, forget not the cocoa-nut milk.

If you don't choose to make your own curry powder, buy it from the best Italian warehouse you know of. You may not be able to get what will suit your taste at first, but when you do succeed in obtaining a good brand, take a note of it, and never get any other.

8. Here is a receipt for what is called *Indian Curry Powder*. I have not tested it nor tasted it, but it seems to be genuine, and it is not at all difficult to make. First catch your hare—that is, catch your coffee-mill—and have it thoroughly cleaned, because I don't think the flavour of Mocca would improve a true Indian curry. Now take half an ounce each of turmeric, fresh ground ginger, and coriander seeds, half a drachm each of black pepper and poppy seed (called *maw* seed in the shops), ten or fifteen grains of cinnamon, a morsel of garlic, six cloves, and two chillies. Mix, and grind all together, and keep in a well-stoppered bottle.

9. *Chutney* is such a delightful relish that I wonder housekeepers do not make it more often than they do. To buy the real Indian chutney becomes expensive. Besides, there is always the danger of a shock to the nervous system from finding what seem, and probably are, cockroaches' legs in it. But most of the so-called Indian chutney is made in England. Here is a receipt on a large scale—you can make less in the same proportions:—Equal parts—say a pound and a half—of apples, chillies, ginger, sultana raisins, and salt; add to this three-quarters of a pound of grated garlic, and one pound of loaf sugar, and five bottles of best vinegar. The chillies are first soaked in the vinegar for a couple of hours, then all the ingredients are mixed and ground to a pulp.

10. *Tarragon Vinegar* is greatly relished by some epicures, and although dear in shops, it is so easily made. You simply steep the leaves of tarragon in vinegar, according to

taste, and there you have it after a maceration of fourteen days. In the same way vinegar from many fragrant herbs may be made.

11. *Curry Vinegar* is made by adding two ounces of best curry powder to a pint of vinegar and keeping it in a warm place for a few days, then straining.

12. It is not generally known that cods' liver may be nicely cooked and relished by invalids who can hardly bear to take the oil itself. You see, it is ever so much fresher thus. I need scarcely dilate here on the benefits that accrue from a long course of cod-liver oil to those who are in any way below par, or whose lungs may not be so strong as they might be.

Many ladies suffer very much from cold during the winter months, and really dread the coming of January, which is undoubtedly the bitterest month in this country. The taking of cod-liver oil in pretty large doses, and the wearing of rather loose warm clothing, is the cure, for by this means cold is set at defiance.

Potatoes—nice floury ones—are steamed till cooked, then a nice portion of cod's liver placed over them, cut in pieces to let the oil exude, and steamed again. The liver itself is eaten with some relish or condiment, and this makes a most nutritious meal. Rice or tapioca is also cooked and then treated with cod's liver. I think many will thank me for giving this treat.

I shall finish my paper by giving one or two other receipts from my wallet, then retire.

13. What so refreshing as *Toilet Vinegar*, either to damp the brow or hair with when one has a headache, or to put in the water to lave the face, arms, and hands, or to throw into the cold or tepid bath, or use in a sick room as a perfume. But to buy, it is very dear.

On the other hand, it is both easily and cheaply made. Here is the receipt in a single sentence:—Otto of roses, one hundred drops; rectified spirits of wine, twelve ounces; acetic acid (dilute), forty-five ounces. Shake, and it is made; but some add four or five ounces of dried rose leaves, and macerate for fourteen days; then strain.

14. *Cold Cream* is not difficult to make, and is very useful for chapped hands or lips in winter. Eight ounces of oil of almonds are melted in an earthen vessel with two ounces of pure white wax, and as soon as it gets cool—not cold—stir in six ounces of rose water.

15. Just one more delightful preparation—the *Cream of Lemons*. An ounce of spermaceti and half an ounce of oil of almonds, to which, as it cools, add eight drops of the oil of lemons.

And now St. Claus takes up his wallet and once more escapes up the chimney or through the keyhole. Before he goes, however, he breathes a blessing on his readers, and says from his heart—Girls all, I wish you a happy Christmas and such a jolly New Year!

