

DECEMBER

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December 6: Feast of Saint Nicholas

SAINT NICHOLAS has been for hundreds of years a popular saint in the East and in the West, greatly famed as a worker of miracles. There are many charming legends concerning him. One tells of an occasion in heaven when all the saints came together to talk and to drink a little wine. Saint Basil filled the golden cups from the golden jug, and everyone was deep in conversation when it was noticed that Saint Nicholas was nodding. One of the blessed nudged him until he awoke, and asked why he was slumbering in such good company.

"Well, you see," he told them, "the enemy has raised a fearful storm in the Aegean. My body was dozing perhaps, but my spirit was bringing the ships safe to shore."

Saint Nicholas is the saint of mariners and also of bankers, pawnbrokers, scholars, and thieves! But he is especially the saint of children, and is known among them in various countries as Santa Claus, Kris Kringle, Pelznickel. There have even been invented servants to accompany him and to deal with the children who have been bad. Saint Nicholas is considered too kind to give scoldings and punishments, so, in Austria Krampus, in Germany Knecht Rupprecht, and in Holland Black Peter go along with him, armed with a stout switch, while Saint Nicholas himself simply gives and gives.

Another very old legend tells us of the saint's kindness to the three daughters of a poor nobleman. They were about to be sold into slavery, because they had no dowry, when Saint Nicholas stole to their home and on three nights in succession dropped a bag of gold down the chimney. This is said to explain why three balls are the pawnbrokers' sign and why the saint drops gifts for children down the chimney.

Devotion to Saint Nicholas began in Asia Minor, where he was a bishop, and it was brought to Russia by an emperor who was witness to some of his miraculous works. It spread through Lapland and into Scandinavia, to other European countries, and finally to America. Up to that time Saint Nicholas had been pictured as a lean and ascetic bishop. In America, he became fat and jolly, and his miter was turned into a winter cap, his vestments into a snow suit. But he has kept his reindeer from Lapland, his propensity for chimneys acquired in Asia Minor, and the generosity of his heart.

A French legend tells that long ago Our Lady gave Lorraine to Saint Nicholas as a reward for his kindness to

the world. He is still the special patron of that province and on his eve children hang up their stocking, saying:

Saint Nicolas, mon bon patron
Envoyez-moi quelqu' chose de bon.

In Holland Saint Nicholas puts in an appearance on the eve of his feast. As the children sing, the door flies open and on the floor drop candies and nuts—right on a white sheet that has been spread out just in case. And after he has gone, there is hot punch and chocolate and boiled chestnuts served with butter and sugar. And in the morning, children find in the shoes they have set before the fire toys and many other good things—candy hearts and spice cakes, "letterbankets," which were candies or cakes in the form of the child's initials, ginger cakes or "taai-tai" in patterns of birds and fish and the form of the saint himself. He also brings a hard cookie, called "Speculaus."

Speculaus

1/2 cup butter	2-1/2 cups cake flour
1 cup sugar	1/2 teaspoon baking powder
1 egg	1 teaspoon cinnamon
1/2 lemon rind, grated	1/2 teaspoon salt

Cream the butter and sugar, add the egg, and continue beating. Add the grated lemon rind and the flour sifted with the baking powder, cinnamon, and salt. Let the dough rest overnight in a cool place. Roll out as thinly as possible—about the thickness of the back of a knife blade. Cut into desired shape and bake at 350 degrees F. for fifteen to twenty minutes.

In Switzerland Saint Nicholas parades the streets, his arms full of red apples, cookies, and prunes for the children who crowd to him. In Austria and Germany he throws gilded nuts in at the door while Rupprecht and Krampus, the spoilsports, throw in a few birch twigs.

In Poland if there is a red sunset on Saint Nicholas' Day, it is because the angels are busily baking the Saint's Honey Cakes.

Ciastka Miodowe (Honey Cakes)

1/2 cup honey	1 teaspoon soda
1/2 cup sugar	1/2 teaspoon cinnamon
1 egg	1/2 teaspoon nutmeg
2 egg yolks	1/4 teaspoon cloves
4 cups flour	1/4 teaspoon ginger

Warm the honey slightly and combine with the sugar. Add eggs and beat well. Sift the flour with the soda and spices and stir into the honey batter thoroughly. Let the dough rest overnight. Roll dough to 1/4-inch thickness; cut out with a cookie cutter. Brush with the slightly beaten white of an egg, press half a blanched almond into each cookie and bake at 375 degrees F. for about fifteen minutes.

December 7: Feast of Saint Ambrose

This is the feast day of the great fourth-century bishop of Milan who censured an emperor for his cruelty and an empress for her heresy, and yet who was known to be ready to listen to the woes of any who wished to consult him. Saint Ambrose is particularly remembered for his great charity to the poor to whom he gave away all his wealth. Among his own people of Milan, who even today boast of being “Ambrosiani,” the following story is told:

One day, although Saint Ambrose had increased the portions of meat he gave to the poor, so many came he found there would not be enough for all. It occurred to him then that if he had the slices of meat beaten flat and coated with nourishing egg and with bread crumbs, it would seem like more; in other words, his idea was what we came to call “meat-extending” in our own days of wartime rationing. On the pulpit of Saint Ambrose’s great cathedral in Milan is carved the scene of a banquet of the poor in commemoration of his fine invention.

Saint Ambrose’s recipe bears the name of “Costoletta alla Milanese”—which sounds much more poetic than the English breaded chops.

Costoletta alla Milanese (Veal Chop Milanese)

4 veal chops	salt and pepper
1 egg	1 cup bread crumbs
6 tablespoons butter	

Have the veal chops cut about 1/2 inch thick. Beat the egg with one tablespoon water and season with salt and pepper. Dip the chops first into bread crumbs, then into beaten egg, and again into bread crumbs. Melt the butter and fry the chops for about ten minutes on each side—until golden brown. Serve on a hot platter with slices of lemon dusted with chopped parsley.

December 24: Christmas Eve

No feast is so steeped in faith, in tradition, and in drama as this eve of the birth of Christ. Everything contributes to its dramatic qualities—the star-filled night, the angels and their message, the manger, the shepherds, the Eastern princes journeying from afar, the human family and the heavenly birth, the whole wonderful mingling of the material and the supernal, of poverty and wealth, of body and spirit. Even its smallest traditions lend themselves to the customs of the home.

Perhaps for this reason, because it is so definitely a dramatic re-creation in memory of this night, we speak here of the “Wigilia,” the traditional Christmas Eve supper of Poland. In the homes of that country, stalks of grain are placed in the four corners of the dining room, with a prayer for plenty in the years to come. Then bits of hay, symbolic

of the manger in Bethlehem, are strewn beneath the tablecloth, which must be hand woven. The youngest child is set to watch for the first star of the evening, and when it appears he runs to tell the rest of the family. Then supper begins, as tradition has ordered it, with the breaking of the “Oplatek,” a semi-transparent unleavened wafer made in an iron mould and stamped with scenes of the Nativity. Each one at the table breaks off a piece and eats it as a symbol of their unity in Christ.

This is a meatless meal for it is a fast day. The number of the courses is fixed at seven, nine, or eleven. It is considered unlucky to have an odd number of persons at table, and relatives are invited, especially those who have no family of their own.

The soups are three in number, and always include “Barszcz” (a beet soup). There are three fish dishes—whole pike or carp, fish puffs, and salt herring; three accompanying dishes—homemade noodles with poppy seeds, red cabbage with mushrooms, and cheese “Pierogi” (dumplings).

Sandacz Pieczony (Baked Pike)

pike, left whole	1 cup cream
salt	1 cup white wine
1 onion	1/2 cup butter
juice of 1 lemon	

Clean and salt fish and cover with onion slices. Let stand at least one hour. Cover with cream, wine, melted butter and lemon juice. Bake at 350 degrees F. for 30 to 45 minutes.

Kapusta Czerwona z Grzyby (Red Cabbage and Mushrooms)

1 small head red cabbage	2 tablespoons butter
1 small onion, chopped fine	2 cups mushrooms
	2 tablespoons sour cream
salt and pepper	

Quarter the cabbage and cook in salted water for fifteen minutes. Drain, cool, and chop fine. Saute onion in butter, add chopped mushrooms, and saute for five minutes. Add chopped cabbage and continue to cook until flavors are blended. Add sour cream and cool.

Pierogi (Dumplings)

2 cups flour	1/2 teaspoon salt
2 eggs	1/2 cup water

Heap flour on a bread board and make a hole in the center. Drop eggs into the hole and cut into the flour. Add salt and water and knead until firm. Let rest for ten minutes in a warmed bowl, covered. Divide dough in halves and roll thin. Cut circles with a large biscuit cutter. Place a tea-

spoonful of filling on each round of dough. Moisten edges with water, fold over, and press edges firmly together. Be sure they are well sealed. Drop "pierogi" into salted boiling water. Cook gently for three to five minutes. Serve with brown butter and bread crumbs and sour cream.

Cheese Filling for Pierogi

1 cup cottage cheese	3 tablespoons sugar
1 teaspoon melted butter	3 tablespoons currants
1 egg beaten	1/4 teaspoon cinnamon

Cream the cheese with the butter. Add other ingredients and mix well.

The Polish desserts for "Wigilia" are also three: a fruit compote made with twelve dried fruits (symbolic of the twelve Apostles), pastries shaped like horns of plenty and filled with puree of chestnuts, and a variety of cakes. Among the latter is

Mazurek

1 cup sugar	1/2 cup butter
2 cups flour	1 egg
1/4 teaspoon salt	3 tablespoons cream

Sift dry ingredients. Cut butter in flour mixture with a pastry cutter or a knife until crumbly. Mix beaten egg with cream and add to mixture. Mix lightly by hand and spread on buttered cookie sheet. Bake at 350 degrees F. for thirty minutes. Take from oven and cover with fruit topping. Bake twenty minutes longer. When cool, decorate with candied cherries, angelica, and candied orange peel, and cut in 1 x 2 inch pieces.

Fruit Topping for Mazurek

1/2 lb. raisins	1/2 cup sugar
1/2 lb. dates	2 eggs
1/2 lb. figs	juice of 1 lemon
1/4 lb. nut meats	juice of 1 orange

Chop fruits and nuts with a hand chopper. (Do not put through a grinder.) Add sugar, eggs, and lemon and orange juice. Mix very well. Spread over baked pastry.

At the end of the Polish supper the numerous beautiful Christmas carols are sung and presents are exchanged between members of the household. In some places the remains of the "Wigilia" feast is given to the animals and bees and even offered to the trees on the farm, in the hope that all living things will prosper which have been fed thus on Our Lord's first night on earth.

In certain countries a Christmas tree for the birds is prepared, made of bundles of grain saved from the harvest and set on poles in field or garden. And in Scandinavia there is even a bowl of rice and milk put aside for the

"Jule-nissen," the friendly elf who lives in the attic or barn and sees that things go smoothly.

Animals are connected in many ways with the customs of Christmas Eve, for there is a widespread belief that they too must share in the blessings of Christmas. After all, did they not kneel to adore the Christ Child even before the shepherds came? Did they not, in fact, give Him the hospitality of their home when He first came to earth? There is a delightful tradition that at midnight on Christmas Eve all farm animals will be found on their knees; and that on that one night they can speak the language of men, to be understood, however, only by the pure in heart. An old English broadside depicts various animals and beasts with Latin inscriptions coming from their mouths. The cock crows, "Christus natus est" (Christ is born). The raven inquires, "Quando" (When)? The crow replies, "Haec Nocte" (This night). An ox lows, "Ubi" (Where)? And a lamb bleats out, "Bethlehem."

There is not one country without its special dishes for this eve of Christmas, not one without its traditional food or drink.

In England for many years the favorite drink was the posset cup, a mixture of milk and ale served in a large pot, accompanied by a ladle. As the pot was passed to each guest, a goodly draught was taken by each, and with it was usually eaten a slice from a great apple pie. On this night "waits" or companies of carol singers went from house to house singing the lovely English Christmas carols. The usual ending, "God bless the master of this house," was the signal for coffee and cakes or a warming toast with hot buttered rum.

Hot Buttered Rum

1 lump sugar	1 jigger rum
boiling water	1 pat butter

Butter the inside of an earthenware mug. Drop in the sugar, fill not quite half full with boiling water, add the rum and pat of butter, and stir. This makes one portion.

Italy has its "Cenone," or Christmas Eve supper, where fish figures prominently and a popular dish is "Capitone," made with eels, usually fried. And Italian housewives prepare in advance for Christmas Day a sausage "ravioli" and the "panettone," or currant loaf, so special to festival occasions.

In Greece Saint Basil shares the honors of Christmas Eve, when his cake waits ready to be divided at the evening meal. The first piece is cut for the saint, and then one for each member of the household. As each receives his share, it is dipped into a bowl of wine with the words, "This is for our grandfather, Saint Basil."

Armenia's simple Christmas Eve meal is fried fish, lettuce,

and boiled spinach, because there is a tradition here that this was the supper eaten by Our Lady the night that Christ was born.

In Austria on Christmas Eve, every house is filled with the aroma of "Fruchtbrod" as it receives the visit of the "Anglockler," or bellringers, who go from place to place singing carols, sometimes two of their number impersonating Mary and Joseph seeking shelter at the inn. In Germany the Christmas observances go back to the start of Advent, when a wreath is hung, usually from the ceiling of the living room, and to it a silver star is added each day, and each week a red candle. Also in advance is prepared the "Christstollen" (a long loaf of bread made with dried fruits and citron) as well as the "Lebkuchen" and marzipan, regarded as important holiday foods. On Christmas Eve the family gathers beneath the Advent wreath and sings carols. Then the Christmas tree is lighted and the gifts are distributed.

In Norway families gather around the table to partake of the "Molje," a rich liquid in which the meats for next day have been cooked, dipping into it with pieces of "Fladbrod," the hard Norwegian bread. And in Provence, we find a somewhat similar custom of dipping bread into the "Raito," a ragout made of a bewildering number of ingredients—onions, tomatoes, bay leaves, garlic, walnuts, thyme, rosemary, parsley, red wine, capers, and black olives, a wonderful mixture which has simmered for hours in olive oil.

In places all over the world, after the evening meal, people troop to the Midnight Mass that honors the birth of Christ. Some go through the snows of a northern winter and some through the gentler southern night, pressing into the churches, large and small, united, no matter what their nationality, in this night of the coming of the Child to earth; for the adoration of the shepherds began a continuity of worship which has never ceased. And in churches as well as beneath the Christmas tree in many homes thousands kneel before the Crib or Creche a representation, large or small, of the stable scene in Bethlehem, which received its inspiration from the good Saint Francis of Assisi.

After Midnight Mass in France, worshippers in the great cathedrals or in little village churches go home to eat the bountiful "Reveillon" breakfast, for now the fast is over and Christmas Day is at hand. The "Reveillon" varies between the city dinner with its conventional elegance of baked ham, roast capon, "vol-au-vent," salad, cakes, fruit and wines, and the traditional country meal consisting of "boudin grille" (grilled blood sausage), "pommes cuites au four" (baked potato), "vin chaud sucre parfume a la cannelle" (mulled wine), or to put it literally, for culinary French is so delightful, "hot sugared wine perfumed with cinnamon."

The poorest in town or country may have eaten nothing but a bit of cheese washed down with "vin ordinaire"; but at least they will have "reveillonne."

Truffled Capon

1 capon	pinch of thyme
1 lb. truffles	2 lbs. chestnuts
2 onions	chicken stock
salt and pepper	1/2 cup cream, or more
1 clove garlic	2 tablespoons sweet butter
1 bay leaf	1/2 lb. mushrooms
24 oysters	

Singe and clean a fine fat fowl. Make a stuffing with truffles, peeled and sliced, the chopped onions, salt, pepper, 1 finely minced clove of garlic, a bay leaf, a pinch of thyme, and the chestnuts which have been boiled until just tender in some chicken stock and drained. If too dry, moisten the stuffing with 1/2 cup of cream. Stuff the fowl, spread with a buttered cloth, and roast at 325 degrees F., allowing about twenty minutes to the pound. A half hour before the bird is ready to come from the oven, remove the cloth, and brush 1/2 cup of cream over it. Thicken the gravy with a little flour and add more cream if necessary. Strain and add the mushrooms which have been sliced and sauteed in a little butter and the oysters, allowing the sauce to cook only until the edges of the oysters begin to curl. Serve at once.

In many countries Christmas Eve brings with it the pleasant custom of the trimming of the tree. While the ornaments of today differ greatly from those of past generations, almost every family cherishes some of the old to mix with the new—

the wax angel with wings that have been repaired again and again, the intricate colored balls, the glass icicles. Fortunately to be seen no more are the candles in their little snapper sockets, for these have given place to the safer electric bulbs. Well we remember the continuous agitation and the precautions taken in earlier days lest the tree catch fire. Our mothers always saw to it that the tree was set well away from the wall, and spent most of the time it was lighted circling about it watchfully, a cup of water in one hand, ready to put out any conflagration.

The origin of the Christmas tree is disputed. Some say it goes back to the Jewish Feast of Lights. In the days of the Druids, Saint Wilfrid is said to have asked his converts to adopt the balsam fir tree instead of the oak which had been the symbol of their former idolatry: "It is the wood of peace, the sign of an endless life with its evergreen branches. It points to heaven. It will never shelter deeds of blood but rather be filled with the loving gifts and rites of kindness." And when Ansgarius preached Christ to the Vikings, he referred to the fir tree as a symbol of the faith, for it was, he said, as high as hope, as wide as love, and bore the sign of the cross on every bough.

We know that in European countries in the late Middle Ages, fir trees were brought into the homes and ornamented with paper roses, apples, sweets, and gold leaf. Germany is usually credited with having had the first real Christmas trees, and they are mentioned in books as early as 1604. Prince Albert, longing for the "Weihnachtsbaum" of his childhood at Rosenau, is said to have brought the

Christmas tree to England.

Just when the tree entered American homes is not certain, but it is surmised that the custom arrived with the Hessian soldiers in the British army during the Revolution. They set up and trimmed trees at Christmas as they did in their homeland, and the custom became widespread with the influx of German immigrants in the next century.

For the American family and the friends who gather today, either before or after midnight services in the churches, to trim the tree of Christmas, we suggest American refreshments of a piping hot oyster stew:

Cream Oyster Stew

6 oysters	salt and pepper
4 tablespoons butter	paprika
3/4 cup scalded cream	oyster crackers

Drain the oysters, reserving the liquor. Heat 2 tablespoons of butter, add the oysters, and cook until the edges begin to curl. Add the oyster liquor and bring to the boiling point. Add the scalded cream and season with salt and pepper. Serve in a bowl, topped with the remaining butter and dusted with paprika, and with oyster crackers on the side. Multiply this recipe by the number of portions desired.

December 25: Christmas Day

The world's greeting for this blessed feast is "Peace on earth to men of good will!" It still rings out over the world today, as it did almost two thousand years ago in Bethlehem—a universal greeting expressing a universal hope. Even in lands torn by war and hatred, hearts remember these words and guard them for the future, awaiting the day when the bells of Christmas will once more, as John Keble says in his lovely hymn:

To high and low glad tidings tell
How God the Father loves us well.

Every country of the world has its time-honored customs for Christmas Day, but nowhere are they so heartwarming as in England. And, since our own ideal Christmas celebration is much like the English, we will put aside on this day the customs and food of other countries and deal exclusively with an English and American Christmas dinner." And did they actually eat the boar's head?" we asked a friend who was born and bred in England and knew its traditions. He assured us that they did, and also that the custom is still maintained there in at least one place—Queen's College at Oxford.

He told in this connection the perhaps apocryphal story of the origin of the boar's head as a Christmas viand. In medieval days a student at Queen's College was walking in the forest, studying his Aristotle, when he was surprised

by a boar which rushed out from the brush to attack him. The student crammed his book down the animal's throat and choked it to death. However, he did not want to lose his treasured Aristotle, and so the boar's neck was cut off and the student's book restored. And since no one wanted to waste the head, it was roasted and eaten for Christmas dinner at the college table.

In the old days the boar's head was served at the very beginning of the feast, on a gold or silver platter befitting the dignity of the dish. Circled with bay leaves and rosemary, its tusks decorated with bright apples or oranges, it was brought to the table with stately ceremonial, attended by music.

The boar's head is still eaten not only at Oxford, but in other places in England, as well as in Brittany and in Central Europe. Should any modern reader be interested in the preparation of this "noblest dish on the board," here is how it is made according to the Vicomte de Mauduit who tells us how it was prepared in his ancestral home. The head was boned, leaving only the jawbones (to retain the head's shape) and the tusks. A stuffing made of minced pig's liver, chopped apples, a little onion, sage, and rosemary was used to coat the inside of the head. A second stuffing consisting of sausage meat, pieces of tongue, truffles, apples, mushrooms, pistachio nuts, and spices, the whole moistened with Calvados, was then placed inside the head. The head was wrapped in a cloth and boiled for eight or nine hours, boiling water being added as required. It was then allowed to cool and the ears, which had been cut off previously and boiled separately, were replaced in their proper position with small skewers. It is interesting to note that in modern England, when a boar's head is not available, a pig's head is used; and the meat cut up, mixed with various ingredients and boiled in a cloth. When the dish is ready, it is filled into a boar's head mould. Holes are left for the eyes and "these can be bought with the tusks from the supplier if required."

Another delicacy long associated with the English Christmas was roast peacock, also heralded to the feudal banquet table by special rites with music. In royal surroundings the peacock was not brought to table by serving men; but one of the court ladies carried in her own dainty hands the platter on which rested the lordly bird—"food for lovers and meat for lords." Its great colorful tail spread wide, its beak gilded, stuffed with spices and wild herbs, the bird must have been a fair sight and a dish of fine flavor.

Occasionally in a later England a little deception was practiced in the matter of the peacock. Washington Irving in his "Christmas in Old England" relates that he on one occasion looked with awe on the pie, decorated with the spreading tail feathers of a peacock, which covered a good bit of the dining table of his host. After a while the squire, whose conscience evidently bothered him, confessed that what was before him was really only a pheasant pie, though peacock should of course have been served—"but

there has been such a mortality among the peacocks this summer that I could not prevail on myself to have one killed."

Of course, boars and peacocks were not the only outstanding dishes of the older English Christmas, for old accounts speak of a quantity and variety of special concoctions that leave us gasping in amazement. We may, however, mention in passing one of them—a famous pie prepared for a peer of the realm in an earlier century. It is said to have contained, besides the crust, the following: four geese, three rabbits, four wild ducks, two woodcocks, six snipe, four partridges, two curlews, six pigeons, seven blackbirds; and it was served on a cart built especially to hold it!

Of the desserts traditional to the English Christmas dinner of early times none was more common than the plum pudding. The richness of its ingredients was said to symbolize the offerings of the Wise Men. Its rival, and sometimes in those heartier days its accompaniment, was the mince pie, alike endowed with meaning and considered on account of its shape, to resemble the manger bed of the Infant Jesus. We shall return to these desserts below, for, although the rare animals and fowl have been replaced by more usual and easily procurable fare, the plum pudding and mince pie are still prime favorites today.

The modern Christmas dinner ranges from elegance to simplicity, as the taste desires and the purse permits. Cookery books list menus in bewildering variety. But perhaps the best suggestions for a Christmas dinner are to be found not in a cookery book but in the pages of a novel—Charles Dickens' "Christmas Carol," read aloud each year in many American homes on Christmas Eve, told over and over on radio and television. The famous Christmas dinner of the Cratchit family can be easily duplicated, and, with changes, offers a fine menu for any home today.

First as regards the goose "that feathered phenomenon to which a black swan was a matter of course," described as served with gravy "hissing hot,"—we have given directions for its cooking on page 123. But here is a recipe for

Sage and Onion Stuffing

6 onions	1/2 teaspoon poultry seasoning
2 cups bread cubes	1 teaspoon salt
1 tablespoon sage	
1/4 teaspoon pepper	

Cook the onions in a little water until tender. Combine with the bread cubes (the bread should be a little stale) and the remaining ingredients.

The potatoes mashed by Master Peter Cratchit, with what is described as "incredible vigor," in one of our families are served circled about with green peas; and over the white and green are laid strips of red pimiento—the traditional Christmas colors.

For the apple sauce "sweetened up" by Miss Belinda Cratchit, it should not be necessary to give a recipe, but here we would like to add a dish to the Cratchit meal—a salad or

Cole Slaw with Boiled Dressing

Remove the outer leaves and stalks of a small head of cabbage. Shred the cabbage and soak in ice water for an hour. Drain thoroughly before using.

Boiled Dressing

1 teaspoon dry mustard	1/2 cup water
1 tablespoon sugar	2 egg yolks
1/2 teaspoon salt	1/4 cup vinegar
2 tablespoons flour	2 tablespoons butter
1/4 teaspoon paprika	sour cream (optional)

Dissolve the dry ingredients in the cold water and mix thoroughly. In the top of a double boiler beat the egg yolks with the vinegar and add the dissolved ingredients. Cook, stirring constantly over boiling water until smooth. Add the butter and cool. When chilled, the dressing may be thinned with sour cream if desired.

We have come at last to the plum pudding—"like a speckled cannonball, so hard and firm, blazing in half of a half-a-quarter of ignited brandy, and bedight with Christmas holly stuck into the top." For after all there is no other such Christmas dessert. One could write poetry—in fact, many have—on this subject, and one could also rhapsodize in prose.

A plum pudding is, even at its simplest, a matter of many ingredients and of preparation far in advance. One of us remembers how it was made by an English grandmother. First came the buying of bowls, new each year and of various sizes, for many of the puddings were destined as gifts to relatives and friends: a big family got a big pudding, the small family a small one. Everyone was called on to help in the preparation, in the cutting up of the orange peel and lemon, the seeding of the raisins and currants. For this latter work the children of the family were pressed into service, and were offered an inducement: for every ten raisins the child got one for himself.

The ingredients were mixed in a vast yellow bowl used only for that purpose—very little flour but vast amounts of fruit and, to moisten, brandy and whiskey and ale. Over each white bowl went a new piece of unbleached muslin. The huge wash boiler was brought from the cellar, heaved to the top of the range and half filled with water. When it boiled, in went the puddings. There they tumbled about for hours, sometimes clicking against each other in their exuberance.

A few square inches of this pudding was all that even the

most venturesome trencherman dared consume at a sitting. To us no other has ever tasted like it, not even the darkest and fruitiest plum pudding from the South. Grandmother Payne's recipe has been lost, but here is one almost as good.

Plum Pudding

1-1/2 lbs. raisins	grated rind of 2 lemons
1-3/4 lbs. currants	1 oz. ground nutmeg
1 lb. sultanas	1/2 oz. ground bitter
2 lbs. sugar	almonds
2 lbs. bread crumbs	2 lbs. finely chopped suet
1 oz. cinnamon	16 eggs
6 oz. finely cut citron	1/4 pt. brandy
1 cup brandy	

Seed and cut up the raisins but do not grind them. Wash and dry the currants. To the fruits add all the dry ingredients and the suet together, and moisten with the well-beaten eggs and the brandy. Butter and flour a piece of unbleached muslin, put the pudding in the cloth, and tie it up tightly. Put in a large pot of boiling water and boil for seven hours, adding boiling water if necessary. Remove from the cloth, pour a cup of warmed brandy over the pudding, stick a sprig of holly in the top, and set aflame as the pudding is being carried in.

Mincemeat for Pie

1 lb. chopped boiled beef	juice of 2 oranges
1/2 lb. chopped suet	juice of 1 lemon
1 lb. dried currants	grated peel of 1/2 lemon
1 lb. raisins	2 cups cider
1 lb. citron	1 cup brandy
1 lb. sugar	1 cup sherry
1/2 teaspoon salt	1 teaspoon cloves
grated peel of ?	1 teaspoon cinnamon
orange	1 teaspoon mace
3 lbs. apples	1 teaspoon nutmeg

Mix all of the ingredients and store in a crock in a cool place or fill into sterilized jars. If the mincemeat is to be used considerably later, omit the apples from the original recipe, and when filling the piecrust add an equal amount of sliced apples.

Dinner being over, both ours and the Cratchits', we might follow their example and group ourselves before the hearth to partake of apples and oranges and chestnuts roasted over the fire—and, of course, of the famous "compound." This was a mixture of lemons and gin and water made by Bob Cratchit, before dinner was ready, as Tiny Tim on his crutch stood watching beside him.

And we should certainly end the day, as Bob Cratchit did, with a toast: "A Merry Christmas to us all, my dears. God bless us every one."

from **FEAST DAY COOKBOOK**

by KATHERINE BURTON & HELMUT RIPPERGER

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