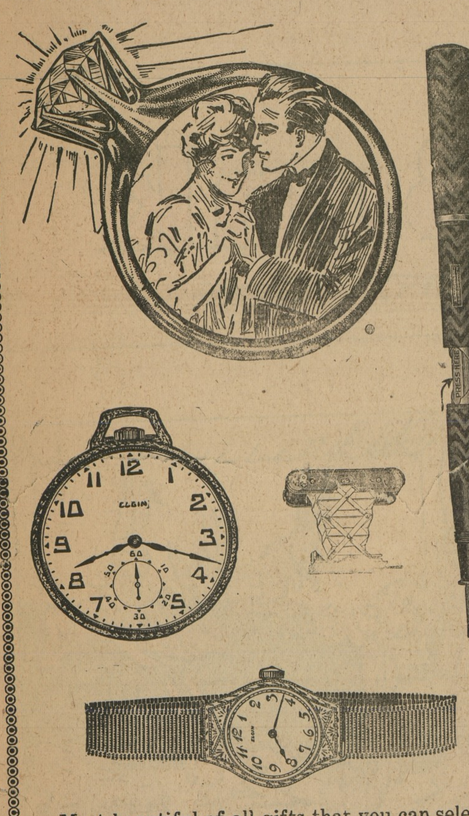
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Christmas Time

By THOMAS A. CLARK
Dean of Men, University of Illinois

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OF ALL the illusions of childhood, I gave up with most reluctance those that clustered around Christmas.

The old saint who climbed down the chimney into the fireplace in our sitting room and filled our stockings on Christmas Eve was as real to me as Moses or George Washington or my grandfather or any other person of whom I had heard but whom I had never personally met. He is to me real today when I am in reminiscent moods, perhaps because I have always wanted him to be real. Long after I recognized all the subterfuges which were being practiced on me as a child at Christmas time, I never admitted them even to myself, for I was quite willing to submit to the deceptions; I was made happy by all the ceremonies and surprises.

I have never in all my life been away from home at Christmas time; I hope I never shall be. Christmas joys are for me the most delightful; Christmas memories, the most precious. Everything about our holiday preparations at home was of the simplest



character, but the season was full of possibilities and surprises. The dinner lacked the conventional roast turkey. Instead there was a roast goose or a huge joint of roast beef (following the English custom with which my mother was familiar) with suet dumplings and gravy. There was always, too, a loaf of spiced bread and plum pudding with a delightful sauce of drawn butter, and there was mince pie followed with nuts and raisins and other goodies.

Just as "home" always suggests to me sugar cookies, hot from the oven, with mother warning me not to eat so many as to make myself sick, so Christmas invariably brings to my mind the thought of raisins. They were in the spiced bread which mother made, the plum pudding was congested with them, I found them always on Christmas morning in my stocking with other good things to eat, and there was regularly on Christmas day a dish of them on the table to be eaten after dinner. It was not altogether what we had to eat that gave Christmas such a high place in my regard, though that helped materially, no doubt. It was the mystery, the anticipation, the preparation and the surprise of it all; the gathering together of all the family, the games, the roaring fire in the fireplace, and the general hilarity and good will prevailing that made Christmas for me the best loved of all the holidays of the entire year.

"We are rather outgrowing Christmas," a friend said to me a few days ago. "I don't believe it is ever going to be for any one again just as it used to be."

I suppose not; though there are some events connected with the celebration of Christmas, there is the real Christmas which I am sure I shall never outgrow. If I should hang up my stocking by the fireplace now, I feel just as sure as I ever did that old Saint Nick would get in some way before morning and fill it as he used to do when I was a child. My faith in Christmas has never waned, and my need for it. I practice economy badly at any time, but with the greatest difficulty at Christmas time, and especially since the prices of my own particular varieties of frankincense and myrrh have been so affected by the economic conditions. It is what is in our hearts that makes Christmas real. The song of



the angels is in the air if the Christmas spirit is in our hearts, Christmas is as great a reality as it ever was, if we will make it so, and for us all the angels are again proclaiming as they did that night in Palestine, centuries ago, "Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good will toward men."

I shall hang up my stocking at Christmas Eve, there will be raisins in it in the morning. I have faith that the old Christmas joys will be mine once more.



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