

# "Do You Know Christmas is Coming Tomorrow?"

"Tomorrow is Christmas! Tomorrow is Christmas!" cried little Fay, clapping her hands as she danced along the sidewalk in softly falling snow. "Did you know tomorrow is Christmas, Fido?" And Fido jumped and barked and rolled in the snow, and bounded up again, and ran scurrying off, saying as plainly as he could that he knew something delightful was at hand.

Fay had seen the Christmas tree and had been told how wonderfully beautiful it would be on the morrow, with its lighted taper and wonderful presents, and her fancy had pictured a paradise, and little five-year-old Fay was surely the happiest child in grim old smoky St. Louis.

"Did you know Christmas is coming tomorrow, sir," she asked the white-haired old man as she skipped along by his side.

"Why, to be sure it is! To be sure it is!" said he as an unwonted glow warmed up his heart again, and they walked along several blocks while she told him over and over again what she was going to have on the Christmas tree. Presently, he said, turning to her, "Where do you live little one?"

"At Twenty-fifth street and Cleveland Avenue," said she glibly.

"Well, you had better run home," said he. "Here we are at Grand Avenue, and papa and mamma will grow uneasy if their little one stays out too late, and it is already growing dusk. Yonder is that church, you see. Keep your eye on that, and you can find your way home."

And as he saw her, with a goodbye, go dancing through the snow, he went on to his own home, the happier for the short glint of sunshine from the little one's curls.

"Grand Avenue! Grand Avenue! I have never been so far as Grand Avenue before!" and she almost ran into a decrepit old woman bent with age, who was plodding through the now blinding snowstorm.

"Hello little golden curls! Where are you going this evening," she asked.

"Going home to our Christmas tree," said little Fay as she clapped her hands gayly. "Won't you come and go with me?"

"Oh, no. I have a more beautiful one. Come and see mine," said the old woman, while her eyes gazed keenly at the necklace little Fay wore.

"I must hurry home," said Fay. "I live down on Cleveland Avenue and Twenty-Fifth Street."

"That is just where I am going," said the little old woman, "so we will go along together." And asking about the Christmas tree, she started Fay to talking while they went on and on and on, and it kept growing darker and darker until they could scarcely see each other. Fay asked if they were not almost there, and the old woman said, "Yes, we are," and then she told Fay she would carry her if she was tired. Lifting her in her arms she did not seem such an old, decrepit creature at all, as she went stalking through the snow storm, while little Fay fell asleep thinking of Christmas.

The morning papers that Christmas morning called upon all generous people to add to the happiness of Christmas morning, and help to heal two wounded hearts by restoring to them their little daughter Fay, with "blue eyes and golden hair." The evening papers found clues, and chased them down, and thus it went day after day and week after week, but if the earth had swallowed her up, little Fay could not have disappeared more completely.

Winter had whitened the northern fields once again, when on the edge of a rolling river close to the limpid waters of the Gulf of Mexico, a band of strolling gypsies were encamped. Among the gypsies was a very fair little girl of perhaps six years, with matted, tangled hair that still showed its gold, and with eyes of heaven's deep blue that seemed to have a world of thought in them. She lay dreaming and hearing nothing of the talk going on in the tent until she heard the words, "Day after tomorrow will be Christmas, you know."

What was that? Christmas! She had not heard the word for a year! What memories it brought rushing, crowding back upon her

brain! Christmas!

When the hour for sleep came she was still thinking and thinking and she received a slap from the hard hand of old Naney for heedlessness, and she crawled off into a corner of the tent and cried softly to herself.

But she could not sleep. The picture of a kind, manly face, and the warmth of a mother's fond embrace remained and abided with her. Hour after hour passed in this way until at last she could stand it no longer. Slipping on her shoes and stockings and taking her little worn and ragged cloak, which reminded her of home, she went quietly and cautiously into the moonlight and over to the wagon road.

Which way should she turn? Surely home lay this way, and she ran along up the road, and for the first time in, oh, so many months laughed aloud in her glee.

After a while, she came to a railroad track. "Ah, that is the way to go home, surely," she thought. But how could she ride? She had not so much as a penny. Then she heard the hoarse whistle of an engine, the rumble of a heavy train, and the great iron horse with his carriage stood beside her.

Ah, if she only had money to pay for a ride! It was so far and already she was so tired. And she looked at the strong engine until she could hardly see it, for the tears would fill her eyes in spite of all her efforts. But just then, a great gust of smoke and steam came out and enveloped her, and to her it became a kind-faced old man, with a great, long, white beard. And as it wrapped its soft arms around her, it said, "I am the Spirit of Steam. As soft as I am, I draw this immense train of cars. But for me, they would lie here helpless and useless. When I am called, I respond with joy, and I leap through the air, whirling this great rumbling train after me by the weight of my little finger. Climb up the steps and get on my train. I will take care of you, and I will carry you home to papa and mamma, and the Christmas tree that was to be so very long ago shall come back again."

And wrapped in the arms of the Spirit of Steam, she climbed up the steps of the great engine and lay down in a corner. It was very black and dirty with coal, but she was so tired.

"Dick," said the engineer to the fireman as their train went thundering across the prairie, "Is this some joke of yours," and he pointed to a fair face partly covered with tangled curls, which lay sleeping in the corner.

"How on earth did she come there," asked Dick. And the blank amazement in his eyes was too genuine to be counterfeited.

But neither had any explanation to offer. Each in his heart thought perhaps it was a warning of coming danger or some sort of supernatural visitation to watch over them, and determined to keep the little one on the engine to the end of their run, if possible.

When the trainmen reached the end of their division, they learned that two freight wrecks had caused a demand for crews, and so they were ordered to continue straight through to St. Louis.

It was nearly daylight when little Fay opened her eyes and sat up. It was snowing, and the flakes were coming down thick and fast, and the sight made her heart leap for joy. The weather was just like that of a year ago, and she remembered every circumstance connected with that fateful Christmas Eve. On and on went the train.

After a while, they entered the suburbs of a great smoky city, for now it was broad daylight, and even the sun was trying to come up, and she could see the interminable row after row of houses, with the smoke from their chimneys curling upward in the still air. Presently, they came up to another station, and she heard a voice back on the train call "Grand Avenue."

"Grand Avenue! Grand Avenue!" whispered the Spirit of Steam as it came in through the cab window and wrapped her in its arms. "This is your place! Come down the steps and I will hold you in my arms."

And when the old engine pulled out from the station, and Jack and Dick found their strange passenger missing, they looked at each other, but said never a word.

And Fay was standing in a snowdrift. It was very cold, and she followed two men going up over the hill. She remembered Grand Avenue and the kind old gentleman who had told her to run home. But how could she find her way? And while she was thinking, and her finger and toes were growing cold, and her lip was beginning to tremble, she heard the chimes of the church and saw the spire that the kind old gentleman had pointed out to her, and away she went on the wings of the wind!

In fact, the wind would have to have very large wings and work them with prodigious force to go half as fast as she did. And when she did get into the yard of the old house, it seemed as if she would never be able to reach the door, for Fido would not let her by, but just pushed her down and played with her and kissed her and just barked until he cried. And when she couldn't get the door open and ran and knocked on the window, and saw papa and mamma sitting by a Christmas tree just like the one a year before, and they both sprang up and screamed and ran to the door, and she felt their loving embraces and tender kisses, her heart ran over with tears of love and happiness.

Ah, but wasn't that a Christmas! It would take a thousand yule logs to equal in Fay's eyes the little lighted tapers hanging from the limbs of the evergreen tree. It would take hundreds of wassail bowls to compare with the sugar plums and candies that delighted her eyes. And then the dolls and the wonderful watches with real hands, and the tin tigers and lions that looked so fierce you could hardly recognize them, and the candy mice and pigs that deserved to be eaten and met their deserts, and Noah's ark, with so many animals that you could not tell what half of them were, and ever so many wonderful things besides!

And when at last she lay so sweetly restless in mamma's arms, with papa looking fondly down, every bell in the city seemed to know it and shouted out the glad tidings as loud as its brazen throat could yell, only gradually quieting down in its excess of joy to join at the close in the harmonious refrain — "Peace on earth! Peace on earth!"

Excerpted from a short story by Harry W. Cockerill From the Catholic Journal

## Reminder of an old custom

Hundreds of old country people, especially of Irish birth, will remember the Christmas candle which is lighted and placed in the window at midnight of Christmas eve and allowed to burn there on the successive nights until it is all consumed. It is one of the most interesting of all the customs associated with the religious celebration of the Christian festival. It is symbolic, of course, of the "Light of the World," but some hold that with the mistletoe, the holly, and the festive practices of the season, it goes back to Druid or pagan origin and is derived from some olden symbolism of the returning warmth of the sun. However this may be, it is not generally known that the custom has been preserved in Canada to this day by a few old country people, comparatively speaking, to whom Christmas would not bear its holy message without the tall wax candle shining in their window.

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## Christmas ladders

A pretty suggestion for a Christmas festival is to substitute for the usual evergreen tree a large arch made of ladders and gay with berries and ribbons shining from the wealth of greens that cover it. In the center of the arch a large bell of holly or other greens, with a tongue of scarlet berries, is to be hung. Fastened to the rounds of the ladder and hidden as much as possible under the greens are to be concealed the Christmas gifts. These are to be distributed by half a dozen little boys dressed as brownies, who are to climb for them and to be directed by a beautiful maiden, who shall represent the German Christmas angel.

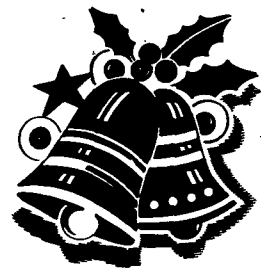
Reprinted from the Catholic Journal December 12, 1896



## Christmas dinners

"May good digestion wait on appetite, and health on both" is a good motto for your Christmas dinner. In this connection it should be remembered that nothing so promotes digestion as a cheerful heart and a clear conscience.


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## Spain's National Dishes

Two special dishes mark the Christmas dinner of Spain — almond soup, obtained by boiling sweet almonds in milk and passing them through a sieve, and, above all, a dish called besugo, which is nothing more than a large goldfish garnished with lemon, chopped garlic and oil and roasted before the fire.

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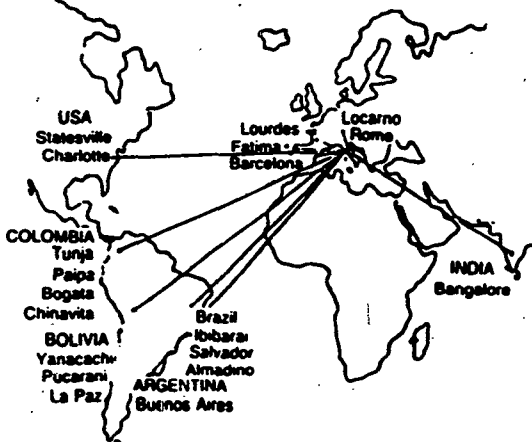
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