

# CONSIDERING CHRISTMAS

CHRISTMAS. . . I leave my mind a blank, drop the word into it and allow "free association" to take place. There float up out of the void a number of other words: plum pudding, turkey, presents, Christmas tree, stockings, good will towards all men, children's parties, jollification. The list looks harmless and obvious enough. But the psychoanalyst would have no difficulty in showing that it was extremely discreditable in its implications. Turkeys, for example, are almost as bad as snakes. Stockings need no comment. Children's parties must be regarded as unspeakable orgies. The inner meaning of Christmas trees can only be mentioned in scientific works published for the sole use of the medical and legal professions. Luckily, however, the experts at Helensville, Waipukurau and Inangahua would interpret it in three entirely different ways. That is the peculiar charm of a science based on the interpretation of symbols. Anything can mean anything else; it is merely a matter of taste and your favourite theory. Hence the great popularity of psycho-analysis among the lay public; hence also its almost total lack of scientific value. If we must have an interpreter to expound the inner meaning of these free associations evoked in us by the word "Christmas," let it be Charles Dickens. He was as reliable an expert as any of them.

SO much for psycho-analysis. As for plum pudding—I doubt whether I really like the stuff as much as I ought. True, I do not refuse it when it comes on to the table; I even eat of it copiously. But that is not so much because I enjoy it as on principle. Plum pudding is essentially English; foreigners, as a rule, turn pale at the sight of it. That is why it must be eaten. "England expects . . ." I whisper to myself, as the pudding comes flaming into the darkened dining-room. And I do my duty. But the only part of a plum pudding I really enjoy is the brandy butter. Brandy butter is one of the great culinary inventions of history. There have been Christmases (I am ashamed to confess it) when no plum pudding was made under my roof—only brandy butter, mountains of it. And the mince pies—where were they? Alas, they too were represented only by their flavouring: Hennessy's three stars. But these are secrets. Enough.

TURKEYS, unhappily, cannot be eaten with brandy. But they can, on the other hand, be eaten without cabbage. But turkey, I must confess, makes no compelling appeal to my palate. I eat it as I eat plum pudding—on principle. But secretly, when the roast is brought in on Christmas Day, I regret the living bird. It seems to me sad that a creature so fantastic, so nearly fabulous as a large cock turkey should be massacred in order to give me so little pleasure. If I were a rich man and had a country estate in the Bay of Plenty, I should keep, to strut along my terraces, not peacocks, but turkeys. Nothing but a natural death should end their pompous walking, their furious and apoplectic gobbling. Nothing—unless someone

## SOME FREE ASSOCIATIONS AND A FEW REFLECTIONS ON THE RITES AND CEREMONIES OF THE SEASON

were to give me that recipe for turning turkey into ambrosia,

IF TURKEYS are better alive than dead, Christmas trees, to my mind, are better dead. A fir tree in a pot, festooned with tinsel and blazing with candles, is a more friendly object than the same tree out of doors in the bush, among all its innumerable fellows. True, if it stood by itself or with only a few others of its kind I should like it well enough. Trees only become

formidable when they grow in quantities together. But then, how malevolent they are! That the ancient Teutons should have been worshippers of trees has never surprised me. I should be a tree-worshipper myself if I lived in a kauri forest—worshipping desperately in the hope of propitiating those malignant forces which lie so terrifyingly in wait among the woodland shadows. The cult of the Christmas tree is a relic of this ancient treeworship. With us, the tree is a symbol of

joy and merriment. Our feelings might not be quite the same if we lived in a bush instead of in towns.

I LIKE Christmas trees for the sake of the presents which hang from their branches. True, the majority of presents are, in themselves, remarkably unacceptable. Calendars are useless; so, in any numbers greater than unity, are diaries. As for "gift books," these are generally the very devil. Who wants new editions of Omar Khayyam? I certainly don't. But such few friends as I possess who can afford to give me something costing a guinea always seem to think I do. Less

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