

Carroll County Times "Carroll's Yesteryears" Articles

"Nineteenth Century Christmas Poetry"

Carroll County Times Article for 25 December 1994

by Jay A. Graybeal

Throughout the nineteenth century local newspaper editors carried poetry and literature columns on page one of their papers. Most of the materials were borrowed from other newspapers or magazines although some were written by local writers. Much of the Christmas poetry was like this following example which was reprinted in the December 22, 1894 edition of the Westminster newspaper, The Democratic Advocate.

A CHRISTMAS GATHERING

From London Society

The Christmas time has come again; the gladsome Christmas time;
The evergreen are berried bright, the boughs are white with rime;
From every steeple far and near the joy-bells pealing ring-
The voice of man's good will to man speaks forth in everything.

Warm glow the lights by cottage-hearth, in lordly mansions high,
And many a tale of love is told 'neath frosty starlit sky,
As merrily the sleigh bells ring and silvery laughter sweet
Blends with the crunching of the snow beneath the ponies' feet.

Here! strains of joyous music come from yonder crowded hall,
And sounds of mirth and twinkling feet proclaim the Christmas ball;
And glowing cheeks and gleaming gems and brighter eyes are there-
Tones of manhood, childhood's grace, and maidens' blushes fair.

The mistletoe hangs coy aloft, its polished beads of white
Mixed with the laurel and the bay and scarlet berries bright
Of glistening holly, whilst the yew peeps graceful from beneath
The glowing mass, and over all is twined the ivy wreath.

The little ten year-old cavalier assumes a mannish air,
The six-year flirt throws, conscious, back her wealth of golden hair;
A riper beauty sheds her smile a white-haired knight upon,
Whilst younger manhood envying turns, and looks half jealous on.

So Winter, once again made young, bethinks him of his Spring;
And spring looks up in Winter's face whilst youth is on the wing,
Forgetting, even as she smiles, Old Time another pace
Hath travell'd forward and hath touch'd, unseen, her winsome face.

Ring on, ring on, O Christmas bells peal out upon the air;
Grasp hands, O stalwart, bearded men; smile on, O maidens fair;
Laugh, darling bright-hair'd little ones, in your white blossoms prime;
Pay royal homage, one and all, to happy Christmas time!

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The time of mutual good will, the season to forgive,
Forget we bygone injuries, but kindness let live,
Let love strew flowers o'er the young, whilst Friendship cheers the old.
Erase the black line of the Past-the Future write in gold!

Not all Victorian poetry, however, was without humor as shown in a poem from the December 22, 1877 edition of the The Democratic Advocate:

THE NIGHT AFTER CHRISTMAS

'Twas the night after Christmas, when all through the house,
Every soul was a-bed, and as still as a mouse!
The stockings, so lately St. Nicholas' care,
Were emptied of all that was eatable there.
The darlings had duly been tucked in their beds-
With very full stomachs, and pains in their heads.
I was dozing away in my new cotton cap,
And Nancy was rather far gone in a nap,
When out in the nurs'ry arose such a clatter,
I sprang from my sleep, crying, "What is the matter!"
I flew to each bedside - still half in a doze - -
To open the curtains and throw off the clothes,
While the light of the taper served clearly to show
The piteous plight of those objects below;
For what to the fond father's eyes should appear
But the little pale face of each sick little dear?
For each pet that had crammed itself full as a tick,
I knew in a moment, now felt like Old Nick.
Their pulses were rapid, their breathing the same,
What their stomachs rejected I'll mention by name--
Now turkey, now stuffing, plum pudding, of course,
And custards, and crullers, and cranberry-sauce,
Before outraged nature, all went to the wall,
Yes, lollypops, flapdoodle, dinner and all;
Like pellets which urchins from popguns let fly,
Went figs, nuts and raisins, jam, jelly and pie,
Till each error of diet was brought to my view,
To the shame of mamma and Santa Claus too.
I turned from the sight, to my bedroom stepped back,
And brought ought a phial marked "Pulv. Ipecac,"
When my Nancy exclaimed - for their sufferings shocked her.
"Don't you think you had better, love, run for the Doctor?"
I ran - and was scarcely back under my roof,
When I heard the sharp clatter of old Jalap's hoof;
I might say that I hardly had turned myself round,
When the Doctor came into the room with a bound,

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He was covered with mud from his head to his feet,
And the suit he had on was his very worse suit;
He had hardly had time to put that on his back,
And he looked like a Falstaff half fuddled with sack,
His eyes, how they twinkled! Had the Dr, got merry?
His checks looked like Port and his breath smelt of Sherry;
He hadn't been shaved for a fortnight or so,
And the beard on his chin wasn't white as the snow.
But inspecting their tongues in spite of their teeth,
And drawing his watch from his waistcoat beneath,
He felt of each pulse, saying- "Each little belly
Must get rid" - here he laughed - "of the rest of that jelly."
I gazed on each chubby, plump, sick little elf,
And groaned when he said so, in spite of myself,
But a wink in his eye when he physicked our Fred,
Soon gave me to know I had nothing to dread.
He didn't prescribe, but went straightway to work,
And dosed all the rest, gave his trousers a jerk,
And, adding directions while blowing his nose,
He buttoned his coat, from his chair he arose,
Then jumped in his gig, gave old Jalap a whistle,
And Jalap jumped off as if pricked by a thistle;
But the Doctor exclaimed, ere he drove out of sight,
"They'll be well by to-morrow - good night, Jones, good night!"

Happy holidays from the Board and staff of the Historical Society of Carroll County.

Photo Caption: Artist Thomas Nast created this familiar portrait of Santa Claus in the late nineteenth century.