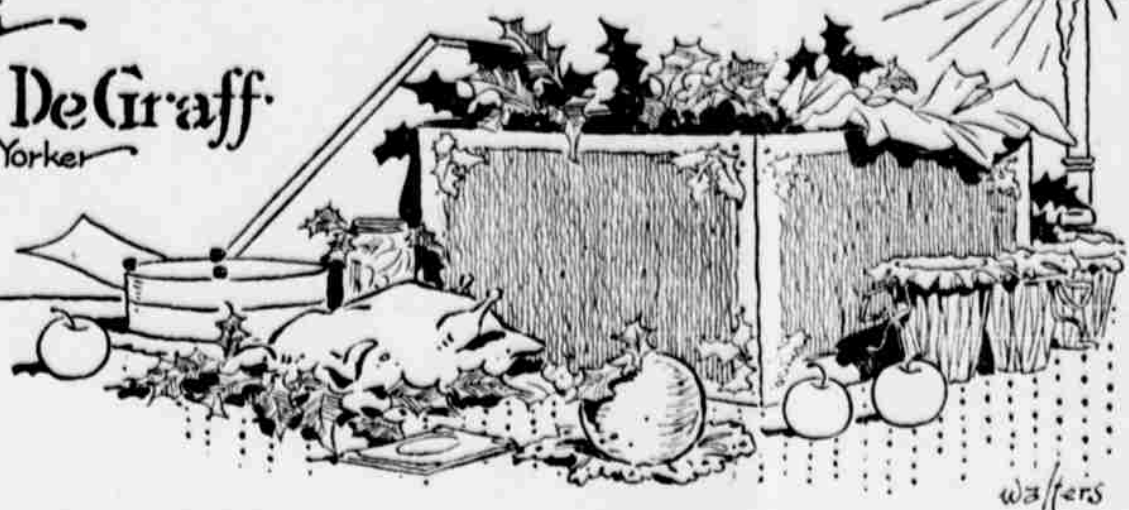


Uncle John's Christmas

Box

By Ellen E. DeGraff
In The Rural New Yorker



MYRTLE stopped playing on the organ, and whirled about, addressing the family gathered around the evening lamp.

"I've got a conundrum for you," she announced.

"One of those that has no answer, I'll bet," said Tim, who was popping corn over a bed of glowing coals. "I don't get caught twice the same way."

"All right, smarty! Count you out then. You'd only give some fool answer anyway. You're never serious."

"Come on with your conundrum," yawned Edith. "I need something to wake me up. This old algebra makes me sleepy."

"Well, here it is: How are we going to give any Christmas presents, with no crops, no money, no nothing?"

with crepe paper, twisted tightly, and the ends fringed. It then resembled the old-fashioned motto candles. That the motto or couplet might not be lacking, the following lines were written and inserted:

"Those Jell girls may be tart and sweet,
But I've heard that they lack spice.
If of me you'll deign to eat
I am sure you'll vote me nice."

Grandma made a wonderful fruit cake—the kind that lasts a year, and improves with age. This was surrounded with white parchment paper, and covered with a white paper dolly, and fancy edges. This was laid carefully over the waxed paper, which covered the frosting, studded thickly with whole hickory and butternut meats. The whole was packed into a round box, made by Myrtle's skillful fingers. To make it she cut two disks of cardboard of the required size, and two long strips of the same cardboard, one the height of the cake, the other narrower, for the cover. She bound the edges together with gummed tape, and covered their junction with narrow strips of gold paper. Then she neatly covered top and sides with Christmas paper, all holly and mistletoe. Lastly, she tied two bright scarlet ribbons about the box, one each way. She made plump bows, and, gathering the ends of the ribbons, sewed tiny sleigh bells on them, so that the box, when moved, gave forth a sweet musical sound.

Myrtle surveyed the box with satisfaction, her head on one side.

"You ought to please," she said. "You appeal to the eye, the ear, and the palate."

The box certainly did present an imposing appearance. On the inside of the cover appeared the lines:

"Of course this cake was made by mother;
She says if it don't suit, she'll make you another."

A great generous ball of cottage cheese was wrapped in paper and packed in a square box, with plenty of tissue paper in the corners. Accompanying it was the legend:

"If Esau had known of the cheese called 'cottage,'
He'd have traded for that, instead of the pottage."

There were two generous loaves of bread, one of "salt rising," the other yeast raised. On a card were the lines:

"Grandma says, when you were a boy,
And eating 'salt rising,' you never could stop;
But in case you tire of the old-fashioned kind,
Here's another loaf, raised with the hop."

Packed about the loaves, and neatly wrapped, each by itself, in parchment paper, were a dozen little individual butter pats, molded in the form of a rose. Myrtle wrote:

"We wonder if, when you eat, you'll mutter:
'Aha! That tastes like Old Home butter!'"

The mince pie was concocted with immense care, from the careful choosing and mixing of the ingredients, to the construction of the faultless, flaky crust. Just touched with the faintest hint of golden brown. This was carefully packed between two wooden plates, tied firmly together. On the top plate was written:

"When is it true that a man's a mince pie?
Cannot you take the hint?
Why, a man's a Mint Spy of course, you know,
When he acts as a spy in the mint."

The duck was, of course, the chef d'oeuvre of the whole undertaking. When it was ready, lying on its back, with its fat legs composed at its plump sides, it surely did look appetizing. The "Poet Lariat," as Tim called her, wrote the following:

"Not a porcine suckling, but a nice fat duckling
You draw for your Christmas dinner.
You never saw a duck
That was nicer to pluck;
We hope you will vote him a winner."

Some beautiful red Brother Jonathan apples were tucked in the corners, and a glass of elderberry jelly. These were grandma's contribution, and she wrote, in a somewhat trembling hand, the following note:

"Dear Johnny:
"These apples came off from the tree where you fell and broke your leg that time. Do you remember? I wouldn't let them cut it down when they cut the others. The elderberry jelly was made from the elderberries that grow on the bushes by the old swimming hole."

"MOTHER."

When everything was finished and the box about ready to go, there still remained two things to be done. One was to put in the old-fashioned daguerreotype of grandma, with Aunt Myrtle (taken at sixteen) standing on one side of her, and Uncle John on the other. This had been taken many years before, for a relative, and had been sent away, and its existence forgotten. Myrtle had been named for her aunt, and she looked very much as the latter had done at her age. Aunt Myrtle had died at eighteen, so Myrtle never saw her. The other thing to be included was the amateur photograph of grandma and the present Myrtle. She had posed in imitation of the pose in the early picture, with her arm around grandma's neck. The resemblance between her picture and that of Aunt Myrtle was almost startling.

When grandma looked at the two pictures together she shook her head:

"Do I really look as old as that?" she sighed. "I hate to send that to Johnny. I'm afraid it will

shock him. I didn't look like that when he saw me last."

But the picture went in, along with those which Tim (a genius at the work) had taken of each member of the family while engaged in preparing the box. Grandma was seen in spectacles and big apron, concocting the cake. Edith was taken dressing the duck, mother stuffing it, Myrtle packing it, and Tim screwing the lid of the box, which was on hinges.

At last the box was ready, and it made a brave appearance indeed, for it had been painted a rich cardinal color, and in the corners Myrtle had transferred pictures of holly and mistletoe bunches.

It was Christmas eve.

Uncle John sat in his bachelor home, his feet stretched out before a comfortable grate fire, his good old pipe in his mouth. When Uncle John was in a reminiscent mood he always smoked a pipe.

The housekeeper knocked softly at the door. "The expressman is here. He has brought a most remarkable looking box, and he says to sign right here."

The box was brought in. "Please bring a screw driver," he said.

The screw driver in his hand, he waited until the housekeeper had left the room.

He had not kept much track of his home folks back on the farm. After Sister Myrtle died he hated to ever think of going back. Myrtle—the good fellow, the charming companion—as good as any boy—never took a dare—even kept him on the qui vive to keep up with her (she was two years older). "Ah," sighed he. "There never was another girl like Myrtle."

As his niece was named for Myrtle, who had always loved music, he had given her an organ, but that was years ago, and he had almost forgotten her existence.

Here then was a box from the old home. His conscience gave a twinge. How he had neglected them!

The box was empty. The contents had been carefully placed on the broad mahogany table. Uncle John sat before the fire, motionless. In one hand was the old picture. In the other he held the photograph. The wavering handwriting of his mother, and the sight of her wrinkled face and white hair in the photograph—such a contrast to that in the old picture—these touched him.

Then the sight of Myrtle, with her fresh young face, her head bound around with heavy braids, just as his sister had worn hers—the coral beads, even, without which he never saw his sister—all these things had seized him and transported him back over the thirty years that had passed since he had been his home. Seizing the receiver at his elbow he called up the telegraph office and dictated the following message:

"Will be home New Years. Greetings. Box received.
UNCLE JOHN."

Then he again took up the pictures and studied them.

Grandma and—Myrtle. His beloved Myrtle—restored to him from the dead! He no longer marveled at that wonderful box.

"Such girls can accomplish anything if they get a chance!" he said. Suddenly he straightened up and pounded the arm of his chair with his fist. "And, by George! I'll see that she gets a chance!"

FOR THE BOY IN CAMP

What shall I send that boy in military camp? Many mothers and others are asking that question. In reply, Dr. James Nalmsmith, professor of physical education in the University of Kansas, says: "Send him candy and lemons, a good book and, if his company has a talking machine, a record of light music or something funny. But don't send him sob letters or nightgowns."

Doctor Nalmsmith speaks from 30 years' experience in training university and college youths and from four months on the border as chaplain of the First Kansas infantry. He is the inventor of basket ball and has trained hundreds of athletes and kept thousands of students physically fit.

"Sob letters and nightgowns were the most worrying and useless things the boys on the border received from home," said Doctor Nalmsmith. "Write that boy once or twice a week. Send him the home paper. He may not seem prompt about writing home, but never forget he has an insatiable appetite for home letters and the home paper. His appetite for sweets, too, is very keen. The army ration, wholesome and nourishing, hasn't many trimmings, so candy always is warmly welcomed by the boys. Homemade fudge or caramel candy, something that doesn't mash or melt easily, should be sent."

"There is no need to send clothing or medicines. Uncle Sam will look out for that. But small musical instruments are valuable in keeping a camp cheerful. Banjos, mandolins, even ukeleles, are good. Baseballs, bats, gloves and masks always are welcome. Anything that encourages healthful play is good to send."

"I am very much in earnest when I ask that no sob letters be sent the boys. Also, if you know of some boy who has no one to write him or to send him candy, remember him. I saw boys who felt it quite a little that there was no one to remember them. They're all just big kiddies, you know, and they need appreciation."

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However, if you wish first to try this great preparation send ten cents to Dr. Kilmer & Co., Binghamton, N. Y., for a sample bottle. When writing be sure and mention this paper.—Adv.

Chore Time Long Past.

Uncle Lige bought a clock. One night the clock got out of order, and began to strike.

The old man awoke and counted 102. He promptly sat up in bed, and calling to his wife said, "Cynthia, get up, get up. It's later than I've ever known it to be."—Everybody's Magazine.

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Take Cover!

Lord Northcliffe, apropos of a Zepplin attack on London, said at a dinner in New York:

"Nowadays in my country, when we want to proclaim a man a fool, we say he hasn't sense enough to come in out of the raid."

Takes Bride's Name.

Murray Cohen, who married Helen Bernays in New York, will hereafter be known as Murray C. Bernays to keep alive the bride's family name.

Necessities and Luxuries.

The trouble with economy is that it would be so much easier to practice if we hadn't made necessities out of so many luxuries.

Most particular women use Red Cross Ball Blue, American made. Sure to please. At all good grocers. Adv.

When it comes to digging in the fields the Chinese woman is equal to any man.

Death loves a shining mark, but love often picks out a rusty one.

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Deserved Rebuke.

John Henry Hibbles, would you take the bread out of your children's mouths to buy gasoline?"

"Tut, tut, my dear. Why this melodramatic attitude? Am I doing anything of the sort?"

"It amounts to that. You've ruined your credit with your grocer, but you take precious good care to pay your garage bills promptly."

Doubly Henpecked.

Jane—Meek men will inherit the earth. It is said.

Jane—Won't their wives get chesty?

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A glass can of watermelon pickles was wrapped in corrugated cardboard, and then wound about

HOW LIFEBOAT ORIGINATED

The lifeboat is a very modern contrivance. It is not much more than a half century since it came to be generally used. In the old days a sea captain greatly resented even the suggestion that his vessel should carry lifeboats.

At the period when these boats still were an experiment, a remarkable feat of life-saving was performed on the New Jersey coast at a point now within the precincts of Asbury Park. Joseph Francis, an inventor, had brought forth a device made of iron and shaped like a boat, with a lid which could be shut, thus keeping out the water. Francis contended that in case of a shipwreck near shore a line could be made fast between the vessel and the coast, and his patent lifeboat hauled back and forth, carrying several persons on each trip.

Francis was the butt of much humor, and his life-saving boat, which was commonly called a kettle because of its odd shape, became a subject for general derision. Then a vessel bearing the name of Ayrshire was wrecked in 1847 off the Jersey coast. It had a large passenger list, and great loss of life seemed inevitable. Francis rushed to the scene got a line to the ship and started his boat upon its first emergency test. He saved 201 lives by this method, many of which must have been lost otherwise, for the sea was so rough that no ordinary boat could have ever reached land from the wreck.

In recognition of his skill and bravery, congress presented Francis with the largest gold medal ever given by that body. It was made of pure gold, two-thirds of an inch thick, and was of about the same size as a tea plate. The boat devised by Francis might still be in use were it not for the breeches buoy. Because of the boat's size, weight and general clumsiness it was difficult to handle. But it was none the less practical, and paved the way for the breeches buoy, operated on the same principle.

Easy to figure the Profits

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