

DEAR

I WISH YOU  
A MERRY  
CHRISTMAS  
& A HAPPY  
NEW YEAR.

FROM:

# RENARD PRESS LTD

Kemp House  
152–160 City Road  
London EC1V 2NX  
United Kingdom  
info@renardpress.com  
020 8050 2928

www.renardpress.com

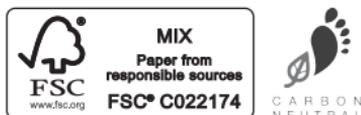
*The Christmas Dinner* first published in 1820  
This edition first published by Renard Press Ltd in 2021

Edited text and Notes © Renard Press Ltd, 2021

Sales of this book support the work of Three Peas, a charity registered in England and Wales (registered charity number 1172777).

Illustrations and cover lettering after William Morris  
Cover design by Will Dady

Printed in the United Kingdom by Severn



ISBN: 978-1-913724-63-4

9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1

The pictures in this volume are reprinted with permission or are presumed to be in the public domain. Every effort has been made to ascertain their copyright status, and to acknowledge this status where required, but we will be happy to correct any errors, should any unwitting oversights have been made, in subsequent editions.

All rights reserved. This publication may not be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system or transmitted, in any form or by any means – electronic, mechanical, photocopying, recording or otherwise – without the prior permission of the publisher.

*The Christmas  
Dinner*

WASHINGTON IRVING



RENARD PRESS



I HAD FINISHED my toilet and was loitering with Frank Bracebridge in the library when we heard a distant thwacking sound, which he informed me was a signal for the serving up of the dinner. The Squire kept up old customs in kitchen as well as hall, and the rolling pin, struck upon the dresser by the cook, summoned the servants to carry in the meats.

Just in this nick the cook knocked thrice,  
And all the waiters in a trice  
His summons did obey;  
Each serving man, with dish in hand,  
Marched boldly up, like our train band,  
Presented and away.\*

## THE CHRISTMAS DINNER

The dinner was served up in the great hall, where the Squire always held his Christmas banquet. A blazing, crackling fire of logs had been heaped on to warm the spacious apartment, and the flame went sparkling and wreathing up the wide-mouthed chimney. The great picture of the crusader and his white horse had been profusely decorated with greens for the occasion, and holly and ivy had likewise been wreathed round the helmet and weapons on the opposite wall, which I understood were the arms of the same warrior. I must own, by the by, I had strong doubts about the authenticity of the painting and armour as having belonged to the crusader, they certainly having the stamp of more recent days; but I was told that the painting had been so considered time out of mind, and that, as to the armour, it had been found in a lumber room and elevated to its present situation by the Squire, who at once determined it to be the armour of the

## THE CHRISTMAS DINNER

family hero; and as he was absolute authority on all such subjects in his own household, the matter had passed into current acceptance. A sideboard was set out just under this chivalric trophy, on which was a display of plate that might have vied (at least in variety) with Belshazzar's parade of the vessels of the temple – 'flagons, cans, cups, beakers, goblets, basins, and ewers\*' – the gorgeous utensils of good companionship that had gradually accumulated through many generations of jovial housekeepers. Before these stood the two Yule candles beaming like two stars of the first magnitude; other lights were distributed in branches, and the whole array glittered like a firmament of silver.

We were ushered into this banqueting scene with the sound of minstrelsy, the old harper being seated on a stool beside the fireplace and twanging his instrument with a vast deal more power than melody. Never did Christmas board display a more goodly and gracious assemblage

## THE CHRISTMAS DINNER

of countenances: those who were not handsome were, at least, happy, and happiness is a rare improver of your hard-favoured visage. I always consider an old English family as well worth studying as a collection of Holbein's portraits or Albert Durer's prints.\* There is much antiquarian lore to be acquired, much knowledge of the physiognomies of former times. Perhaps it may be from having continually before their eyes those rows of old family portraits, with which the mansions of this country are stocked; certain it is that the quaint features of antiquity are often most faithfully perpetuated in these ancient lines, and I have traced an old family nose through a whole picture gallery, legitimately handed down from generation to generation, almost from the time of the Conquest.\* Something of the kind was to be observed in the worthy company around me. Many of their faces had evidently originated in a Gothic age, and been merely copied by succeeding generations; and there was one little girl, in particular,

## THE CHRISTMAS DINNER

of staid demeanour, with a high Roman nose and an antique, vinegar aspect, who was a great favourite of the Squire's, being, as he said, a Bracebridge all over, and the very counterpart of one of his ancestors who figured in the court of Henry VIII.

The parson said grace, which was not a short, familiar one, such as is commonly addressed to the Deity in these unceremonious days, but a long, courtly, well-worded one of the ancient school. There was now a pause, as if something was expected, when suddenly the butler entered the hall with some degree of bustle: he was attended by a servant on each side with a large wax light, and bore a silver dish, on which was an enormous pig's head, decorated with rosemary, with a lemon in its mouth, which was placed with great formality at the head of the table. The moment this pageant made its appearance, the harper struck up a flourish, at the conclusion of which the young Oxonian,

## THE CHRISTMAS DINNER

on receiving a hint from the Squire, gave, with an air of the most comic gravity, an old carol, the first verse of which was as follows:

*Caput apri defero,*

*Reddens laudes Domino.*

The boar's head in hand bring I,

With garlands gay and rosemary.

I pray you all sing merrily

*Qui estis in convivio.\**

Though prepared to witness many of these little eccentricities, from being apprised of the peculiar hobby of mine host, yet, I confess, the parade with which so odd a dish was introduced somewhat perplexed me until I gathered from the conversation of the Squire and the parson that it was meant to represent the bringing in of the boar's head: a dish formerly served up with much ceremony, and the sound of minstrelsy and song, at great tables on Christmas day. 'I like the old