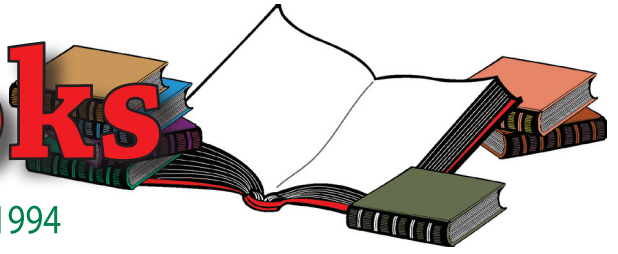


Great Books

An Irish Country Christmas Alice Taylor, 1994



This darling book is a tradition in the making. I have it on long term loan from my mom (i.e., I borrowed it last Christmas and enjoy seeing it on my bookshelf) and I reread it for this December's issue because of its timely, endearing story. Starting December 1, I want to share a chapter a night with my daughter, which should take us right up to Christmas if I skip a few days here and there.

Chapter by chapter, Ms. Taylor lovingly recalls preparing for The Christmas with her three sisters and brother in rural Ireland, where they lived on a farm. "We loved Christmas and threw ourselves wholeheartedly into all the preparations that my mother left in our hands, and maybe we enjoyed Christmas all the better when we had put such effort into all the work leading up to it." Herding scampering young heifers into the barn for winter, cleaning the house spit spot top to bottom, white washing the hob (the cooking hearth), plucking geese; these were some of the tasks.

The joys were plentiful too: adventuring into the deep woods to collect bundles of holly, writing a letter to Santy, release for school holiday. There were new gramophone records, cards from dear ones around the world, muscatel raisins and the never had before box of fancy chocolates a cousin sent from England! On Christmas Eve every kitchen nook and cranny was crammed with holly and draped with ivy. Bountiful, scrumptious food was cooking in the hearth, the animals were bedded down for the night, and the large Christmas candle upon the deep windowsill was reverently lit.

Christmas brought the sweetest of gifts early that morning. And under a dark-blue, starry sky, just before dawn "candles lit up the hills and valleys as far as we could see." The images throughout are so lovely, humorous and vividly wrought, I'm inspired to adopt a few of Ms. Taylor's traditions for my own.

