spilling the poisoned wine. In memory of this, the Church has a special blessing, the *Benedic
tio Sancti Johannes* (St. John’s blessing). On the twenty-seventh, the feast of St. John, the people bring wine to church, and before Holy Mass the priest blesses it. At the main meal at home, the wine is poured into as many glasses as there are people. Just before the meal begins, everybody stands up, holding his glass, while the father and mother begin the St. John’s Day ceremony. The father touches the mother’s glass with his glass, looks her in the eyes, and says, “I drink to you the love of St. John.” The mother answers, “I thank you for the love of St. John,” and they both take a sip. Then the mother turns to the oldest child and repeats, “I drink to you the love of St. John,” and the child answers, “I thank you for the love of St. John.” Again, they take a sip, and the child turns to the next oldest, and so it goes around the table until the last one turns to the father, and the family circle is closed. Some of the blessed wine is kept for days of sickness or of great celebration. If someone in the family is about to take a journey, a few drops of the blessed wine are added to each wine glass, and the whole family again drinks “the love of St. John.” Immediately after a wedding ceremony, the newlywed couple also drink to each other “the love of St. John.”

**Episcopus Puerorum**

The day following St. John’s Day is a great day for the children. This goes back to a medieval custom in monastery schools. On December 28, the day dedicated to the Holy Innocents, the boys used to elect one from their midst as bishop—the *Episcopus Puerorum*. This boy bishop would take over the direction of the abbey for this one day. Dressed in pontifical vestments, surrounded by his schoolmates, he would sit in the place of the abbot and the others in the choir stalls of the monks, whereas abbot and monks moved over to the places of the pupils. This custom is still alive in many convents and monasteries, where the young ones in the novitiate have the ruling of the house for this day. It also is preserved in many families, where the little ones take the seats of the father and mother and try to play a few little tricks on the grown-ups as long as they are in authority.

**NEW YEAR’S EVE**

December 31, the last day of the old year, or New Year’s Eve, finds the whole family in the Christmas Room again. In the morning, there was a Thanksgiving Mass, solemnly starting the day. Looking back over the past 365 days with their bright and their dark hours, we gave thanks for both the bright and the dark to Him Who knows what is best for us. In some parts of the old
country, the people observe a strict fast and abstinence during this day (which in earlier times was observed solemnly throughout Christendom) as a token of its serious, thought-provoking character.

In our day, however, New Year’s Eve is dedicated to fun and merrymaking.

“Let’s play the handkerchief game!” someone will suggest.

We all sit in a large circle on the floor. A clean handkerchief is tied up in knots so that it takes the shape of a ball and can be thrown easily through the air. Hedwig volunteers to go out. Now we start throwing the handkerchief across the circle. We have to keep it going until Hedwig comes in. At the moment of her entrance, the one who has just caught it will have to hide it, and Hedwig will have to guess where the handkerchief is. She gives three warning knocks at the door, but as we know that immediately after the third she will burst through the door, we are getting increasingly nervous between the second and third warnings. Sometimes it leads to hilarious situations. The moment Hedwig steps into the room, everyone’s features relax into complete, harmless innocence. Everyone’s face spells: “Handkerchief? I don’t know what you are talking about, Hedwig!” Hedwig has three guesses. If she hasn’t found out after the third one, she has to go out again. But this rarely happens. Some people blush helpfully; others look like a bad conscience personified, wiggling nervously on the handkerchief they are trying to hide by sitting on it. Everyone—guests, grown-ups, and children—has to be in on the game. And of course, the one who has been discovered hiding the handkerchief has to go out next.

From long years of experience, I know that one should stop every game when it is at its height. Never let it wear thin. So I suggest “Jump at Quotations,” and I’m always met with eager consent. Last New Year’s Eve, the children took three quotations from my little speeches on the stage: “Are you a tenor or a bass?” “And I am the mother!” “The family who plays together and prays together usually stays together.”

The teams are placed at opposite sides of the room. Each team gets the same quotation. One word of the quotation gets pinned to the back of each player. At “Go,” one may read the word on the back of every other member of one’s team, but not the word on one’s own back. Rule: No oral communication! The winning team is the one that first gets itself lined up in the correct order. (Have the words in large print so the “audience” can enjoy the fun too!)

And then there is the treasure hunt. Everyone gets a list of objects that have been placed in plain sight in the Christmas Room. After it has been explained to the guests that the object of the game is to locate all the “treasures” as quickly as possible and note them down on one’s own list, and after the rule has been stressed that nothing can be touched, the signal “Go” is given.
This was last year’s list:
• a cherry (on top of lampshade)
• an olive (on a branch of the Christmas tree)
• dry noodles (woven into wicker chair)
• soap (on piano key)
• an egg (in a light socket, instead of a bulb)
• lump of sugar (on ceiling light)
• toothbrush (over picture frame)
• clothespin (on lampshade)
• picture of “Mother Trapp” (pasted on book jacket)
• 2-cent stamp (on pink book jacket, in bookshelf)
• onion (on windowsill)
• Cheerios (in carving of chest)

In the margin of my list I had scribbled, “Funny how blind people are!” The time given to find the treasures was twenty minutes. And out of fifty-four participants, only three found every item!

The next game has to be tried in order to be appreciated. It is called a Smiling Contest. There are two teams, two judges, and two tape measures. Each judge has a tape measure, pencil, and paper. One person from each team comes forward. A judge then measures the width of his smile and records it (one judge per team). The next pair come forward and are measured in turn, until every smile has been measured. The judges then add up the total yards of smiles for each team. The higher total wins, and it is interesting to see who has the biggest smile, too. The

SYLVESTER PUNCH
A punch in honor of Pope St. Sylvester

Ingredients
Red burgundy (count one bottle for six people)
Equal amount of hot tea
12 cloves
rind of 1 lemon
2 tablespoons sugar to each bottle of wine
2 cinnamon sticks to each bottle of wine

Directions
Pour the liquid into an enamel pot, add the cloves, the thinly pared rind of 1 lemon, the sugar, and the cinnamon. Heat over a low flame but do not allow to boil. At the last moment add the tea. Serve hot.