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Christmas with the Savages

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Christmas with the Savages was first published in 1955. A fictionalised account of Mary Clive's own Edwardian childhood Christmases with her relatives in a large country house, it is narrated by Evelyn, a precocious eight-year-old, who is sent to spend Christmas at a house-party in Tamerlane Hall during her father's illness. Evelyn, an only child and accustomed to adult company, casts rather a beady eye on the antics of 'the Savages' and the other young familial groups also staying in the house, while vigorously engaging with their antics. And what antics they were! Children and parents today can only marvel (and sometimes shudder in terms of safety) at the freedom this boisterous group had to rampage through house and grounds, receiving only the lightest of reprimands when, among their other antics, they break into the attic and stick their feet through the ceilings of the nursery-maids' bedrooms as they traverse the beams.

The tribal nature of the group of children is reinforced by the presence of a nursery-maid attached to each family, and by the pecking order among the maids. Evelyn's rather prim and moralising voice, which is cast aside when she wants to join in the fun, provides a perceptive and often unwittingly humorous commentary on the customs and mores of a particular social grouping in Edwardian England.

Christmas with the Savages might not be immediately accessible to a modern child, needing perhaps the intervention of an adult reading it aloud. It was a recent BBC Radio 4 'Book of the Week', and this is probably the ideal way for a delightful period piece to be preserved. And for those reading the book, Philip Gough's drawings add an atmospheric note. **Christmas with the Savages** will also be a valuable resource for classes studying the late Victorian or Edwardian periods.

Running Order:

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