

19th Century literary non-fiction

Source B

This 1898 article from a University magazine, hears the female student reflect on her Christmas holidays. In this extract, she details the activities of New Year's Day and the end of the holidays.

Reminiscences of the Christmas Vacation

However, by nightfall, I had accomplished something – I had been to watch all the little ragamuffins of the town eating their New Year's dinner, and it was indeed a sight to be remembered. The accommodating way in which knives acted as forks, and grubby little fingers took the place of both, the whirlpools of gravy which resulted from the efforts of those
5 who conscientiously, but clumsily, endeavoured to put the above-named blunt instruments to their orthodox use, the enthusiasm of the noisy multitude who employed them as clappers, or in some cases as drum-sticks, converting the table into a huge drum, and thereby causing the emission of sparkling fountains from the row of mugs arranged down the centre, till the formerly spotless tablecloth forcibly reminded one of the appearance which the surface of
10 the earth must have presented immediately after the deluge*, all these, accompanied by cheering so vociferous* that it completely drowned the sound of the band, made a powerful impression on my mind. Then too, an interesting scientific enquiry arose. – How could so much be put into so little? This problem was afterwards solved to my satisfaction by one who has had experience in such matters, though perhaps the learned would cavil* at the solution.
15 "Hydraulic pressure!*" was the brief and pithy explanation.

And now the holidays are over, and as I look back upon them, it seems to me that I have fulfilled none of my intentions save those relating to amusement, such as visiting, dancing, etc. And even in dancing, I have not found the unmixed pleasure which I so fondly anticipated. To be sure, a giddy waltz or an inspiriting galop is very enjoyable, but when, as
20 you are endeavouring to make your way without mishaps across a highly-polished floor to the refreshment-room, a sprightly-looking young man invites you to take a roll, whilst later on another anxiously inquires if he may press you to a jelly, things begin to look a trifle alarming: moreover, the next morning everyone, except, of course, the dancer, is apt to be irritable or gloomy, and the course of daily life does not run as smoothly as usual. On the
25 whole, my holidays have not been what I intended, and next vacation I shall have to try some other plan: perhaps in the meanwhile, I may be able to obtain some suggestions as to the best method of holiday making.

Glossary

- * deluge – a great flood (here the Biblical flood which supposedly destroyed the Earth)
- * vociferous – loud and forceful
- * cavil – make annoying and unimportant objections
- * hydraulic pressure – the pressure caused by the movement of liquids (the author makes a joke, since hydraulics is a technology/applied science)

Sample Paper 2 Section A Question 3:

03 You now need to refer only to **Source B** from **lines 3 to 13**.

How does the writer use language to describe the scene of the dinner?

[12 marks]

This extract is from “Reminiscences of the Christmas Vacation” by “F. E.” in Vol. 7 No. 2 of *The Magazine of the University College of North Wales* (March 1898) and the full text can be found online at <https://journals.library.wales/view/2699558/2701141/19#?xywh=-1114%2C-76%2C4170%2C3209>.

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