

THE FEAST TIME OF THE YEAR.

This is the feast-time of the year, When hearts grow warm and home more dear; When Autumn's crimson torch expires To flash again in winter fires; And they who tracked October's flight Through woods with gorgeous hues be-dight, In charmed circle sit and praise The goodly log's triumphant blaze.

This is the feast-time of the year When Plenty pours her wine of cheer, And even humble boards may spare To poorer poor a kindly share, While bursting barns and granaries know A richer, fuller overflow, And they who dwell in golden ease Bless without toil, yet toil to please.

This is the feast-time of the year; The blessed Advent draweth near, Let rich and poor together break The bread of love for Christ's sweet sake, Against the time when rich and poor Must open for Him a common door, Who comes a Guest, yet makes a feast, And bids the greatest and the least.

GOOD ST. NICHOLAS.

(By Mary Diefendorf.)

As the merry Christmas tide approaches there is often present in our thoughts the vision of the guardian spirit of the season. At the time when the name of St. Nicholas, or the more familiar nickname, Santa Claus, is so often upon our lips, it is surely fitting that we should spend a few minutes in the study of that well-beloved saint, and of the traditions in which he holds so prominent a place.

The birthplace of the subject of our sketch was the city of Patava, in Asia Minor. There he was made abbot, and won renown by his religious devotion. He afterward became Archbishop of Myra. At the latter place, in course of time he died, and was duly buried. In May, 1087, his remains were carried by some pious Italians to Bari, on the Adriatic coast. There they now rest in the splendid church that bears his name.

Every year a pilgrimage is made to his shrine by the people for miles around. No one seeking food on that occasion is refused it by the priests, while shelter is given to as many as the edifice will hold.

On St. Nicholas Day, Dec. 6, there is a great celebration. Early in the morning the sailors, who, as well as maidens and children, claim to be under the peculiar protection of the saint, take his image from the priests and parade with it through the town. Then they sail away with it, returning and bringing it back at nightfall amid the general illumination of the city.

Now, this same pious bishop, who beams so faintly upon our vision through the vistas of the past, veiled in a "dim, religious light," is to us of the present day, perhaps, the most beloved saint on the calendar. Moreover, to all Americans he should be peculiarly dear, and invested with great historic interest as the guardian genius of our metropolis.

In that wonderful book, "Knickerbocker's History of New York," that work so quaint in humor and rich in the perpetuation of old traditions, we find many edifying references to our hero. The Dutch ship, the Goede Vrouw, so runs the story, came over from Holland three or four years after the return of Hudson, bringing settlers for the new world, who located at Communipaw. At the bow of the goodly vessel stood an image of St. Nicholas, smoking a long-stemmed pipe and wearing a broad-brimmed hat. To his guiding care all attributed their prosperous voyage. In due time a prophet among them dreamed a dream, which was that St. Nicholas appeared and directed him to seek another abiding place. Thereupon Heer Van Kortland, the dreamer, and selected band of men went in search of another habitation, and were stranded on Manhattan island. There, after regaling themselves on oysters, they rested a little time. Meanwhile the dreamer dreamed again. Again St. Nicholas appeared, and sitting down at the foot of a tree, smoked his pipe. And as the smoke rose, it spread over a vast extent of territory, and resolved itself into many peculiar shapes, as of spires and steeples, after which it finally cleared away. "And when St. Nicholas had smoked his pipe, he twisted it in his hand, and laying his finger beside his nose, gave the astonished Van Kortland a very significant look; then mounting his wagon, he returned over the tree-tops and disappeared.

"And Van Kortland awoke from his sleep greatly instructed; and he roused his companions and related to them his dream and interpreted it that it was the will of St. Nicholas that they should settle down and build a city here." That spot was Bowling Green.

Now, when these voyagers had returned to their homes and related this incident, all "the people lifted up their voices and blessed the good St. Nicholas."

After these thrifty folk had become settled in their new abode, they constructed a fort, and within the fort they built the first church erected in the future city of New York. It was made of stone, and named after St. Nicholas, who, as Irving tells us, immediately adopted New Amsterdam as his special charge, and became its tutelary guardian.

The people of New Amsterdam swore by St. Nicholas when they had any swearing to do. They blessed him when they were happy, thanked him when they were favored, committed their voyaging and absent friends to his guiding and protecting care, went to the field of war singing his great song and fought their conflicts shouting, "St. Nicholas and the Manhattan," as their battle cry.

Interesting as the history of the grave bishop of Myra may prove, and interwoven as his memory

must ever be with the traditions of the city of which he afterward became the tutelary saint, it is not of either of these manifestations that the children like best to think. It is as master of the ceremonies of Christmastide that he appears enveloped in the most fascinating glamor.

Bayard Taylor tells us that on one occasion, when he was in Germany, about December 1, a fair was held in the town he was visiting, at which fair many toys were exhibited, and St. Nicholas, in counterfeit presentment, was everywhere to be seen. On many of the little booths were also "bundles of rods with gilded bands," designed for the punishment of naughty children. On St. Nicholas Eve, December 5, the family with which he was staying was visited by a gentleman wearing a "mask, fur robe, and long, tapering cap," and "carrying a sack, a bunch of rods and a broom." He threw the contents of the sack upon the table, and while the recipients were devouring the nuts and candies, "kave them many sharp cuffs over the fingers." He remarks further that some of the children had been taught to say, "I thank you, Herr Nicholas."

In Germany, in days gone by, all presents were put in charge of Herr Nicholas, called, in Northern Germany, Knecht Rupert, who talked with each child about his conduct for the past year. If he had been naughty, he left a rod, recommending to the parents its frequent use. As the custom is still followed in some of the German villages, we rejoice to know that the "night before Christmas" a beautiful lady generally appears, who pardons the faults of the culprit. So everything ends happily after all.

In America, the descendants of the old German and Dutch settlers have some undefined notions of the Pels-nichol floating through their brains. In the old days, they are told, Pels-nichol (Nicholas of the furs), dressed in a buffalo robe, and with horns and tall, would pass from house to house, talked gruffly to the children, who would flee for refuge to their mother and cluster round her skirts.

In some such families the children still hang up their stockings in the belief that they will be filled with rods by Pels-nichol, the punishing spirit, or with goodies by Kriss-Kringle (Christ-kindlen) the Christ-child.

It is, then, a two-fold role that our hero has been called upon to fill at Christmas—that of Pels-nichol, the avenger, and that of St. Nicholas, the beneficent giver. The former phase of his office, now fast passing into obscurity, was but a subordinate one, even in the days gone by. It but gave a little variety and added zest to the Christmas merriment. Christmas then, as now, was, above all, a joyous season. Then, as now, it was in the reindeer steeds that the children delighted, and their—

"Little old driver, so lively and quick, I knew in a moment it must be St. Nick.

"He was chubby and plump; a right jolly old elf; And I laughed when I saw him in spite of myself."

In the days of Peter Stuyvesant—most obstinate and best beloved of the Dutch governors—all the holidays, including St. Nicholas Eve, were celebrated with especial glee, while early in the history of New Amsterdam St. Nicholas, who once used to ride gayly along the tree-tops, dropping presents down the chimney at any time of year, changed his habits in that regard, and there "was instituted that pious ceremony, still religiously observed in all our ancient families of the right breed, of hanging up a stocking in the chimney on St. Nicholas Eve, which stocking is always found in the morning miraculously filled; for the good St. Nicholas has ever been a great giver of gifts, particularly to children."

Christmas Decorations.

The use of holly and mistletoe, the plants sacred to Christmas, is now very general, and as they are abundant in our markets, as well as cheap, every household may be made bright with them. In parlors and sitting rooms, wreaths, crowns and festoons can be arranged over mantels and windows, as well as hung from lamps and over pictures.

For the Christmas dinner-table, a large bowl of holly leaves with the scarlet and white berries, makes a beautiful center piece; while tiny bunches of holly laid at each plate brighten the table wonderfully. Cakes may be ornamented with candy designs of holly, while ices may be molded and colored in the same style. If in remote localities it is not possible to obtain holly and mistletoe, green of some other variety should be procured. All-over greens, such as pine and cedar, can be utilized, and bitter-sweet and Indian arrow berries arranged with these can be made into beautiful decorations. When chrysanthemums are yet blooming, they add greatly to the beauty of the table; the bright yellow and dark crimson are particularly appropriate for the Christmas dinner table.

In arranging the table, the cakes, bonbons, nuts and fruits may be placed on it at the beginning, and will give it a festive appearance, rendering very little additional decoration necessary.

Christmas Gifts of Money.

"If, after thinking for a long time, you cannot decide what she (my poor girl friend) would like best," writes Ruth Ashmore, in advising girls as to their Christmas-giving: "and you know her well enough to leave to her the choice of the gift, then send her the money that she may spend it for herself. But make this money look more like a chosen gift, and less like that which is so hardy earned by her; trouble yourself to go to the bank and put it in gold, or at least in a new bank note, and inclose it in a tiny little purse."

The "Yule log" is a great log of wood, sometimes the root of a tree, brought into the house with great ceremony on Christmas Eve, laid in the fireplace and lighted with the brand of last year's log. While it lasted there was great drinking, singing and telling of tales. Sometimes it was accompanied by Christmas candles, but in the cottages the only light was from the ruddy blaze of the great wood fire. The Yule log was to burn all night; if it went out, it was considered a sign of ill-luck.

The Christmas dinner was the central feature of all the gay festivities. The table was literally loaded with good cheer. The bear's head held the place of honor and was a lordly affair, brought in by the butler, attended by a servant on either side with a large wax light. The head was carried on a silver dish, the tusks piercing bright-red apples, while between them an orange was laid, the whole graced with an abundance of sauce. When this, "the rarest dish in all the land," was placed at the head of the table, one of the company sang a carol suited to the great occasion.

The Christmas peacocks were also gorgeous, the bird being flayed, roasted and then sewed up again in all the splendor of its brilliant feathers, a piece of cotton saturated with spirits being placed within the gilded beak to burn while the carver was at work. Still more gorgeous was the ancient peacock pie, the bird being covered by the crust, save that on one side appeared his plumed crest, while from the other side protruded the gorgeous, spreading tail.

Since pies were called Christmas or December pies, as the old rhyme went—"Treason's in a December pie And death within the pot." They date back to 1596. The classical plum pudding must be added to the list of good things, though, sad to relate, it was really plum porridge, and not pudding, as we have always believed. An old poem says—"And those that hardly all the year Had bread to eat or clothes to wear, Will have both day and night, And all the day be merry."

The leader of all the merry-making was called the Lord of Misrule or Abbot of Unreason. The wardrobes at halls and manor houses were often laid under contribution to furnish fantastic disguises. Snap Dragon was one of the favorite sports. Raisins were placed in a large shallow dish and brandy poured over the fruit and ignited. The lights in the room were extinguished, and in the weird glare the players attempted to pick the raisins out of the flaming dish.

When the Christmas dinner was over, the guests were seated at a table, and the Christmas carols were sung. The German children probably believe more firmly in Kriss Kringle, or Santa Claus, than do the children of any other nation. Germany is the birthplace of Kriss Kringle, and the wonderland of fable and poetry. German children are taught to love the Christ-child. In many parts of the country it is the custom, on the morning before Christmas, to let a figure representing the Christ-child wave past the window of the room where the little ones sleep. Half awake only, in the gray of the morning they see this little child-figure fit dimly past, and they go to sleep again in the blissful consciousness that the Christ-child has not forgotten them, and that they will have an abundance of presents around the tree in the evening.

A beautiful custom in Norway and Sweden is the Christmas feeding of birds. Bunches of oats are placed on the roofs of houses, on fences and

OLD TIME CUSTOMS.

By Winona Butler.

There is no brighter fact in history than Christmas. The golden thread of its influence can be traced through nearly nineteen centuries. On the first Christmas morning the angels sang: "Peace on earth, good will to men." The glad refrain has been repeated each Christmas season in every Christian land, though the character of the music varies greatly.

Our ancestors were in the habit of forming companies which went from house to house, singing Christmas carols in the streets. These beautiful carols would break the stillness of the winter night or early Christmas morning, making a most delightful beginning to the merry day.

But these holy jubilees had as rivals the mingling instruments of those wandering spirits of harmony—the "Waits." One author writes: "Many and many a time have we been awakened by the melody of the Waits, and have lain and listened to their wild music, its solemn swells and 'dying falls,' kept musical by the distance and made holy by the time, till we could have fancied that the morning stars were again singing as of old they 'sang together for joy,' and that the sounds of their far anthem came floating to the earth."

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When the Bells Were Ringing.

BY SHIRLEY WYNNE.

Alone, alone in the crowded street, Alone on New Year's night, Barefoot and wet with the blinding sleet, Pale 'neath the red lamplight, A little match girl through the crowd Raises a feeble cry While the New Year bells are chiming loud, "Matches! Oh, will you buy?"

Gay, bright-eyed, smiling children pass; They laugh and sing and dance and run— They all have happy homes; alas! But this heroine has none! Alone, alone in the busy street She cowers on a doorstep nigh While the New Year bells are chiming sweet, Still pleading, "Will you buy?"

Hungry and ragged and blue with cold— The wind blows keen and loud— Her frozen fingers can scarcely hold The matches to the crowd, And still, as faster falls the sleet, More piteous grows the cry While the New Year bells are chiming sweet, "Oh, will you—will you buy?"

No more alone in the moonrise gray, With face so wan and white; The little match girl has gone away To a happy home tonight; For an angel came through the crowded street, Hushing the tempest wild, While the New Year bells chimed loud and sweet, And bore away the child!

"Here he comes with flaming bow!— Doesn't he mean to take his toll? Snip, snap dragon, Take care you don't take too much, Be not greedy in your clutch, Snip, snap dragon."

But in 1652, the question of Christmas was brought up in parliament. They decided it was not in harmony with the scriptures; pronounced it "anti-Christmass" and abolished it. So the Jolly Lord of Misrule became an outlaw, and the old picturesque Christmas faded away with the severity of the Puritan atmosphere; but with the nineteenth century came a revival. The new Christmas was merry, but quieter. What it lost in noise and frolic, it made up in cheerfulness and good will; and now, remembering the message of that first Christmas morning, we hail the merry Christmas day with—

"Peace on earth, Good will to men."

Gifts for Women and Men. "Women's wants, if measured by their belongings, would seem to be almost innumerable, and of a kind which require constant renewing and replacing," writes Frances E. Langan, telling of appropriate Christmas gifts for women and for men. "Women's interests and occupations require a greater number of small things for their equipment than do those of men, and Christmas gifts for them are, therefore, more easily prepared. Women's belongings have the further advantage of being useful as well as beautiful. Men are always pleased with simple gifts, and are usually embarrassed when presented with expensive articles of any sort. The value to them of a gift is, as it should be with all persons, in proportion to its simplicity and usefulness, and out of proportion to its cost."

Life's a short summer; man a flower. —Dr. Johnson.

CHRISTMAS SONNETS.

By Christian Burke.

This is that Holy Night!—O World, be still!— Surely, if we but listen we shall hear That Song that all the luminous dark doth fill, The Choir of Angels chanting soft and clear, "Glory to God and on the Earth Good will!"

Now with the eager Shepherds let us run Across the starlit plains, 'mid shadows dim, To that poor shelter where the Mother Maid Ere break of day her first-born glorious Son With a narrow crib adoring laid, Because His people found no rest for Him.

O mighty Love, that we might see, How often wilt Thou deign to seek Thine own, Who gave Thee yon bare manger for Thy throne!

Come all ye Faithful!—let us watch a space; Mary and Joseph will for us make room, That we may look on Him Whose radiant face, Like some fair flower in all its lovely bloom, With light and glory fills this lowly place; Lo! we have travelled from a country far, Through years of failure, deserts sad and wild, And, even as of old came Eastern Kings, With costly treasures, led here by Thy Star.

We, too, would bring Thee our poor offerings, O Word incarnate! Bethlehem's Holy Child, Accept our gifts and us of Thy great grace— Myrrh of our Sorrows, Frankincense for Faith, And Gold for Love that is more strong than Death!

Two rich men were sipping wine in the exclusive dining room of a New York clubhouse. Each had seen about forty years. Each had a private income of not far from that figure of thousands per year. Well kept, not profligate, were they, for they were too bright to throw away life.

"You would tire of Mexico," drawled one of them. "I have been wandering about down there, with my private car, for a year. How's Dresden?"

"My dear fellow, so did I get tired of Dresden. Five years, don't you know. You know how dull Europe is. I've been over the pond, too, frequently. I wish some chap would discover a brand-new Europe or some other new place."

"Ah, yes," sighed the first speaker; "there's nothing new. We have seen it all. But"—and his eye suddenly grew brighter and his hand held his champagne at a halt as he spoke—"I found a wine in an old refectory in a monastery of Mexico that was the most wonderful you ever tackled."

"Where?" exclaimed his friend. "Give me the address!" And a few days later he started on a journey of over three thousand seven hundred and fifty miles for a new sensation in his worn-out world—a novel sip of wine.

There are thousands of men and women in old aristocratic countries and hundreds in young republican America to whom it seems almost that a real new year can come. Life is old in sensations. They have already seen and felt it all. But there is a way to renew life to them. It is to touch the heart with a new love for the poor, the country, the suffering times, the wants of a weary world. All that because it gives life, from within, a new purpose, unselfish and wishing to serve others, would transform the very existence of such men.

The seventeenth President began life as a tailor. It is an honorable calling. Let us suppose an honest tailor sitting at his ease on New Year's day. He hates the thought of the drudgery of tomorrow. He looks forward to his workroom, top floor, back, dingy windows looking on back yards and their garniture of hung out laundries. His companions the hot goose, the skeleton garments half finished hanging on the wall, hanks of thread that kinks and knots, broad bench on which he squats and crowds his lungs into his feeble heart. He wishes for a new year. How can he have it? Let him receive the love of God into his heart. Let him forget self. Then, lo! tomorrow his workroom is moved, as it were, to the front of the shop. Its windows look out on the flashing Hudson, the Pallsades, and even to the gates of the eternal city by the sea of glass. His thread runs smoothly, his scissors are gold and his shears silver. The skeleton garments around the room seem to be finished for angels. He sings a new song, for his life is uncomplaining, thankful and unselfish. God knows that this is the only way in which thousands of the bravest and best of the world can have a new year. They must renew their own spirits from within and above. And God knows that this is the best of all kinds of a new year possible to us all.

I can see the hardy milkman standing in his doorstep at two o'clock of the still dark new day of 1897. Cold stars are two o'clock-in-the-morning stars. There is a hard grind of the wheels over the echoing streets. Shivering on his perch, he notes the glow of the midwinter sunrise over acres of roofs where in palatial homes the rich are yet sleeping. The quiet is

gloom. The wind is gloom. The same old slavery is gloom. Suddenly the man thinks of it.

"I am not the servant of these rich customers. I serve my pretty baby boy whom I left in his cradle. He shall have a better start in life than I had. I serve his beautiful mother. It is not my own mouth, not my own back, not my own life, but theirs to which I minister. Ah, hail New Year! My master is unselfish love. My king is my sense of manly duty."

He breaks forth into a song. The cold stars bear him, the iron-bound wheels of his milk cart drum an ecko as a king's chariot could not. He has entered into a new world. He has forgotten himself. Blessed work, when work is for a holy love. Alas, for him who slaves it for his savings-bank account, with small earnings hoping to get rich and growing sick at heart by the long delay. The way for most of us to meet each new year is not to count how near—or, alas! how far—we are to "being independent," but by thinking thankfully how many loved ones are dependent on us and we are yet able to care for.

Why not look upon each new load that is added, year by year, as a new sign of manhood? Why not see in each fresh care one more mark of honor from our creator? Why do we, poor fools, dream of a time when we shall have money enough to be idle, and then be obliged to go to Mexico for a fresh sensation of a new wine? Is it not all a matter of heart, anyway? Do the opulent idlers escape? Can Europe renew itself to a man who has seen it all? What difference is there between the men who have played and danced till life is old and those who have stored and plodded till life is old? The springs of eternity are in the human breast. Alas! for him who has dried up those sweet waters, whether by over indulgence or under thankfulness.

The New Year comes in the invalid's room, all caged and bedridden, if a bright and deathless spirit inhabits the pain-racked body. Do we not know of such bright chambers? Can we not each visit some heroic sufferer to whom the unconquerable soul within gives such mastery over time that years of sickness possess no powers to cloud? What is time to the aged who grow happier as they grow old? What is the date to some of our fathers and mothers whose ever-youthful love makes them seem as young as their children's children whom they dandle on their aged knees? Thank God for the good and unselfish heart that never grows old!

Christmas Day. "Christmas is pre-eminently a church festival," writes Mrs. Lyman Abbott. "The Puritans, seeing only the superstitions and disorderliness with which Christmas had become encumbered, strove with all their ardor to destroy it, but happily did not succeed. The argument sometimes used against it, that the birthday of the Child Jesus is not known, and therefore cannot be observed, does not prevail against the almost universal longing to celebrate in some way this great event. So we are not surprised to learn that in the first centuries of the Christian era Christians, though generally celebrating the Nativity, were not unanimous in the time chosen for the festival. At least a part of the early church observed the sixth of January, not only to commemorate the Epiphany, or the manifestation of Christ to the Gentiles, but also the birth of Jesus, and it was not until the end of the fourth century, perhaps not until the beginning of the fifth, that the present date, December 25, was generally accepted. * * * The 'Christmas season' is sometimes used to designate the time between December 16 and February 1, more often the fortnight between December 24 and January 6. During all this period there was formerly, and still continues to be, a spirit of joy and festivity which entitles it to be called 'the holidays.' The vigil of the Nativity, or as we now call it, Christmas Eve, was observed from the first with exceptional devotion, perhaps because the birth of our Lord occurred in the night. Unlike other vigils it continued through the night, and made, with Christmas itself, one great solemnity."

A Queen's Christmas Gifts. "It is quite impossible to form any idea as to the value of the presents made by the queen or given to her," writes Lady Jeanne in an article on "What Christmas Means to Queen Victoria." "In some cases, when her gifts consist of India shawls, jewelry and the like, they are very valuable because they are unique, but the presents she gives to her family, or in turn receives from them, are not expensive. The royal purse is not an inexhaustible one, and the claims on it are enormous, so that the presents given by royal people must always be regarded in the light of souvenirs and not as costly gifts. The Queen's children are not rich, and as they are not able to afford expensive presents so we may consider the value of all royal gifts from the sentimental, not the commercial, point of view, and it is its pleasantness as well as most touching aspect, for it shows that simplicity and depth of the family affection, which is neither nourished nor fostered by any feeling of greed or expectation, but which is as simple and genuine as that of the poorest subject of our great Queen."

Sensible Japanese. From the Baltimore American: The Japanese address letters the reverse of what we do, writing the country first, the state or province next, then the city, the street and number, and the name last of all.