

New Year's Old Time Romance Lost in Modern Noise



Old grandfathers did not give up \$50 each for the privilege of spending New Year's eve in crowded restaurants. Neither did they, at the stroke of twelve, put on caps of colored paper, ring cow bells, and throw confetti at strangers. Yet we, who ridicule their traditions and superstitions, can find, it seems, no more satisfactory way in which to speed the old year and welcome the new.

Perhaps we might profitably follow their example. Certainly their way of waiting for the new year at home, or at the home of their friends, with games and songs and domestic cheer, was less expensive than our way. Also it is a matter for regret that the pleasant customs of paying New Year's calls and of giving New Year's presents has disappeared. All the ritual of the day is gone; even the newboy brings only a prosaic calendar nowadays, instead of the elaborate poetic address which in years gone by set forth his claims on the world's generosity. And New Year's resolutions exist chiefly in the imagination of humorous writers.

Now, it is true that the apparently harmless customs of paying calls and giving presents on New Year's day were not regarded with favor by all critics of morals and manners. Early in the eighteenth century Henry Bourne, M. A., "curate of the parochial chapel of All Saints, in Newcastle upon Tyne," wrote "Antiquitates vulgares, or the antiquities of the common people, giving an account of their opinions and ceremonies, with proper reflections upon each of them; shewing which may be retained and which ought to be laid aside." And he felt that he must be very careful indeed with his discussion of New Year's calls and gifts. He approved of them, in moderation; but he wanted to be on the safe side.

"As the vulgar are always very careful to end the old year well," he wrote, (pointing his satire by means of italics,) "so they are also careful of beginning well the new one. As they end the former with a hearty commotation, so they begin the latter with the sending of presents, which are termed New Year's gifts to their friends and acquaintances; the original of both which customs is superstitious and sinful; and was observed that the succeeding year might be prosperous and successful."

He calls many writers to witness the antiquity of these customs, quoting from Bishop Stillingfleet, Claus Wormius, Scheffer, "Snorro Sturleson," and "the poet Naogeorgus." Then he writes: "And no doubt, those Christians were highly worthy of censure, who imagined, as the heathens did, that the sending of a present then was in any way lucky, and an omen of the success of the following year. For this was the very thing that made several holy men, and some general councils, take notice of, and forbid any such custom; because the observance of it, out of any such design and view, was superstitious and sinful, we are told, in a place of St. Austin, the observation of the calends of January is forbid, the songs which were wont to be sung on that day, the feasting, and the presents which were then sent as a token and omen of a good year. But to send a present at that time, out of esteem, or gratitude, or charity, is no where forbid."

"On the contrary, it is praiseworthy. For the ancient fathers did vehemently inveigh against the observations of the calends of January; yet it was not because of those presents and tokens of mutual affection and love that passed; but because the day itself was dedicated to idols, and because of some prophane rites and ceremonies they observed in solemnizing it."

"If then I send a New Year's gift to my friend, it shall be a token of my friendship; if to my benefactor, a token of my gratitude; if to the poor (which at this time must never be forgot) it shall be to make their hearts sing for joy, and give praise and adoration to the giver of all good gifts."

At any rate, we still say "Happy New Year!" whether or not the words have any special significance to us. In the time of the learned Bourne there were those who regarded this phrase with deep suspicion. He writes: "Another old custom at this time is the wishing of a good New Year, either when a New Year's gift is presented, or when friends meet. Now, the original of this custom is heathenish, as appears by the feasting and presents before mentioned, which were a wish for a good year, and it was customary among the heathens on the calends of January, to go about and sing a New Year's song. Hospinian, therefore, tells that when night comes on, not only the young, but also the old of both sexes, run about here and there, and sing a song at the doors of the wealthier people, in which they wish them a happy New Year. This he speaks indeed of the Christians, but he calls it an exact copy of the heathens' custom."

"But, however, I cannot see the harm of retaining this ancient ceremony, so it be not used superstitiously, nor attended with obscenity and lewdness. For then there will be no more harm than wishing a good each others welfare and prosperity; no more harm, than wishing a good day, or good night; than in bidding one godspeed."

In Philadelphia there has been preserved up to recent years the custom of New Year's "mumming." Boys and girls—men and women also, to some extent—dressed in fantastic clothes and with their faces painted or masked, could be seen in the streets up to recently, begging and playing practical jokes. They did similar things in eighteenth century London, by no means to the approval of the curate of the parochial chapel of All Saints in Newcastle-on-Tyne. He writes: "There



is another custom observed at this time, which is called among us mummung; which is a changing of clothes between men and women; who when dressed in each others' habits go from one neighbor's house to another, and make merry with them in disguise, by dancing and singing, and such like merriments. * * * It were to be wished this custom which is still so common among us at this season of the year were laid aside; as it is directly opposite to the word of God."

It is possible that "mumming" is related in some way to the performance which marked "Hogmanay" in England and Scotland. "Hogmanay" was the last day of the year. Some scholars think the word comes from the Greek "agia mene," ("holy month"); others from the Saxon "halig monath," which has the same meaning; still others from the French phrase "Au guil menez" ("to the mistletoe go!"); which mummungers anciently cried in France at Christmas, or from "Au gueux menez," ("Bring to the beggars!"). Whatever the origin of the word may be, Hogmanay was the time for much amateur begging.

The children went from house to house, singing such songs as:

"Hogmanay, trololay,
Give us of your white bread,
But none of your grey,
Hogmena, Hogmena,
Give us cake and cheese, and let us go away."

As they sang they collected what they called their "farls"—oaten cake and cheese. From this developed the "letting in" of the new year. Parties of men and boys went through the town. They stopped at the front door of every house and sang until they were admitted. Then they received a small gift of money, went through the house and left by the back door. That a man should be the first visitor of the year was a general belief in the British isles for centuries, nor is it yet extinct.

In Scotland the ceremony of "first-footing" has almost entirely died out, but in some of the remotest parts of that country it is pleasantly remembered. At the approach of 12 on New Year's eve a "hot pint" was prepared. This was a kettle of warm spiced or sweetened ale, with a liberal infusion of spirits. When the clock struck, every member of the family drank to the new year.

Then the elders of the family went out into the street, carrying the kettle, of spiced ale and a supply of buns, cakes, bread, and cheese. When they met a party of friends similarly engaged, they stopped to exchange greetings and sips of ale. They went to the houses of their neighbors, sent the kettle from friend to friend, and spent the hours before dawn in sociability and good cheer. If they were the first to enter a house after twelve o'clock they were the "first-foot" and received especial favor.

In England, the first-footing parties were made up generally of the poor boys of the village, who carried a "wassail-bowl" decorated with ribbons, and received in return for their proffered drinks and good wishes, cakes and cups of ale. But in Scotland as recently as 100 years ago first-footing was a democratic social institution, in which few were too proud to share. The principal streets of Edinburgh, it is said, were more crowded between twelve and one on New Year's day morning than at noon on business days.

A simple ceremony, not yet obsolete, consisted in unbarring the front door as the clock struck twelve, to let the old year out and the new year in. In the island of Guernsey the children paraded the streets carrying the effigy of a man, emblematic of the dying year. This they buried at midnight on the seashore, with elaborate ritual. At Burghhead in Morayshire, they kept New Year's eve by "burning the clavie." They made huge piles of herring barrels, and set fire to them with peat. The burning embers they carried home to their houses as a protection against whatever evils the year might bring.

On New Year's day the Scotch of bygone generations believed no fire should go out of the house. If it were given, misfortune might be prevented by throwing burning peat into a tub of water.

There is something suggestive of the Russian Easter in one "first-footing" custom once popular

in Scotland and England. The first visitor to a house on New Year's morning had the privilege of kissing the person that opened the door. Perhaps there is a reminiscence of ancient fire worship in the Shropshire custom of stirring the fire on New Year's morning before uttering a word.

Although there are few houses where New Year's day is observed with its oldtime hospitality, the day is not wholly divorced from the thought of good things to eat. The ridiculous New Year's eve dinners in the Broadway restaurants have no special significance, but there are certain dishes inseparably associated with the day.

One of these is roast goose, which is perhaps more liked in England than America. But even more characteristic are those admirable little cakes which come from Germany, and which are imported in tin boxes. German cooks have made them for centuries, have lavished their time and energy on new designs and new flavors, and the result is a cake so excellent that it must always be the special delight of the New Year feast. This point of ritual, surely, must be left us.

So excellent is the German New Year's cake that it cannot be used for a charm, like the New Year's eve cake of Ireland. For this was thrown against the wall and broken into pieces. The first fragment to touch the ground was eagerly sought, for he who ate it was sure of a year's happiness. There was much pleasure in the baking of the cake, and incantations were sung to secure the success of the charm.

THE CALL OF THE NEW YEAR

A Christian man sat in the Master's presence thinking of the coming of the new year. It was a good but solemn thing to do. The man's thoughts in that presence ran thus: "Seeing him I am sure that every year is 'the year of our Lord.' It ought to be 'begun, continued and ended in him.' He will be with me all the days. My days must be in his hands." The Christian man continued his meditation—always in his presence. "What sort of man ought I to be, this year and all years?" The answer came out of an old word which had new meaning, in his presence: "Complete in him." Again he asked: "What kind of work ought I to do this year and all years?" The centuries fade away and he seems to hear again: "Whatever he saith unto you do it." He asked again: "Where shall I go to be his man and do his work?" Once more old words leap into new times: "To your household, to your neighbor, and to all the world." "How can I do all this?" "The entrance of his word giveth light," therefore give yourself to Bible study; "not by might nor by power but by my Spirit, saith the Lord of hosts," therefore give yourself to prayer; "I can do all things through Christ," therefore give yourself to work; "in all things he shall have the pre-eminence," therefore give yourself to him. And the man arose from the meditation to make the new year and all years, years of the Lord. And the Master arose and went with the man.—Bishop McDowell.

THE NEW YEAR.

Julia Ward Howe was no believer in New Year's resolutions. "We should make and keep good resolutions all the year round," the celebrated author once said in Boston. "I am no great believer in New Year's vows, for, although they are splendid things, they really don't amount to much more than Oliver Wendell Holmes' tobacco resolution."

"Mr. Holmes, with affected gravity, said to a friend on the first day of the year: 'I really must not smoke so persistently; I must turn over a new leaf—a tobacco leaf—and have a cigar only after each—here he paused as if to say 'meal,' but he continued—'after each cigar.'"

A CASUAL OBSERVATION.

"We are living in an age of exceptional culture," said the woman with angular features. "Mebbe we are," said Farmer Cornstossel. "But I can't help noticin' that people walk right up to the news stand to buy some pretty fluffy stuff, while it takes a mighty good book agent to work off a set of Shakespeare."

His Only Possession.
Al Rogers was traveling through a lonely section in the suburbs of Boston one night, a short while ago, when he was startled by hearing this piteous appeal:
"Will the kind gentleman please help a poor unfortunate man? I—"
At this point Al felt to locate his watch. The other continued:
"I have nothin' in the world but this loaded revolver."

The Drummer's Work.
"Are these moving pictures of the war authentic?"
"Of course. All but the rumble of artillery. That's imitated by the drummer."

Paradoxical Result.
"What's the matter with my labor theories?"
"They won't work."

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MODERN LIVING COMES HIGH

Observer Thinks There Are Too Many "Necessities" in Demand at the Present Time.

"One of the reasons for the cost of living," observes a wise clubman, "lies in the fact that people buy wholly unnecessary things. I had a conversation with the proprietor of a novelty shop in Fifth avenue a few days ago. A shiny object had attracted my attention, and I inquired about its use.

"Those," said the proprietor, "are gilded pincers to pick up letters one has placed on the letter-panels."

"And that ivory stick, carved and forked at the end?"

"People use that to fish out things they have dropped into carafes."

"That square of morocco, about the size of a nut—what is that for?"

"That's a tampon—used to press down stamps after sticking them on envelopes."

"That ornamental box with a whole battery of little brushes?"

"Those are to clean other brushes; brushes to clean hair-brushes, brushes to clean tooth-brushes."—New York Evening Post.

Walking Graveyards.

Some of the Indian princes have given over two million dollars apiece to Britain for the war. Beside such gifts, the gifts of London business millionaires seem small.

"In fact," said James Douglas, in an interview, "in fact, the gifts of the nizams of Hyderabad and the maharajah of Mysore and the gawkwar of Badoa give our English merchant princes, who owe England so much more, a look of avarice; and you know the definition of avarice."

"Avarice, like a graveyard, takes in all it can get, and never gives anything back."

The Peeling Kind.

"Mamma," said a little boy, "the place where I got stung last Sunday down at Uncle Jim's is all peeling off."

Brother Bruce took a look at the injury.

"That's so," he grinned, "I guess you must have been stung by a husking bee."

Inconsistent.

"The English are queer people."

"You think so?"

"Yes. In time of peace they treated Tommy Atkins with contempt and made him sore, and now in time of war they treat him with so much good liquor that they make him drunk."

War Styles.

"Have you heard anything about the fall fashions as yet?"

"Not as to how the gowns will be made. I suppose the girls are bound to wear cartridge belts, of course."

Marble to Retain.

Knicker—Jones has a remarkable memory.

Bocker—Wonderful; he remembers a winter that wasn't just like this.

Few of the men who are willing to give you a recommendation would give you a job.

Why Thomas Concurred.

Whack, whack, whack! Tommy was undergoing a painful punishment at the hands of his loving mother for eating the jam.

"Tommy," she said seriously, when she was forced to pause, "this hurts me far more than it does you."

And when Tommy was alone with his brother he produced a square board he had concealed, and thoughtfully murmured:

"I thought all along that bit of wood wouldn't do her any good!"

At the First Signs

Of falling hair get Cuticura. It works wonders. Touch spots of dandruff and itching with Cuticura Ointment, and follow next morning with a hot shampoo of Cuticura Soap. This at once arrests falling hair and promotes hair growth. For free sample each with 32-p. Skin Book, address post card: Cuticura, Dept. X, Boston. Sold everywhere.—Adv.

Seeking Worthy Objects.

"Dodsworth tells me that he is a practical philanthropist."

"That's just what he is. Before offering a dime to a beggar Dodsworth asks him so many disagreeable questions that the poor devil is glad to escape without the dime."

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