

OLD and NEW CHRISTMAS CUSTOMS

HERE are two days of supreme importance to all christendom when, no matter what the difference in creeds, the whole Christian world unites in the observance of what are rightly regarded as the most significant anniversaries in the year. On Easter and Christmas all the churches are at one.

The story of the first Christmas is so universally known that it needs no repetition, and one hesitates to repeat it for fear of mar- ring the beauty and simplicity of the original narrative. The story of the origin of the observance of Christmas is quite another thing, however, and may be approached in a more mundane spirit. We take part in the time honored customs which are so intimately associated with the day without stopping to consider whether they had their inception in the Christmas idea or whether they ever had any other significance than they now have. We trim the Christmas tree, distribute our presents, decorate with holly and mistletoe and sit down to a big dinner, and if we ever stop to think why we do these things (and it is more than likely that we don't) why, it is just the Christmas cus- tom and that's all there is to it.

But it is very far from being all. The customs which seem such an in- tegral part of the festival are inextricably tangled up with Roman, Scandi- navian, German and Celtic ceremonials, in which very many of them had their origin. Our Christmas, when we investigate it, is found to be a melting pot of pagan traditions and practices without number, purged of their old significance and adapted to the higher faith.

The observer halts before the contemplation of the countless variety of customs associated with Christmas in all lands, both in the past and the present day. To describe them all would fill a good sized book, so we can only refer briefly here to some of the most prominent of them.

The early fathers of the church, however much they might have desired to banish all pagan practices from the exercises of religion, were perforce obliged to allow their converts to retain part of the old usages. It was an impossibility to put an end to them, so they wisely decided that it was better to let the people follow their bent along certain lines rather than to antagonize them by insisting too strongly on a course which they were bound to oppose. The more glaringly heathenish rites were eradicated, and those which remained were purged of their more objectionable features and infused with a new spirit.

Christmas was not observed at all, so far as we can find any record, for 200 or 300 years after the birth of Christ, and as the event had occurred in such a humble fashion men were quite unable to determine its date when they began to interest themselves in keeping the anniversary. There is not a month in the year for which some authority has not claimed the honor of the nativity. One thing is certain, and that is that it could not have occurred on the 25th of December, as this date is the height of the rainy season in Judea, as in California, and it is quite unlikely that the shepherds could have been watching their flocks by night under those conditions.

The first attempt on record to assign any date for the nativity was made in Egypt about 200 A. D., when May 20 was the date mentioned. From that time forward claims were made for various dates, January 6 and December 25 being the most in favor up to the time of Chrysostom in the fourth century, when the latter gained the preference.

This date was not chosen entirely without reason. The celebration of the winter solstice was one of the chief festivals of Rome, and among the Celts and Germans it was regarded with even greater significance. The sun, as the giver of light and heat, and consequently of life, has been an object of worship and adoration from the remotest times down to the present day; therefore the period of the winter solstice was marking the renewal of the power of the sun was a time of rejoicing among all peoples who either worshipped the sun directly or who regarded it as a manifestation of one of their deities. The 12 days between December 25 and January 6 were regarded as extremely important by the Teutonic races, who believed that at that time the influence of the gods was more powerfully directed toward the earth than at any other. Nothing could be more natural, therefore, than that these peo- ples, on turning to Christianity, should fix the commemoration of the appear- ance of the Saviour on the earth at the same time of year they had been ac- customed to acknowledge the glory of the sun. The significance of the two events is parallel; the one heralds new life to the physical world and the other the deliverance of the human race from the powers of evil.

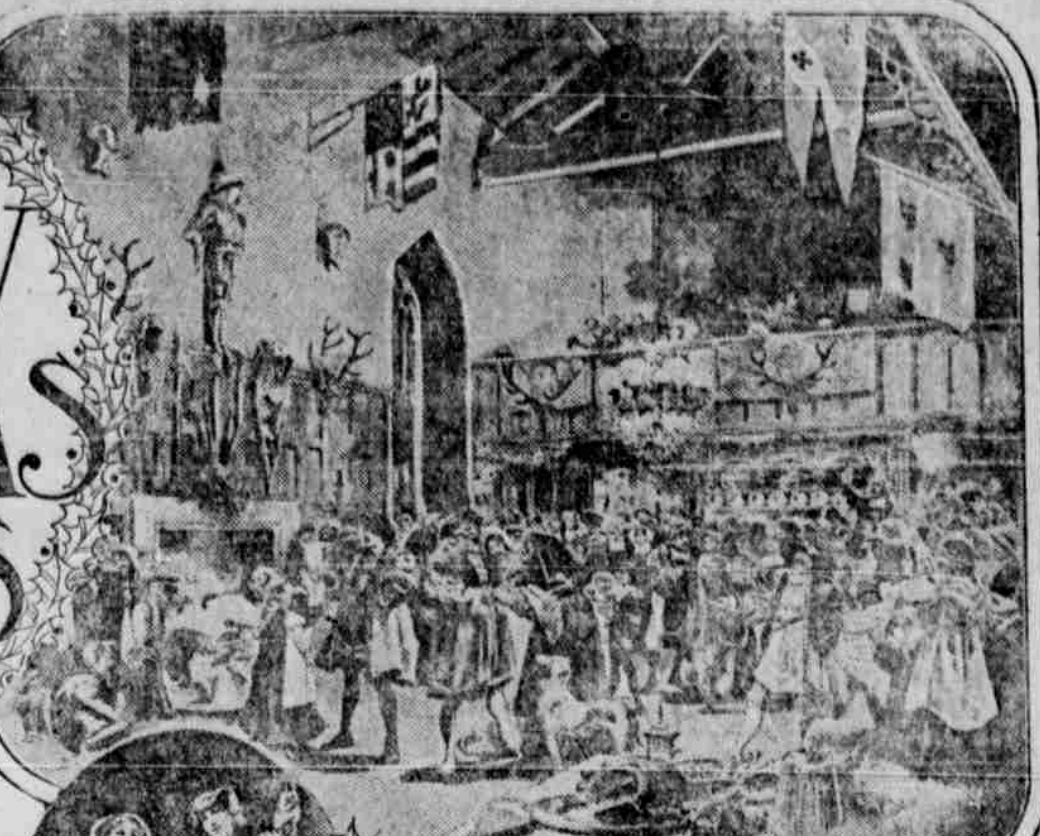
It has been pointed out that in the early period of the church it was con- sidered wise to allow the converts to retain some of the old customs. The observance of Christmas was therefore encouraged as a substitute for the pagan festivals, in particular for the Roman saturnalia, which occurred in December and which was so popular that while it originally lasted for one day only (the 17th), it was first extended to three days and later, under the Em- peror Claudius, to seven. The festival was opened by public sacrifice before the temple of Saturn, followed by a great public banquet, in which all classes participated. From this time all the people seemed to go mad; the com- pletest liberty prevailed and it was a time of universal festivity and merry making. Crowds swarmed through the streets shouting "To Saturnalia," a form of greeting similar to the modern "Merry Christmas." It was a holiday time in the widest sense; schools and law courts were closed and the senate adjourned; no criminal was executed and no war was proclaimed. The slaves enjoyed an equality with their masters, and even served them at the table. The people occupied themselves in calling on one another, in exchanging presents and attending banquets. There was always one day especially de- voted to the children, a custom to which we may trace the particular sig- nificance of Christmas to children down to the present time.

Certain other practices of the Saturnalia which Christmas has preserved related to candles, images and cakes. Candles were always in evidence at this time, as were small images made either of baked clay or dough. The Germans today always make a practice of baking great quantities of all kinds of Christmas cakes, which are an important and indispensable adjunct to the occasion.

The custom of decorating with evergreens at Christmas has the tradition of ages back of it. As far back as history goes people have been in the habit of using flowers and greens in all sorts of festivals. The use of the mistle- toe, however, is a survival from the ancient Celts and Scandinavians, to whom it was an object of particular veneration at all times and especially when it grew on an oak. When found growing on this tree the Druids cut it with solemn ceremonies and used it in their sacrificial rites. It was believed to possess magic qualities of potent power. It is still potent, but only in the matter of conferring privileges.

The first historic mention of a Christmas tree was made in Strasburg in 1665, but the Danes go farther back than that. They have a sweet old legend relating to the time when Ansgar first preached Christianity to the Danes, wherein it is told how the Lord sent his three messengers, Faith, Hope and Charity, to help light the first Christmas tree. They sought for one that should be as high as hope and wide as love, and that bore the sign of the cross on every bough and they finally found it in the balsam fir.

Beliefs which have been cherished for ages generally die hard, and the church, realizing this, introduced other practices into the old customs which survived from paganism. Such were the miracle plays and dramatic repre- sentations of early events in Christ's life, which received great attention during the middle ages and of which the Christmas carols may be considered an offshoot. These enjoyed great popularity throughout all Europe, but particularly in England, where in many villages today it is customary for troops of men and boys, called the wights, to go from door to door singing



carols for several nights before Christ- mas.

Similarly in some of the country districts in France the children make the rounds of the village, carrying a lit- tle cradle on their backs and singing carols for pennies.

Santa Claus is not as familiar a figure in France as he is among us. There, instead of hanging up their stockings to be filled by him, they place their shoes in front of the fireplace on Christmas eve, so that the Christchild may leave their presents in them.

In north Germany, however, it is not the Christchild who gives the presents, but his servant, Knecht Ruprecht. This individual is usually represented by a man who clothes him- self in a white robe and high buskins, a mask and an enormous wig. So attired he presents himself at the door and announces that he is sent by the Christchild to distribute gifts among the children. The parents receive him ecstatically, and he inquires whether each child has been good, and if the answer is in the affirmative the child receives his presents; but if not, Knecht Ruprecht gives the parents a stick with the advice to use it often.

In Belgium the children go about carrying paper stars with a lighted candle in the center from Christmas to Epiphany, to commemorate the appearance of the star of Bethlehem. There is a similar practice among some of the natives of Alaska belonging to the Greek church. A procession of men, women and children is formed, at the head of which is carried a large figure of a star covered with brightly colored paper. Two men also march at the head, carrying lanterns on long poles. The procession makes the rounds of the village, stopping at each house, where the marchers are invited to come in and take refreshments. They always accept and after singing a carol or two they march on to the next house. This performance is kept up through Christmas week, but after the second night it is varied by the introduction of a new feature. The star bearers are pursued by men and boys, who try to catch them and destroy their stars, and while the significance of the game is supposed to lie in the fact that it is a repre- sentation of the soldiers of Herod killing the children of Bethlehem, the players are mainly concerned in the opportunities for a frolic which it af- fords and bother themselves little about the event it is supposed to com- memorate.

The old custom of burning the yule log still endures in certain parts of Europe. It is an outgrowth of the feast of Jul among the ancient Scandi- navians, when every winter at the solstice they kindled enormous fires in honor of the god Thor. Among the Slavonians of southeastern Europe the bringing in and burning of the yule log is an elaborate ceremony. Some time during the week before Christmas, or on the day before, an oak or beech tree is selected, but on account of the superstition that such trees are endowed with souls it is necessary to observe certain precautions while cutting it down. The hewers must wear gloves throughout the whole pro- ceeding and before they dare lay an ax to the tree they must face the east and cross themselves three times, and in felling it they must take care that it falls toward the east. Evil consequences will follow if they do not chop off a chicken's head on the fresh stump, using the same ax with which they cut down the tree. The first chip is the prize of the housewife, who pre- serves it to put under the cream dish, so that the cream will be rich and abundant during the year.

After sprinkling the newly hewn log with barley to insure good crops for the coming year it is ready to load on the ox wagon and the homeward journey is so timed that the house is not reached until after twilight falls. The housewife is on the lookout for it and as soon as she sees it coming she hastens to hide the table, the spoons, the fire shovel and the dining chairs, which are not brought to light again until the log has been kindled. It is generally about midnight when the log is brought into the house, and it is received at the doorway by the father, who wishes his family a "Good morning and merry Christmas" three times. They, on greeting him in turn, shake over him some barley and, this ceremonial having been ob- served, he drags the log up to the hearth by means of a chain wound around it. In case the log is brought into the house before evening three sticks are cut from it and leaned against the eastern wall, where they remain, crowned with ivy, until the log is burned out.

The log must be paid marked respect by everybody up to the very last if good luck is to be enjoyed during the year, and no one had better ap- proach it barefooted unless he wants to condemn himself to a whole year's suffering with sore feet.

Christmas eve is distinguished by feasting and if a visitor appears he is sprinkled with grain from a sieve by the master of the house, in return for which greeting he places three candles wound around with gold and silver thread in the bottom of the sieve. These are lit at the beginning of the meal and when everybody has had his fill the master of the house ex- tinguishes them with a bit of bread dipped in wine.

Much more could be told concerning the way Christmas is observed in different localities and many curious beliefs and practices would thus be brought to light. Some can be traced directly to a purely Christian source; the origin of others is unexplainable, and very many prove to be relics of the ages preceding the introduction of Christianity. The features briefly touched upon above are only the skimmings of innumerable usages relating to this one day. There is no other day in the year about which such a great variety of traditions and observances cluster, for there is no other day which people so delight to commemorate and none which is regarded with such deep and universal veneration.

Now is the time of all good things that delight the heart of man at the passing of summer. Hickory nuts, fresh molasses, apples, sweet cider and "punkin" pie, are all ushered in with the approaching vanguard of winter, and until the April rains re- turns we shall be basking in the warmth and comfort, the cheer and delight of home.—Paris, Mo., Appeal.

Spain annually uses the huge quantity of 275,000 tons of grapes for the making of other products than wine.

TIME OF ALL GOOD THINGS

Writer Speaks of Happiness Ushered in With the Coming of the First Frost.

With the coming of the first frost, when a wind of icy freshness blows across the fields, comes also the true realization of what "home" means. With supper ended, an intermittent clatter of knives and dishes comes from the hidden regions of the kitchen, where Lizzie is manipulating a

tea towel with all the vigor of her eleven years in the hope of earning the "extra nice present" which Brother Bob, writing from Chicago, has promised her at Christmas for lending mother a hand. Father pulls out an old, blackened cob, and having filled and lit it, props his feet up on the hob. From now till bedtime, save for sundry interruptions, he is buried to his eyebrows in the weekly paper, and neither Nero's growlings at the rumble of a distant wagon nor the continued mutterings of the kettle

which steams and sputters on the stove, can disturb his meditations. And while father reads and mother mends, with Lizzie frowning over her lesson at the table, an invisible white brush paints all the countryside with the sparkling rime of the first frost. It sparkles from the cobweb under the eaves like drops of molten silver; it gleams from grass and stubble, and glitters from every tree, so that when the moon comes over the barn, grass and tree and stubble scintillate with soft, sugared brilliance.

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YOUNG FARMERS FROM NORTH AND WEST MAKE VISIT TO WASHINGTON

Champion Potato, Corn and Tomato Growers Are Handsomely Entertained at the National Capital Along With Prize Winners From Southern States—Work Encouraged by Agricultural Department in Various States of the Union.

Washington.—When the Canning club girls and the Corn club boys from the southern states arrived in Wash- ington recently there were boys and girl representatives of the potato, corn



Secretary of Agriculture Houston.

and canning clubs of the northern and western states to join them in receiving diplomas from the secretary of ag- riculture. They also were shown the sights of the capital; their expenses being paid by individuals and local or state organizations interested and not by the department.

There were 12 Canning club girls from as many of the northern and western states and 15 or 20 boys, champion winners of the potato and corn clubs. Five states sending "potato boys" are Massachusetts, Ohio, Utah, Iowa and Michigan. Colorado sent a "Sugar Beet club" boy, who was the champion sugar beet grower of the state and was the sole representa- tive of the club work which has re- cently been started in this line by the department of agriculture.

The work of the clubs which the department has encouraged in the various states to interest the younger generation in agriculture has been going on in the northern and western states for only about a year and a half. The work was started sooner in

As an example of the interest taken by individuals, the work of a well-known society leader of Cleveland, O., may be cited. She has devoted from three to four months of her time during the past year to organizing and promoting girls' canning clubs. She has paid visits to the 126 girls in her county who have taken up the work, and among the girls who will shortly visit Washington are two champions of that district who come at her ex- pense. Her two daughters, aged four- teen and sixteen years, are among the club members, and, although not com- peting for a prize, they have done the work of raising tomatoes on a one- tenth acre plot and canning the prod- ucts.

In districts where corn does not grow readily, but where there are plenty of young people eager to grow something, it has been found that potato clubs are more satisfactory than corn clubs. An organization of boys and girls was started last year in Massachusetts to grow potatoes, and there are now 18,000 young people en- rolled in potato work, most of them being boys, as the girls are encour- aged rather to take up tomato raising and canning. Some girls, however, have shown interest in potato grow- ing and have done particularly well in manufacturing home-made potato



Boys Judging Contest.

starch out of the unmarketable culls of the vegetable.

Potato club work is going on in Idaho, Iowa, Colorado, Utah, Wyoming, Upper Michigan, in parts of the Dako- tas, in Minnesota and in Ohio. The young people engaged in potato grow- ing range in age from ten to eighteen years. The basis on which the awards are made for the potato champions who will go to Washington is as fol- lows:

- (1) Greatest yield of potatoes per one-eighth acre 40
- (2) Best showing of profit on in- vestment 30
- (3) Best exhibit of one peck of seed potatoes 15
- (4) Best history on "How I Made My Crop of Potatoes" 15

Total score 100

Besides showing good potatoes, well developed ears of corn and rows of at- tractive jars of well canned toma- toes, these young people have shown a surprising amount of pluck and per-

CARRANZA'S NEPHEWS TRAINED AVIATORS



The two young nephews of General Carranza, commander-in-chief of the rebel forces of Mexico, who were sent to the United States by President Madero to learn to fly. Lieut. Gustavo Salinas (in machine) was educated at Syracuse university, and his brother, Lieut. Alberto Salinas (standing), re- ceived his education at Troy Polytechnic. The brothers were given their pilot licenses last year, and are well known in the aviation world. Recently they succeeded in smuggling an aeroplane across the Mexican border.

MASTER JAILED, DOG STRIKES

Searching for His Owner, Hector Dis- appears and Police Are Asked to Look for Him.

Minneapolis.—This is a story of a dog that went on a hunger strike. It is also a story of a man the dog adopt- ed, showing his faithfulness and set- ting the whole police department on a hunt for the dog.

Hector is the dog and Frank Tre- wick of St. Cloud, Minn., is the man. The man took a drop too much and was snagged into the East Side police station. The dog accompanied him and when his friend disappeared cellward Hector set up a howl that kept the po- lice awake. Frank was fed in his cell, J. Quasley's office, but Hector would not eat. He would only howl.

When Frank was fined and it looked as if he would have to spend a few days in the workhouse, arrangements were made to have Hector cared for at the pound, but Frank paid his fine and asked for Hector.

The dog's howling has ceased, but the policemen were surprised when they discovered that Hector was not in the room where he had been locked. He had wriggled between narrow bars and had gone to look for Frank.

Now the police have been instructed to find Hector and restore Frank to him.

Don't attempt to remove pitch, var- nish or wax from a burned surface.

everance in meeting setbacks and un- foreseen disasters.

Illustrated booklets which the vari- ous young agriculturists have made giving an account of "How I Made My Crop," contain many stories indicating that young America is not exclusive- ly bent on city life, but finds much for



Agricultural Students at Work.

enjoyment and interest on the farm. A girl in northern Ohio tells in her account how she made a net profit of \$10.41 on her tomato work during the past season. A note at the bottom of her story says she "had 50 bushels of green tomatoes left."

POSTCARD SENT NEWLY WEDS

Highly Decorated Remembrance is Incribed With Advice From Sender.

Denver.—A wooden postcard nearly two feet long and more than half a foot wide and highly decorated with instructions to newly married couples was handed to E. C. Bennett, clerk at the Kaiserhof hotel, by the letter car- rier when making his usual mail de- livery.

It was addressed to Mr. and Mrs. Roy D. Lee of Pueblo, who were here on their honeymoon. The couple had departed, however, before the card ar- rived. Clerk Bennett tried to put it in the mail box and it wouldn't go. Then he hung it up over his desk. That caused so many people to make use- less remarks that he shoved it under the counter.

Then some one told him he was in- terfering with the United States mails, so he took it out again and handed it to the telephone operator, who wrote another address on it and forwarded it after the happy couple.

One motto said: "May all the troubles be little ones." Another said: "Be good to one another." Another card asked the clerk, in the event he could not deliver the postcard, to re- turn to the couple addressed at Rose- lawn cemetery, Pueblo, Colo., as that would undoubtedly be their stopping place in the end.

The card had thirty-four stamps on it and numerous pictures of hearts, cupids and other designs which con- veyed the impression that the parties addressed were in a blissful state of mind.

Remedy for High Cost of Living.

New York.—"Fuel for the body should not cost more than twenty cents a day for an adult," said Doctor D. G. Lusk, speaking on "The Founda- mental Basis of Nutrition." He recom- mended as a remedy for the high cost of living a thorough knowledge of what food really is.

Woman's Ashes by Parcel Post.

Paterson, N. J.—Under the regis- trar's permit, the ashes of Miss Hen- rietta Branning, a school teacher, will go to Germany by parcels post.