

Christmas in the Old Days and Now

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All the world keeps Christmas day. From the land of the midnight sun to the sunny south of perpetual summer is a far cry. But in the long distance there is no land where Christmas is not kept. Its celebration is a part of the universal history of the human race. Whatever may have been its origin and whatever peculiarities may have gathered about it in its adaptation to different people and different circumstances, it is to us Americans to-day a practically national feast.

To keep it was at one time, and in our own part of the country, it is true, a penal offense. It was thought to savor of prelaty and to foster unpleasant memories of political servitude. But it has grown with our growth and the broad-mindedness of the American people is seen at its best in the hearty commemoration of the nativity of the Christ from year to year.

In some parts of the country, in fact, Christmas day bids fair to supplant Thanksgiving day, and it certainly may already claim an equality of recognition with the time-honored national festival of our New England forbears. People of every creed and every nationality within our borders delight to participate in the celebration of the Christmas feast, and many a scion of old-world stock finds himself back home again as the church bells peal and the candles glimmer on the Christmas trees. It is a time of universal peace and good will. It brightens homes, softens asperities and uplifts us as it brings "the light that never was on land or sea."

The Origin Unknown.
The origin of the festival is said to be lost in antiquity. If, as held by many, it is a Christian feast grafted on to a pagan one, its history is age long. The actual institution of Christmas as the celebration of the nativity of Jesus Christ dates from the second century of the Christian era. St. Chrysostom says that it was observed from the beginning, according to western practice, from Thrace to the Straits of Gibraltar, and he calls it "the most venerable, the mother of all the rest."

But as to the time of the celebration there was a diversity of observance. The early Christian church naturally kept Easter as commemorative of the resurrection of Christ, which the apostles were especially chosen and instructed to proclaim, and the feast of Pentecost, which became the birthday of the church, came next in order. Then to these were added two others, the one commemorative of the baptism of Jesus Christ and the other of his birth. The first of these, the Epiphany, or Manifestation, came from the east to the west. The second, Christmas, or the nativity, came from the west to the east. The two were officially recognized and quite widely kept in both the east and west in the fourth century. In a sermon preached by the Golden-Mouthed in Antioch on December 25, A. D. 386, he speaks of the festival of Christmas as having first become known there 10 years before and on another occasion he invites his hearers to participate in its approaching observance.

But as to the reason for the selection of December 25 as Christmas day, first arrived at by the Hippolytes, there is much difference of opinion. It is held by some that the German name of the festival "Weihnacht," is a literal translation of the Hebrew "Chanuka," the Jewish festival of the purification of the temple by Judas Maccabees, which begins on December 17, and that as the Passover and Pentecost were perpetuated in Easter and Whitsuntide, so the festival of the purification has been preserved in Christmas and the practice of burning candles on the Christmas trees has come from the old Hebrew feast.

Early Festivals.
But the Purification can hardly be numbered among the greater and important festivals of the Hebrews and, as Schaff says, there is really no Old Testament feast corresponding to our Christmas. The weight of opinion as to the time of year chosen by the Christian church in the west lies in another and entirely different solution of the question and links the Christian observance to the ancient practice of the heathen world.

It must be remembered in this connection that the particular date was first fixed upon by the Roman branch of the church, and at that season of the year a series of pagan festivals occurred which were closely interwoven with the civil and social life of the Roman people. These festivals had an import which lent itself to the growth of the Christian faith, and they may have been spiritually adopted by the church in order to counteract their evil tendencies and at the same time advance the cause of the new religion.

The Saturnalia, for instance, represented the peaceful times of the golden age and abolished sharp distinctions between citizen and serf. But it was a time of wild and unholiness. Then the Brumalia—the feast of the shortest day, or winter solstice—was the commemoration of the birthday of the new sun about to return to the earth. It was the "dies natalis invicti solis." In the old mythology of the sun worshippers it was the birthday of Methras himself, and, in fact, the time of year when from unnumbered ages before the Chris-



THE WASSAIL BOWL OF SWIMMING ROASTED APPLES.



IN AUSTRIA CANDLES ARE SET IN THE WINDOWS.



KNECHT RUPRECHT WITH HIS JINGLING BELLS.

worship. The banquet time itself may be a survival, purified and refined, of the original feast to the gods and goddesses of the fabled Olympus. The "Yule" of "Morrie England" is the old Teutonic name of the religious festival of the winter solstice, during which Celt and Roman could trace the movements of their deities as they walked abroad in the world.

The Story Christmas Tells.
The Christian religion is not merely something built over the old ethnic religions as the church of St. Maria Sopra Minerva in Rome is built over the ruins of the old heathen temple of Minerva, or as the grove sacred to Adonis was planted by the order of the Emperor Hadrian over "the cave close to the village" which is now honored as the scene of the Saviour's birth. It had a larger and a deeper meaning. Christmas tells the story of a gradual but complete unfolding of the divine idea of religion as seen in the Christ Child, of its worship and its merry-making in its at once sacred and social feast.

The story is told simply but graphically by two of the four evangelists. St. Mark's gospel begins with the baptism of the Christ, so logically he had no need to tell the story of his birth and boyhood. St. John wrote near the close of the first century, and with the dominant idea of setting forth the divinity of Christ in opposition to the prevailing gnosti-

cism of the time. But St. Matthew, whose narrative bears traces of having been gleaned from Joseph and St. Luke, who probably got his information from Mary, have given us the story with a directness and a humaneness which the grotesque and often meretricious wonder-tales of the apocryphal gospels have but served to accentuate as a dark background to a touching and reverent picture.

Around the story legends naturally gathered. It was the custom in early days to decorate in this way the graves of heroes and some of these legends are no doubt the offspring of the "vulgar fable" of the apocryphal gospel stories. In some parts of the world the bees are said to sing on Christmas eve. The cattle kneel in honor of the manger-bed at Bethlehem. The sheep go in procession in commemoration of the angels' visit to the shepherds. The Indians creep through the winter woods of Canada to see the deer kneel and look up to the Great Spirit. In the German Alps the cattle are thought to have the gift of language, and the story is told of an Alpine farmer's servant who hid in the stable on Christmas eve and heard the horses talking about his own death, which followed a few days later.

A Bosnian Legend.
There is a Bosnian legend that the sun leaps in the heavens and the stars dance around it. A great peace comes stealing down over mountain and forest. The rotten stumps stand straight and green on the hillside. The grass is bedewed with blossoms and the birds sing on the mountain tops in thanks to God. In Poland the heavens open and Jacob's ladder is set up between earth and sky. In Austria the candles are set in the window, that the Christ Child may not stumble when he comes to bless the home. In north Germany the tables are spread and the lights left burning for the Virgin Mary and her attending angel.

The English superstition is admirably voiced by the myriad-minded Shakespeare in "Hamlet":
Some say that ever 'gainst that season comes
Wherein our Lord's birth is celebrated,
The bird of dawn singeth all night long,
And then they say no spirit can walk abroad.
The nights are wholesome, then no planets strike,
No fairy takes, nor witch hath power to charm,
So hallow'd and so gracious is the time."

If a man will compliment his wife upon her youthful appearance and tell her that he loves her, she will forgive other white lies.

MEN TO LIVE 120 YEARS

Rev. Newell Dwight Hillis in Chicago Lecture, Foresees Human Longevity—Advocates Suffrage.

Chicago.—That man may by his own methods of living sustain life until he reaches the age of 100, or even 120 years, is the contention of Rev. Dr. Newell Dwight Hillis, pastor of Plymouth church, Brooklyn, N. Y. Dr. Hillis arrived in Chicago in the course of a lecture tour which carried him through the middle west, bringing with him the excellent good news that the time is near at hand when we will "all be ashamed to show our faces in heaven before we are 100 years old." Dr. Hillis is convinced that present day conditions are such as to make for the longevity of the



race. He believes that in a thousand years women will own all the property.

He was talking about "The America of To-day and To-morrow" before the Cook County Teachers' association when he expressed the opinion that the span of life is to be lengthened.

"It has been proved," he said, "that the men of to-day are on an average four inches taller than the men of 500 years ago and that the women are five inches taller than the women of 1789."

"The women are getting the most of the education of to-day, and before long, if the men continue to go into business and get their recreation in the evening playing billiards, while the women follow intellectual pursuits, the latter will be the only educated persons of the country."

"I don't know why the women should not vote. I am tired listening to these false statements about the women to the effect that they were made inferior to man and should be kept subject to his authority and should have no say in politics or in religion. We are having too much trouble over that statement of Paul's that women should not talk in the church."

OLEO MAN FOR CONGRESS

Sixth Illinois District Voters Choose Moxley to Fill Lorimer's Place.

Chicago.—Unless the plans of one of defeated opponents succeed an oleo-margarine manufacturer will represent the Sixth Chicago district in congress. This manufacturer of a substitute for butter is William J. Moxley and he was elected after a hard campaign. So far as the records show he is the only oleo maker in congress. The government has had considerable trouble with men in Mr. Moxley's business and a Chicago paper which opposed his election called attention to the fact that Mr. Moxley had not been without his own clash with Uncle Sam.

Mr. Moxley was elected to succeed William Lorimer who was elevated to



the rank of senator last spring. He is wealthy and his friends are certain that he will give the people of the Sixth district satisfactory service.

"Touch Wood."

While we are on the subject of evil spirits let us listen to a correspondent who informs us that he has lately noticed a curious superstition among the children of his village. "When a motor appears the children within sight all run to touch something made of wood, retaining hold of it until the motor is out of sight. When asked to give a reason for this they say that it brings good luck. I wonder if any of your correspondents in other places have noticed this." We think it not unlikely. And except where the road is paved with wood, we should judge the incantation very effective.

Origin of the Oldest Christmas Hymn

IN EVERY Roman Catholic church and in probably ninety-and-nine out of every hundred Protestant churches throughout Christendom this is the season when is heard that grand old hymn whose tender and solemn strains find an echo in the universal human heart—"Adeste Fideles" (Come, All Ye Faithful). It is the anthem sung at high mass at Christmas-tide for centuries past, calling Christ's worshippers to Bethlehem, where the new-born Saviour lies.

This naive and beautiful Latin anthem is more ancient than its history, and goes back six or seven centuries. Saint Bonaventura, an Italian monk of the thirteenth century, who died in Lyons, France, in 1274, is credited with the authorship of the beginning:

Adeste fideles,
Laeti triumphantes,
Venite, Venite in Bethlehem.
Natum videte, Regem angelorum.
Venite adoremus,
Venite adoremus,
Venite adoremus Dominum.
Oh, come all ye faithful,
Joyful and triumphant,
Oh, come ye, oh, come ye to Bethlehem.
See the new-born Saviour, king of all the angels.
Oh, come let us adore him,
Oh, come let us adore him,
Oh, come let us adore him, Christ, our Lord.
Saint Bonaventura was a Franciscan scholastic philoso-

pher, and was surnamed "Doctor Seraphicus." His preserved writings are of a dogmatic or didactic nature exclusively, and this hymn is not to be found among them. Doubtless it is to be referred to the seraphic side of his genius and temperament. Its classic Latin cadences are of such lyric felicity that one cannot help but believe they were written to the noble and touching melody on whose wings they have floated to our time. Surely this is not too fantastic a suggestion, when it is remembered that the original Greek music of the Delphic hymn to Apollo is preserved intact, and that certain familiar phrases of the Gregorian chant, used to-day in the Roman mass, are identified by Hebrew historians as the same which were sung in Solomon's temple many centuries before the time of Christ.

The hymn "Adeste Fideles" is not known to have been used in England earlier than the seventeenth century. The musical setting, as we have it in modern notation, is ascribed by Novello to one John Reading, who was organist at Winchester cathedral from 1675 to 1681, and later at Winchester college. Its real origin is lost in the mists of antiquity which probably far antedates the middle ages and the Latin verses to which it has been inseparably wedded.

Word-language reaches but the one people or race to whom it is directly addressed. But the language of music is universal—it is "understood of the people" instantly all the wide world over—it needs not to be written in choice Latin nor translated into many tongues—it is caught up from the heart and echoes on forever. That is why the "Adeste Fideles" has become the Christmas hymn of all the world.

