

# Christmas in the Old Days and Now

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**A**Ll 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 prelacy 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 Maccabeus, 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 Christmastide 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 unpolished revelry. 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 the sun 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.



NECHT RUPRECHT WITH HIS JINGLING BELLS.

tian era pagan Europe, in all its tribes and peoples, had celebrated its chief festival. So here we have the double truth of the golden age and the rebirth of the unconquered sun, as he breaks the power of darkness, refined and enriched in the Christian teaching of "peace on earth and good will to men," as coincident with the rising of the Sun of Righteousness in the birth into the world of the son of the peasant woman who was also the Son of God.

This view of Christmas accentuates the true place of the Christian religion in relation to the ancient and deep-seated religions which preceded it, and at the same time reveals a beauty of development in its culmination as the completed manifestation of God to man. In the infancy of the race the winter solstice was everywhere a season of rejoicing. No matter what the peculiar form which it assumed, it expressed the world joy of the time. So the very idea of the Child God which gives Christmas its meaning may not only have been foretold by sybil and seer and prophet, but prefigured by the infant gods of the Greek and Egyptian and Hindu and Buddhist forms of religion.

These to us imperfect and unsatisfactory conceptions of the Divine may have been the rude but honest efforts of the earlier days of the human race to group the idea of a God-man which has been made so real and so full of joy to us in the Nativity and the Epiphany of the Christ. In this sense the early church may have been wiser than she wot of. Her aim was to select the best features of the heathen feasts and embody them for their purification in Christian practices and sacred rites and to weave the converts from their old superstitions to the deeper and more real truths of the Christian faith.

But in so doing she may have been the unconscious instrument of a divinely guided evolution in religious practice and belief which has ennobled and enriched the world. The symbolism of our Christmas to-day certainly lends itself in many ways to this point of view. In the greenery with which we deck our houses and churches and in the gift-laden fir trees which gladden our children's hearts, we still retain the symbols by which our heathen forefathers signified their faith in the power of returning sun to clothe the earth with green and hang new fruit on the trees. The Christmas carol may be a new birth of the hymns of the Saturnalia. The holly and mistletoe came from the Druid

"Yule" of "Merrie 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 tattle" 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 belowered 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 hallowed 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.

## SUFFERED TERRIBLY.

How Relief from Distressing Kidney Trouble Was Found.

Mrs. Elizabeth Wolf, 388 W. Morgan St., Tipton, Mo., says: "Inflammation of the bladder reached its climax last spring and I suffered terribly. My back ached and I could hardly get around and the secretions were scanty, frequent of passage and painful. I was tired all the time and very nervous. I began using Doan's Kidney Pills, and after taking a few boxes was cured and have been well ever since." Remember the name—Doan's. Sold by all dealers. 50 cents a box. Foster-Milburn Co., Buffalo, N. Y.



## HE DID HIS BEST.



Merchant—What? You were robbed of everything on the way?  
Messenger—Yes, but don't worry. They gave me a receipt.

## LEWIS' "SINGLE BINDER."

A hand-made cigar fresh from the table, wrapped in foil, thus keeping fresh until smoked. A fresh cigar made of good tobacco is the ideal smoke. The old, well cured tobaccos used are so rich in quality that many who formerly smoked 10c cigars now smoke Lewis' Single Binder Straight 5c. Lewis' Single Binder costs the dealer some more than other 5c cigars, but the higher price enables this factory to use extra quality tobacco. There are many imitations; don't be fooled. There is no substitute! Tell the dealer you want a Lewis "Single Binder."

## Stated in Cold Figures.

It costs on an average about \$250 to cure an incipient consumptive or to care for an advanced case of tuberculosis until death. If he is left in destitute circumstances without proper attention he will surely infect with his disease at least two other persons, and possibly more. Considering that the average life is worth to society in dollars and cents about \$1,500, the net loss which would accrue to a community by not treating its poor consumptives in proper institutions would be, for each case, including those who are unnecessarily infected, at the very lowest figure, \$4,250. On this basis, if the poor consumptives in the United States who are now sick were segregated from their families, and either kept in institutions until they died, or else cured of their disease, the saving to the country would be the enormous sum of \$1,275,000,000.

## Woman's Daring Deed.

In southern Tunis lies an extensive salt marsh desert called the Shott Jerid, of which the Arabs stand in terror, for many a caravan has been lost in the salt incrustated morass, which, according to De Lesseps is as much as 1,200 feet deep in places. This region has been crossed for the first time in a small automobile by a woman, Myriam Harry, a well-known French novelist.

## Taking the Tips.

"Why did Dollarby sell his hotel?"  
"He wasn't making money fast enough."  
"What is he doing now?"  
"He's luxuriating in the position of head waiter."

Heroic souls in old times had no more opportunities than we have; but they used them.—Charles Kingsley.

## HABIT'S CHAIN

Certain Habits Unconsciously Formed and Hard to Break.

An ingenious philosopher estimates that the amount of will power necessary to break a life-long habit would, if it could be transformed, lift a weight of many tons.

It sometimes requires a higher degree of heroism to break the chains of a pernicious habit than to lead a forlorn hope in a bloody battle. A lady writes from an Indiana town:

"From my earliest childhood I was a lover of coffee. Before I was out of my teens I was a miserable dyspeptic, suffering terribly at times with my stomach."

"I was convinced that it was coffee that was causing the trouble and yet I could not deny myself a cup for breakfast. At the age of 36 I was in very poor health, indeed. My sister told me I was in danger of becoming a coffee drunkard."

"But I never could give up drinking coffee for breakfast, although it kept me constantly ill, until I tried Postum. I learned to make it properly according to directions, and now we can hardly do without Postum for breakfast, and care nothing for coffee."

"I am no longer troubled with dyspepsia, do not have spells of suffering with my stomach that used to trouble me so when I drank coffee."

Look in pkgs. for the little book, "The Road to Wellville." "There's a Reason." Ever read the above letter? A new one appears from time to time. They are genuine, true, and full of human interest.

# Origin of the Oldest Christmas Hymn

**I**N 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 Christmastide for centuries past, calling Christ's worshippers to Bethlehem, where the new-born Savior 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 philos-

opher, 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.

