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**AMERICA'S FIRST
NEW YEAR'S DAY**

By J. A. EDGERTON

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NEW ENGLAND may have seen the first Thanksgiving celebration, and Philadelphia may have inaugurated the Fourth of July racket, but the initial New Year's day observed by white men on American soil was celebrated on the island of Haiti Jan. 1, 1493. Just what there was to that celebration will never be known. Columbus, for he was master of ceremonies, was so busy with other matters that he failed to leave a record. But it is impossible that Europeans should have let their first New Year's in a new world pass by without some observance.

It was on the 1st day of January, 1492, by the way, that Columbus met the sovereigns of Spain, Ferdinand and Isabella, and concluded with them the contract for his voyage of exploration and discovery. That might be called the initial New Year's, though it was not spent in America. It was a sort of prophecy, as it were, of the day that was to be spent in the then undiscovered country one year later.

It was not until August that the three ships got under way. Then they sailed into new seas in search of a continent that had been hidden from the knowledge of man all through the ancient and middle ages. But Columbus did not know that he was to find such a continent. He was seeking a western route to India and died in the belief that the land he found was a part of Asia. He accomplished more than he knew. The "divinity that shapes our ends" was kinder to him than his own prevision.

Across the unknown ocean he sailed until, almost becalmed in the tropic seas, each of his vessels was "like a paluted ship upon a painted ocean." It was then that the crews well nigh mutinied. Only the indomitable will and courage of Columbus kept them upon their way. At last floating seaweed and flying birds told of approaching land. By following the flight of the birds the new shore was sighted. America was discovered, and a new era was opened in the history of humanity.

It was in October that the landing was made. The thing was accomplished, or Columbus thought it accomplished, of which he had dreamed from youth. Through poverty, neglect, ridicule and rebuffs he had sought all through the intervening years for people of means who would take interest in his dream. So great was the stress of his soul that he had gone white headed at thirty, and now he was far past forty. But he had been faithful to his vision, and his reward had come.

From island to island the voyagers passed until Cuba was reached and then Haiti, where the discoverer's flagship was wrecked. The natives, who were delighted with the visit of the white men, helped him save his wreckage and cared for him and his crews until he was ready for the return voyage. It was Christmas morning when Columbus landed at Guairico, and it was Jan. 4, 1493, when he sailed away for Spain. So the New Year's day was spent among the hospitable Haitian natives.

The birth of 1906 marks the four hundred and thirteenth anniversary of the day since then, a very brief time in the life of the world, but a very long time in the annals of progress. The Spain from which Christopher Columbus sailed has passed into eclipse.



LANDING OF COLUMBUS, FROM AN OLD SPANISH PRINT.

while the lands he discovered support nations that are in the morning splendors of a better age.

Whatever the formal ceremonies attending the first New Year's day in the western hemisphere, its notability is not lessened. That Columbus and his men took some note of its passage goes without saying. Even in a time so crowded with other emotions the fact that he was greeting another year on the shore that he had seen so long in vision must have filled the heart of the daring discoverer with quickened joy and thanksgiving. His mind would naturally travel back a twelvemonth to the day that he had completed with his sovereigns the negotiations for the voyage that had culminated in success.

Just as naturally he would look forward to another year, picturing the enthusiasm at his home coming, the fitting out of other expeditions and the colonizing of the new land. Happily then he knew naught of the chains and indignities that awaited him. The fu-

ture was all roseate. He had discovered the western way to the Indies; he would return and find gold, and henceforth fame and fortune should be his.

The feast which the Spaniards had that New Year's day in Guairico was something novel for European palates. First there was bread made of Indian maize, or corn, over which Columbus grew so enthusiastic that he carried a quantity of the grain back to Spain. Another form of Indian bread was made from a tuber called manioc. The white men were also introduced to the West Indian "pepper pot," which is still highly esteemed. Then they were asked to try a condiment called "aje," which proved too strong even for the seasoned stomach of a Spaniard. There were meats as well made from a sort of rabbit, a "dumb dog," a lizard, or iguana, to say nothing of boiled parrots. There were also fruits and vegetables in such quantities that Columbus wrote in his journal it was the most protracted feast he had ever enjoyed.

It is also narrated that after the feast the Indians smoked the delicious



FROM ISLAND TO ISLAND THE VOYAGERS PASSED.

West Indian tobacco and invited the whites to do likewise, but this was too heathenish a custom for the dons. So tobacco was a luxury unknown in Europe till Raleigh started it on its way to make incense around the world.

Columbus left part of his crew, but they treated the trusting natives in so Spaniardly a fashion, if the term may be used, that the red men turned about and murdered the entire outfit. It was here in the West Indies, by the way, that the great discoverer was afterward placed in chains by some titled nobody who was sent over to represent the Spanish king. It is not alone republics that are ungrateful.

But the memory of that initial New Year's, which was also the first day of a new epoch in the history of mankind, will be cherished along with the fame of him who drew the veil from two continents and made it possible for the weary world to look into a later golden age in another Atlantis.

New Year's in French Canada.

New Year's day to the people of French Canada is as much of a social holiday, as much of a children's festival, as Christmas is to their English speaking fellow citizens. As in the United States, France and England, so in the province of Quebec the religious observance of Christmas is very much more imposing than that of New Year's day, but among the French Canadians the day of social festivity and family reunions and of the giving and receiving of gifts is not Christmas, but New Year's. To many of the younger portion of French Canada's population New Year's day is still known, as it was in those provinces of France from which their forefathers came, as le jour des etrennes—the day of gifts.

The Weeping Toad.

In the ancient churches of the Tyrol the sacred edifices are kept securely closed on the evening before the new year, and the people of that romantic district are firmly convinced that at this time, when no one is present, a huge toad crawls before the altar and prays, weeping bitterly. These toads are supposed to be the reincarnations of Christians who have failed to make a pilgrimage, and no one in the Tyrol ever molests them as they go hopping about, striving, perhaps, to find their way to shrines which have long since ceased to exist.

Russia's New Year.

In Russia the new year is ushered in by a long and rather tiresome New Year's religious service, which is followed by strenuous drinking, frequently interrupted by prostrations before the all powerful icons, or holy pictures, without which no Russian household is safe and which have played so prominent a part in the war in the far east.

Scandinavia's Odd Custom.

In Scandinavia the favorite beverage New Year's day is drunk from silver or wooden tankards or from horns of the urox, an animal now extinct, which custom substantiates the antiquity of the Norse New Year's day. Many of these horns are old enough to have been used by Thor and Odin.

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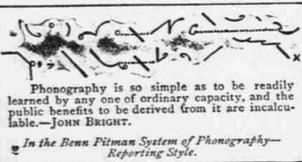
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