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How Christmas is Spent by Those that Go Down to the Sea in Ships

CHristmas at sea is, so far as the great majority of sailors are concerned, a myth created by the landlubber, and as purely a fiction of the brain as the phantom ship. To be sure, some notice is made of the festival on board the big passenger boats, and the man-of-warman gets better rations on that day; but the ordinary Jack Tar to him who mans the cargo ships, whether under sail or steam, Christmas day means little or nothing, unless he should happen to be ashore. It is essentially a land feast, and its celebration at sea appears to be ignored by the shipowner. More often than not Jack does not realize that the day is Christmas. His attention may be called to the fact, if he be lucky, by the cook serving him with his rations, a bit of duff with currants in lieu of raisins, however, so few and far between that the stuff is hardly distinguishable from the greasy everyday duff. On still more rare occasions, showing the skipper's frugality in order, a piece of fresh meat may take the place of the canned goods, known to us as "Harriet Lane," a woman of that name having been murdered in Liverpool about the time that canned meat was introduced on cargo ships. There is a story that the remains of the deceased woman are served up in the cans. On a few American ships a double quantity of rum is served out, but to the British sailor even this luxury is denied, thanks to the benevolent solicitude of the Temperance union.

As a general rule, however, the sailor's Christmas day has to be satisfied on the Christmas day with the same old tough and bitter beef, the same old biscuit; the same fare upon which he has been feeding for months. There is no time for him to envy the lot—at least for that Christmas day, if he recalls that it is Christmas day—the paupered murderer who is shortly to die in the electric chair at Sing Sing, or the prisoner charged with some heinous offense who feasts on turkey and mince pie in the Tomb, and reads in the next morning's paper the menu of his meal. You may trudge up and down South Street, or wherever the tramp seaman congregates, buttonhole one tar after another, and you will hear the same uninspiring tale about Christmas day at sea. He will not hitch his trousers, he will not cry "shiver my timbers," nor indulge in strange oaths, as the sailor of comic opera melodrama does; he is much more likely to weep over the reminiscence of his last Christmas day at sea, if he recalls it at all. The mention of the feast does not even inspire him to spin a yarn for the landlubber's edification, of how

his skipper, like worthy Captain Reece, R. N., Did all that lay within his crew and supplied the men with a Gargantuan feast, or how he had enjoyed the luxury of feeding on "the bo'sun tight" who "much resembled pig."

Snares and Delusion.

On that one subject, at any rate, the tramp seaman refuses to allow himself to be carried away by his imagination. He and his shipmates, with one accord, agree that Christmas day at sea is a snare and a delusion, but why it is not the happy and lively affair the landman has painted he cannot explain. There is a tradition among them that in old days great feasts were given on the wharves, but the Jack Tar of that period hardly regarded the wharves as a sailor. It is a curious fact that Christmas has no place in the tar's folk-lore. In a book on the legends and superstitions of the sea and of sailors, written some years ago by Lieutenant Bassett of the navy, who had delved deeply into both ancient and modern authorities on the subject, all he could find to say about Christmas day was that "no fishing is done in Sweden on Christmas, but his nets are set that night for luck," and that ships' models figure in one of the Britanny "parades." Good Friday appears to have a far better show, for there the Portuguese sailors dog an effigy of Judas Iscariot, but, on the other hand, the seaman's superstition that it is unlucky to start on a voyage on Friday has nothing whatever to do with the crucifixion as is generally supposed. Freya, the daughter of Njord, chief god of the ocean, is responsible for the tradition. She was worshipped by sailors before the introduction of Christianity, and Friday was her fete day.

It seems strange that when the teachings of the church transferred the vows and offerings that had been made to heathen gods to the saints, no attention should have been paid to the great feast of the Christian year. The conservative manner still retains memories of the powerful gods whom his pagan predecessors worshipped. Long after the Norsemen became Christians they called upon Thor when they found themselves in difficulties, although they had been taught that Christ stilled the waves and possessed power to save them from peril. But Christ's birthday does not enter into the sailor's legendary lore, and it seems impossible to discover the reason for its not doing so.

Sailor's Sentiment.

The sailor, although he rarely makes a parade of his tender feelings, or talks in sentimental fashion, except when he is hitched to the eternal snigma, has plenty

of sentiment. It may have withered in his voluntary exile from home, but it is not destroyed. He may have been separated for years from his friends, and have become an utter stranger to the voice of sympathy, but his heart remains in the right place. He may not be exactly a saint when he finds himself on shore, in spite of all the worthy attempts made to guide his erring footsteps toward the narrow path, but in the deep watches of the night memory will take him back to the home of his youth. Possibly the image of a girl who had captivated his heart and sworn to be true, but had given her hand to a lubberly landman, will rise before him and he grows sentimental. At least such was the verdict of the master of the ship who had served before the mast for more than twenty years. And then the sailor is the most credulous of mortals. The literature of every country in the world that has a seaborne is crowded with his superstitions and filled with stories of the tenacity with which he sticks to them. And yet with all his sentimental nature, with

all the traditions with which the ocean teems, the Jack Tar has made no attempt to clothe Christmas with folk-lore. There is but a plank between him and eternity, and it is the realization of this, according to Gibbons, that has much to do with the broad grain of superstition at one time undoubtedly lurking in his nature. But it is in the winds, the clouds, the waves, sun, moon and stars that he seeks for signs, and upon them his sentimentalities settle when he is at sea. Why he has not spared some of it for Christmas day passeth understanding.

On the Big Liners.

The celebration of Christmas on board the great transatlantic liners appears to be due more to the hospitality of the shipowners than to any sentiment bogotten by the sailors out of the sea. Strangely enough, although Englishmen have the credit of observing Christmas day more devoutly than any other people, yet less attention is paid to Christmas day on board the British ocean steamers than on the German and French. Englishmen, it is true, are not

Notable Christmas Days on Which World History Has Been Made

Historic Christmas Days.

It is singular that in the history of the world since the Christian era few important events have happened on Christmas day, yet the festival has been preceded and followed by decisive battles, by transactions of mighty import and by movements of nations that have affected the future of millions of people. From the earliest date it seems to have been understood that wars were to be temporarily suspended and that a truce was to exist until the celebration of the birth of Christ. There have been exceptions to this, of course, and the exceptions have in each instance been remarkable. The 1900 Christmas will be remembered and recorded in histories for the benefit of those to come as the day which recorded the restoration of tranquility between Spain and the United States, which gave to the Philippines and Porto Ricans a freedom they could never have hoped to gain for themselves.

Going back to the first observance of Christmas day it is found that December 25 was not looked upon as the birthday of Christ. Until 337 A. D. various days were celebrated by various people, but Pope Julius I caused an investigation of all the authorities to be made, with the result that December 25 was decided upon. The first observances were very simple, but as the years passed and Christian people increased in numbers the day became one of more importance. In 385 while devout Romans were celebrating Christmas their emperor, Marcus Aurelius Carus, was killed by lightning, upon the 25th of December, 385. Clovis, the first Christian king of France, was crowned at Rheims. On the same day in the year 800 Charlemagne, king of France, was crowned by Pope Leo at Rome as emperor of the west, and the people combined the festivities of Christmas with those incident to the imperial occasion. December 25, 850, Leo, emperor of Constantinople, was assassinated. He was an Armenian by birth, but by his valor became general of the Roman armies. He prevailed upon his troops to proclaim him emperor. The Christians were greatly incensed at this and it was decided that he should die at Christmas, which he did.

Ruption of a Crown.

December 25 William of Normandy was crowned at London. There was great tumult. It is not definitely known whether the people were enraged because their church festivities had been interrupted or whether they were dissatisfied with their new ruler, but William was a shrewd politician and to secure the obedience of his

subjects he gave them a charter for a Christmas present. December 24, 1440, Gilles De Retz, the famous Bluebeard, was executed at Nantes for his horrible crimes. Accounts of his exploits have been written in every written language.

Harsh as it may seem in this enlightened age, there was wide rejoicing upon the 25th of December, 1456, when an assassin's knife ended the life of Giulio Maria Sforza, duke of Milan. He had rendered himself unpopular by his ferocity and debauchery. When the puritans came to this country with their hatred of popery they at once cut out Christmas from their days of rejoicing and substituted Thanksgiving. But, thanks to providence, the old spirit which animated them has passed away and in no place in the world is the true Catholic spirit of Christmas so much in evidence as in this country.

On December 25, 1584, Oliver Cromwell was angry. Several congregations met in London to celebrate the birth of the savior and he dispersed them in no gentle manner. That was not a very happy Christmas for the good people of England, but their disappointment and anger engendered determination and they observed the day in their homes, hid from the view of the soldiers.

James called the pretender, designated December 25, 1715 as the day to land at Peterhead, where he forthwith established his court. On Christmas day, 1752, there was a big riot at the Drury Lane theater

in London. The people had begun to make the occasion one of general rejoicing and amusement and they wanted to be admitted to the performance at half price, but the managers were selfish and knew there would be a rush and insisted upon maintaining the scheduled rates. The result was that the theater was nearly torn down and the players prevented from acting.

In Revolutionary Times.

Christmas night, 1776, Washington crossed the Delaware and the next day occurred the battle of Trenton. The Hessians were surprised. They took it for granted that the revolutionary army would rest upon its arms and allow them to spend their Christmas in peace, but Washington concluded that the deed would be better by the day and he led his small army into boats and crossed the icy waters of the muddy river. He reckoned correctly and the result of his daring maneuver was that he attacked Colonel Redbank at sunrise. The commanding officer and twenty of the enemy were killed and 1,000 taken prisoners. Two Americans were killed and two were frozen to death. Washington's valor, however, saved the American cause. He had found it difficult to secure recruits, but this coup brought him thousands of volunteers. The spirits of the colonists had been drooping for sometime and the Christmas day preceding the battle of Trenton was one of the gloucest in the history of the United States. The previous Christmas

however, was equally distressing. The American revolution had just begun, and looking into the future, Washington and his adherents could not foresee the victory of Trenton. December 25, 1777, found the continental army at Valley Forge, where the shabby clothed and poorly fed soldiers virtually froze or starved. Martha Washington was with her gallant husband, but there were no Christmas presents. The festivities were confined to religious worship. In the not far distant city of Philadelphia the British had confiscated warm houses, good things to eat and were as happy as they could wish to be spending the holidays in riotous living, dancing and all kinds of diversion and merriment.

A Portentous Day.

December 25, 1778, was another portentous day for the Americans. The British were preparing to enter Savannah, having obtained the services of a disloyal negro, who was guiding them to a weak point in the American lines. A battle was impending, all were filled with dread and the celebrations of Christmas lacked the spontaneous happiness that will be universal this month.

On December 25, 1790, England had declared war against Holland and the Americans were more hopeful. December 25, 1791, the Americans, under Morgan, were daily expecting to fight the British under Tarleton at Cowpens, but the battle did not occur until January 17. This same

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The First Christmas Tree

The first Christmas tree in the United States, it is asserted by the people of Wooster, O., was introduced in their town by August Ingard, who brought the idea from his former home in Germany. For more than half a century Mr. Ingard has been familiarly known among a large circle as the "Father of the Christmas Tree." He died at the age of 84, having lived in Wooster more than sixty years. Few people of the present day realize that the Christmas tree is a comparatively recent feature in this country. In early days there was a strong aversion to the observance of Christmas after the manner in which it was celebrated in many parts of Europe, or, in fact, to any observance at all. It is even declared that the New England Thanksgiving was established to counteract the growing tendency to ob-

serve Christmas. All Yuletide festivals were, therefore, slow in making their appearance in the United States, but the Christmas tree came last of all. In Europe the Christmas tree was first established in Rome, and from there it was introduced into Germany.

American forests are being stripped of timbers suitable for Christmas trees. Maine sends out nearly 1,000,000 a year. Vermont has shipped 50,000 mere saplings for a single holiday season. In Colorado 200,000 evergreen trees are sacrificed every year for the need of that state alone, causing no little alarm among those who realize what the loss of the timber supply will mean. In Michigan there are companies making a business of raising trees especially for Christmas and ship to New York, Boston and other eastern points.

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