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SECOND SECTION
Fashion
Fads and Fancies
Music Page
Christmas Suggestions

Western Standard

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An Exponent of Clean Journalism.

Those who bring Christmas
Cheer into the lives of
others cannot keep it from
their own.

FIVE SECTIONS—Section Two

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SECOND SECTION—Pages 9 to 16

BRITAIN'S CHRISTMAS CHEER DATES BACK TO EARLY AGES

Even in Pagan Days Some Emblem of Christmas Time Was Recognized

By E. L. CHICANOT

The festive celebration of Christmas in Great Britain dates back for centuries to the time when each borough or county was entirely separated and distinct from its neighbor—even to Pagan days, as witness the survival of the use of mistletoe, the Druidical emblem, at Christmas time. Many customs are common the country at large, but others are celebrated only in the districts in which they originated centuries ago. Among the former are to be mentioned the carol-singing of the "Waits"; the giving and collection of Christmas boxes and the burning of the "Yule Log."

In the middle ages these waits were a band of minstrels attached to the King's Court, and doubtless their vocal exhibitions were good, but today the waits are interesting solely as the survivors of an ancient Christmas custom. All over the country during the nights preceding Christmas Day, bands of men and boys, with various instruments travel from house to house singing hymns and carols. Seldom do they go unrewarded, especially in the country districts.

The Yule Log, in the days of wood fires figured prominently amongst the preparations for Xmas, but even in these modern days of coal stoves, it adds a "Christmas" effect to the night, and many families secure a single log especially to be put on the fire in the waning hours of Christmas Day. In many districts the carrying of the Yule Log is attended with much rite and ceremony, and many superstitions are connected with it. In some places, it is incumbent upon the host every time the log "cracks" to furnish a fresh bowl of liquor for his guests. As a rule the charred remains of the log are saved from extermination and hung upon the kitchen ceiling. This ensures peace and prosperity to dwellers in the house during the coming year. A small piece of the brand thrown upon the fire is supposed to allay a severe storm, and when the new log is at Xmas successfully lighted with the charred remains of its predecessor it is a sign of good luck and a happy marriage in the family.

On the day after Christmas Day, known as Boxing Day, all manner of public servants, merchants' delivery men and hosts of small boys go from door to door soliciting Christmas "boxes." This practice, it is said, survives from the time when the Romans placed their gifts or "vails" into an earthenware box to be distributed among the poor.

For many reasons, the boar's head, the Christmas dish of olden times, is seldom seen, but in a few places it still makes its appearance at Yuletide. At Oxford the "boar's" head feast is annually celebrated at Queen's College. A blast of a horn announces the advent of a procession consisting of the provost and fellows, followed by the bearer of a silver dish, upon which, decorated with holly and bay, reposes the boar's head. Whilst it is being carried in all state and solemnity round the table, all sing, the old carol:

"The boar's head in hand bring I,
With garlands gay and rosemary;

I pray you, all sing merrily:
Qui estis in convivio.

The boar's head, I understand,
Is the chief service in this land:
Look, wherever it be found,?
Servite cum cantico.

Be glad, lords, both more and less,
For this hath ordained our
stewards,
To cheer you all this Christmas:
The Boar's head with mustard.
The boar's head figures, too, in a wrestling match, which takes



place annually in Essex. The boar's head, provided by New College, Oxford, is elevated on a pole which is divided among them. The antlers and hobby-horse are stored away from year to year and only make their appearance yearly at the festive season.

In the fruit-growing districts of Devonshire, Somerset, Hertfordshire and Sussex, where the farmers' livelihood depends almost entirely on the apple industry, there is a curious old custom favoring somewhat of superstition. On Xmas eve, the farmers and their hired men take a large bowl of cider with toast in it and carry it in procession to the orchards to salute the trees in order that they may bear well the following year. The ceremony consists of throwing the cider about the roots of the

trees and placing the pieces of plum-porridge. This was a kind of sweet soup made from the gravy of beef and mutton, thickened and spiced. It would be rather difficult to track the different stages of evolution and even now of course the ways of making the Christmas pudding are strangely varied. It is a common practice to place little symbols in the pudding; a sixpenny piece for prospective wealth, a ring for the person to be next married, and a thimble to signify perpetual bachelorhood.

A custom which exists only in the district in which it originated, is that of "throwing the hood," which always takes place on Christmas Eve, in the Lincolnshire fen district. It was originated by a daughter of the Mobrays, a wealthy

family of the district. One Xmas eve the young lady, when out riding, had her hood blown off by the wind. Several men in an adjoining field set off in pursuit, but so severe and fickle was the wind that they had considerable difficulty in securing the elusive garment. Their efforts caused the young lady some amusement that besides recompensing the men she endowed a piece of land, the annual proceeds of which should support a sport to be carried on on Xmas eve, to be known as "throwing the hood."

The villagers have tenaciously adhered to the celebration and each year, chase the hood with as much zest as did their ancestors of old. It is but natural that Celtic Cornwall should have its own customs and superstitions. Their Christmas

celebrations begin on the first Thursday before Xmas Day, when the feat of St. Chewidden, the discoverer of tin, is honored. Cornish miners will not work on Christmas Eve, because of a tradition that on that day the fairies meet together underground, to attend mass in honor of the birth of Christ, and sounds of lovely music, it is alleged, have often been heard from the pit mouths. On two occasions, when love of money vanquished superstition, miners descended to work on Xmas Eve, and each time fatal accidents occurred.

The gathering of "maidens' purses" is a Christmas practice confined almost entirely to the northern counties of England. These purses which are supplied free among the mining population of the country, are supposed to be the marriage portions for poor girls who will shortly be led to the altar by some young fellows of the village. On Xmas Eve the filled purse is thrown in at the girl's window, so as not to hurt her feelings. In one parish of the north, four purses are provided by a wealthy lady who makes no secret of the fact that the early years of her married life were made all the brighter by the kindly gift, which a rough hand threw, through her window, when she was but a miner's lass. Another romantic custom of the north country exists for girls who wish to see in their dreams their future husbands. On the third evening after Xmas the girl must abstain from eating, drinking and talking, and at night after all the members of the family have retired to rest, make what is known as a dumb-cake, composed of flour, salt and water. This is to be eaten just before she jumps between the sheets, the belief being that the cake will conjure up sweet visions of the man who will ultimately lead her to the altar.

In Scotland, Christmas observance is still in its infancy, having had a neglected past. Puritanism effectively suppressed most of the ancient Scottish customs by prohibiting the celebration of pre-reformation feasts. A few have, however, survived, kept alight, no doubt, by adherents to the old religion, and are now indulged in throughout the "Land o' Cakes."

At Wemyss, on the Fifeshire shore of the Firth of Forth, the curious game of yettlins is played at Yuletide. The course usually lies over about a mile of rocks, and at each end boulders mark goals. Th Yettlins are balls of cast iron weighing about a pound and a half. Each player has a ball, and the object of the game is by repeated throws. He who requires the fewest throws wins a "hail," and the one with the most hails to his credit secures the game.

One old Scottish custom is as quaint as can be found in any land. Young and old in the district meet at the house of some prosperous farmer, and one of the strongest of the company drags around the house three times a dried cow-hide. The rest follow singing all manner of songs and rhymes and beating the hide with sticks. After completing the third round the company halts at the door, and each proceeds in rough rhyme, more or less extempore, to praise the hospitality of the owner of the house, after which all are regaled with refreshments. Before leaving the house one of the visitors having solemnly burned the breast part of the hide, puts it to the nose of everyone, that he or she may smell it, and these ceremonies are supposed to protect those taking part from witchcraft and infection of diseases.

In many parts of Scotland, the custom of burning the "Clavie" is intimately connected with the Xmas season. The Clavie consisting of half a barrel supported

(Continued on Page Twelve)

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Under the deep shadow of a loss
which in this world can never be re-
vived. But Christmas speaks of the
restitution of all things in Christ. It
is enough, if the dead even in their
hour, prayed to be remembered.
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of God, "whose diamond line of fort
storm of foe can dare."

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