

## Christmas Customs and Superstitions.

Crowding in the train of Old Christmas are customs and superstitions that have endured since the pagan Briton worshipped under his oak-tree, and the hardy Saxon feasted in honor of Thor, or the Roman broke in wildest orgies during the Saturnalia. The Yule-tide transports us to the cherished feast of the Teutonic races, when Freyer, or Pro, the sun-god, awoke and lighted up his wheel once more. Our Anglo-Saxon ancestors sang to the Christmas boar-head, just as did the valiant Norsemen. Just why the boar's head was the dish of honor at this midwinter feast is hard to determine; might it not be because it was a boar that drew Freyer's ship, Skidbladnir, over the woods and meadows, making light all the dark places by his golden bristles? The Saxons called their midwinter feast Mother Night, parent of all other nights, also Yule. The midwinter feast, wherever celebrated, was distinguished by excessive revelry and feasting. The Christianization of the pagan resulted in the engrafting of his customs on the Christian celebration frequently quite obscuring its holier significance. When Pope Gregory sent Saint Augustine to convert Saxon England, he directed him to accommodate, as far as possible, Christian to heathen ceremonies, that the people might not be startled, and in particular he advised him to allow them on certain festivals to kill and eat a great number of oxen to the glory of God the Father, as they had formerly done in honor of the devil. On the Christmas next after his arrival he baptized many thousands, and permitted the usual celebration, only prohibiting the intermingling of Christians and pagans in the dances. From these early pagan-Christian ceremonies are derived many English holiday customs. The custom of decorating the houses with evergreen, is very ancient. The Jews practised it in the Feast of Tabernacles, a feast very like our Christmas. The world-tree, Yggdrasil, of the Scandinavians, was an evergreen, stretching its branches to the uttermost parts of the earth, its topmost boughs to heaven, its roots to hell. Aubrey cites a curious custom of Oxfordshire. The maid-servant was wont to ask the man ivy to trim the house, and if he refused or neglected it, a pair of his breeches was stolen and nailed upon the gateway. The holly was the most prized of all the evergreens. Dr. Turner calls it holy tree.

The mistletoe also belongs to Christmas. What pictures it recalls of ancient Druids going in solemn procession for the annual cutting on the sixth day of the moon nearest the New Year, the officiating priest, clad in white robes, bearing a golden sickle with which to detach the plant, which was reverently received on a white cloth. To add to the solemnity, bulls, and even human victims, were offered in its honor. It was supposed to keep away the witches, and the people accordingly paid the Druids handsomely for a bit of the precious plant to hang about the neck for a charm. There is an old superstition that holding the mistletoe in the hand will not only enable a person to see ghosts, but will force them to speak to him. Valence says it was held sacred because its berries grew in clusters of three. It has changed its mystic power with respect to witches, for one standing today under its golden green has drawn to her kisses, one for every leaf.

It has not been a great number of years since one might have seen, in certain sections of the United States children and young people circling about the hearthstone where the mistletoe was to tell somebody's fortune. Two leaves were placed upon the stone in front of the blazing fire, and any one desiring to know if he or she was loved had but to name the leaves for himself and his beloved. This he might do privately, and thus spare his feelings if the fortune was adverse. When the leaves began to shrivel under the influence of the heat, they moved or "jumped" as chanced, either farther apart or nearer together. Then it was the old story of the marguerites over again, "He loves me, he loves me not." Kissing beneath the mistletoe dates from the Druids. According to tradition, the maid not kissed beneath the mistletoe at Christmas goes husbandless another year.

Not many years ago, the entire Christmas week was generally considered a period of feasting and revelry through many of the United States, although never extending to Twelfth Night, as in England since the days of King Alfred. There are many superstitions connected with the coming of Christmas itself. To the cock has, from time immemorial, been attributed unwonted energy, and sagacity at that season. Even now it is common to hear one say, when he is heard crowing in the stillness of the November and December nights, "The cock is crowing for Christmas." He is supposed to do this for the purpose of scaring off the evil spirits from the holy season. This bees were said to sing, the cattle to kneel, in honor of the manger and the sheep to go in procession in commemoration of the visit of the angel to the shepherds.

A Christmas dinner in England in the ancient days was a meal massive beyond our comprehension. Only by comparison can we estimate its proportions. In Gervase Markham's "English Housewife" is a bill of fare, oft quoted, for an ordinary friendly dinner, to which the imagination may add the fitting accompaniments for the "king of dinners." First course, sixteen full dishes; "a shield of brawn, with mustard; a boiled beef; a roasted chine of beef; a neat's tongue roasted; a pig, roasted; baked chow-chow; a goose roasted; a swan roasted; a turkey roasted; a haunch of venison, roasted; a kid with a pudding inside; a party of venison; an olive pie; a couple of capons; a custard." To these add "saute, fricasse, quelque chose, and devised paste, as many dishes more to make the full service thirty-two dishes," which the housewife is admonished is "as much as can conveniently stand on one table and in one mess, and after this manner you may proportion your second and third courses, holding fullness in one-half of the dishes, and show on the other which will be both frugal in the splendor, contentment to the guest, and pleasure to the beholder."—Ed.

## The Young People

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## Prayer Meeting Topic for December.

C. B. Topic.—What message did Christmas bring you?  
Isa. 53:1-12.

B. Y. P. U. Topic.—India's Millions.  
Alternate Topic.—How am I building? 1 Cor. 3:10-17.

## B. Y. P. U. Daily Bible Readings.

(Baptist Union.)

Monday, December 27.—1 Cor. 7:25-40. Paul and self-restraint, (vs. 10). Compare 1 Cor. 7:8.

Tuesday, December 28.—1 Cor. 8. Conscience and self-restraint, (vs. 10). Compare Gal. 5:13.

Wednesday, December 29.—1 Cor. 9. Self-restraint in service, (vs. 19). Compare Gal. 6:2.

Thursday, December 30.—1 Cor. 10:1-13. Self-restraint and a way of escape, (vs. 13). Compare 2 Pet. 2:9.

Friday, December 31.—1 Cor. 10:14-33. Self-restraint and expediency, (vs. 23). Compare 1 Cor. 6:12.

## Write Short.

Some excellent articles have come to hand of late for the "column," but our space is so limited that it is almost impossible to use them, owing to this length. The one who expects his or her newspaper articles read in these busy days must write short. To condense articles is a task too long for your editors, and to cut into sections give but little satisfaction to writer or reader. We are thankful for short crisp original articles, and trust our friends will help in this way. We have bought a pair of new sharp scissors, especially for the column, but please do not compel us to use them so much.

## B. Y. P. U. Prayer Meeting Topic—December 26.

How am I building? 1st Cor. 3:10-17.

This is a very important question for our consideration. Let it be understood at the outset that we are not building for time only, but also for eternity. If persons who purpose erecting fine buildings to live in for a few years, spend much time and thought in preparing the foundation, selecting materials, and deciding upon plans, surely we should spend much more time and thought in the erection of our spiritual eternal building. If we are to put up a beautiful and costly building which is to last a long time, the very first consideration must necessarily be about the foundation upon which it is to rest. The future of the building depends upon its foundation, at least this is so in spiritual things. (a) The foundation of sand. Matt. 7:26, 27. (b) The foundation of rock. Matt. 7:24, 25. What is the foundation upon which we are building?

1. There is only one good foundation, (vs. 11, etc.).
2. What does it mean to acknowledge Christ to be our foundation? It means that we embrace and hold the true doctrines concerning him, such as: (a) His incarnation. (d) His divine nature. (c) His atonement. (d) His resurrection. (e) His ascension.
3. Places in the Bible where Christ is referred to as the foundation. Isa. 28:16. Matt. 21:42. Acts 4:11. Eph. 2:20.
4. What kind of building are we intending to build? After one has fixed upon a suitable site for a building, the next thing in order is to look at plans and settle upon the one best suited to our ideas. When one has become a Christian the foundation has been laid, but the building has not been erected. What is our plan or model?

1. For building on individual Christian character or life. Many good and great men are worthy examples to follow, but they all fall short of the ideal Christian life, Christ is the model after which we are to fashion our lives. Eph. 4:15, 16 and 5:1, 2.
2. For building up the church of Christ or temple of God, (vs. 16, 17). This is the building Paul speaks of in this chapter, (vs. 9, 10). This is the temple in which God the Holy Spirit dwells. As members of the B. Y. P. U., we are banded together for the purpose of building up this holy temple, the church of Christ, what then is our conception of the church? Let us try and find out from God's word, what kind of building we are having a hand in erecting. (a) It is Christ's Church. Matt. 16:18. (b) It is God's church. Acts 20:28. (c) It is a glorious church. Ephes. 5:27. (d) It is a holy building. Ephes. 2:21. (e) It is for the habitation of God. Ephes. 2:22. We are greatly honored by being permitted to work in the construction of this building.

3. What materials shall we put into this building? The idea of the Apostle is this, how absurd it would be

to erect upon this good foundation a temple of magnificent design, partly composed of gold and costly stones and partly of wood, hay and stubble. This would be indeed unsightly. The spiritual temple should not be built partly of converted and partly of unconverted persons. 1st Peter 2:5. (a) Build one another up with sound doctrine. (b) Build up our characters and the church with Godly living.

## A Will That Found a Way.

A while since a large number connected with our Union pledged themselves to obtain, within a definite time, a dollar each for Foreign Missions. Then a meeting was appointed for receiving the dollars, and for hearing the various experiences in securing the money. It was called an Experience Meeting. And a meeting of great interest it was, indeed, for it showed what can be done by young people in giving to the good cause if they set about it in earnest. "Where there's a will, there's a way." I have asked one of the young ladies to give me her experience, as then read, that it might be used as a stimulus to persons who did not hear it. And with some reluctance she has handed me her "Sketches from the career of a Little Red Bucket," which I now hand over to the Young People's section of the MESSENGER AND VISITOR, with the comment that if this sort of effort for the gospel's spread should become universal and continuous with old and young there would be no lack of funds for prosecuting the work of the Lord. A. C. CHUTE.

## SKETCHES FROM THE CAREER OF A LITTLE RED BUCKET.

I will not touch upon the time or place of my birth, but simply commence with that period in my career which forms a connecting link in the chain of events which more particularly interests us all this evening.

Some three years ago I, with numerous other buckets of similar proportions, was reclining quietly in the showcase of Reardon's art store, when a lady entered and asked for some gilding preparation. Several qualities were shown her, and among the rest ranged on the counter for inspection I was placed. (At that time my principle attraction lay in being the receptacle for a bottle of Japanese gilt.) As you may imagine I was quite anxious that I should be the choice, as my experience for some time past had been rather monotonous, and I hoped that now I should be able to have an entire change of scene. After some discussion as to the merits of the different compositions for sale, my expectations were realized by hearing the lady say, "Well, I think I will take this Japanese gilt, and after it is gone I may be able to make some use of the bucket."

So I was taken from the old surroundings to grace my lady's mantel; the bottle of gilt was removed, and I remained for several weeks in the same place, until at length one day my lady, in dusting, whisked me off and threw me carelessly into a box, filled with a heterogeneous collection, with the exclamation, "There is too much trash here altogether. I will put this bucket out of the way; it is no good, but possibly some day I may be able to make some use of it."

Alas for my hopes! Far preferable my old situation in the showcase, to being thrown into this out-of-the-way place. However, I tried to make the best of a bad matter and in relating and comparing experiences with other inmates of the box, the days dragged on. But I will skip over the weary months spent in this miserable way, haunted by the verdict, "it is no good" and hoping against hope that the "some day" when I might be of use would arrive.

My delight can better be imagined than described, when by and by the box was opened, and I was taken out and hung on the corner of a whatnot, in the same room I had occupied months before. "What now?" I thought, and my curiosity was further aroused when—chink—and I was made the receptacle for a ten cent piece, at the same time the lady who bought me said to another who entered the room:—"There, I have earned ten cents toward that dollar I promise for Foreign Missions." "How did you earn it?" was the response. "Why Mrs. S—"

Let your curiosity wait until next week for the answer.—Editors.

## Charlottetown B. Y. P. U.

Our Union is in a flourishing condition, the devotional services are well attended, and the interest in them is increasing. A class in Sacred Literature has been formed and good work is being done. All who are taking the lessons seem to be quite enthusiastic over them, and the enthusiasm is spreading. The class at present numbers thirty-five members, but as we are continually adding to the list this number will, in all probability, be largely increased within the next few weeks.

G. L. SIMMONS, Pres.

## A Merry Christmas!

To the Christian, Christmas should be a season of special, spiritual blessing; a time of deep and solemn joy; an occasion for the adjustment of his relations to God and man. What with the sweet thought of "infinite love creeping up into ten thousand hearts, as one festal day comes round and the magnetic gospel of the Incarnation calling men to salvation and to service. Christmas ought to be a revival season in the church. For each of us there is a grand Christmas gift in waiting. The Son of God gives us himself. Ah, how many have slighted the offered gift! How few have made room in their hearts to receive it in its fullness! Oh let us all accept the gift! For the sinner there is "grace," for the saint, "more grace." "Thanks be to God for his unspeakable gift!" And we may each of us make a gift to God, the gift of ourselves, our hearts and lives. The Cross, God's Christmas Tree, let us load it with the offerings of our grateful hearts, "Holy, acceptable unto God." J. D. F.