

CHRISTMAS TIDE

CHRISTMAS CUSTOMS:

How Christians Have Imported Pagan Customs Into Their Celebrations . . .

In "ye olden time" the holidays were ushered in on Christmas eve, and until Twelfth Night, known familiarly as the day of the Magi or Little Christmas, nothing was done, nothing was thought, save fun, revelry and feasting, while the watchword to all was eat, drink and make merry.

If we trace the origin of our modern Christmas we find that from time immemorial it was celebrated with religious worship and social gaiety of all kinds, just as it is now; and that many of the festive practices, the beautiful customs which characterize the occasion, are derived from age long antedating the coming of the Redeemer, and from peoples who knew naught of the true God.

The Worship of the Sun.

Among all the pagan races of antiquity there seems to have been a universal tendency to worship the sun at this season, just as there was at the change of the other seasons, he was regarded by them as the giver of light and life, and the visible manifestation of a supreme Deity, and when the shortest day of the gloomy winter had passed, and he began his return course, bringing warmth and the reanimation of all that was dead, there was general rejoicing everywhere.

The Christian Festival.

The dedication of the 25th of December for commemorating the birth of Christ dates back to the fourth century. Previously it had been the most movable of the church feast days, and confounded by some with the Epiphany, by others with the feast of Tabernacles, held in September, while more of the Christians celebrated the event in March, about the time of the Passover, and still more as late as April or May. The actual date of the Nativity could not be learned with any degree of accuracy, as the evidence regarding it was traditional and likewise conflicting and confused, so, after a conference of the theologians of the East and West, for the sake of uniformity, it was thought best to settle upon one particular day, and after all, it was the event, not the date of its occurrence, which was celebrated. This agreement was the result of an inquiry brought about by the earnest solicitation of St. Cyril, of Jerusalem, to Julius I, who granted an order for an investigation to be made concerning the right day. The chief grounds for the final decision was the information obtained from the archives of Rome.

Thus the Christians from a very early period observed the Christmas festival at this especial time of the year, which made it coincident with the one held by the ancients at the winter solstice in honor of the sun, and from this it is easy to see how the heathen and Christian observances became inseparably mingled.

The Saturnalia.

The Romans worshipped the sun under one of the characters attributed to Saturn, father of the gods, and the feast was called "Saturnalia." Historians and antiquarians seem unable to discover the origin of this festival, but the Romans derived it from the Grecians, as they did many other of their customs, and it is not improbable that it was instituted in some rude period of antiquity and by other races previous to its advent into Greece.

It was the favorite recreation of paganism and was marked by a universal license and merry-making. Slaves were for the time being free and recognized as the equals of their masters, with whom they were permitted to dine as guests, to converse with, and what was perhaps more ruthless by this miserable class, to tell their imperious owners of their faults to their faces, treat them as menials and punish them for the misdemeanors of which they might be guilty, as they themselves were punished for similar offenses. No one was allowed to be angry, and no one was put upon and made sport of, if he loved his comfort, would be the first to laugh.

All the city was in the wildest commotion; business was suspended, and none were at work but the cooks and confectioners who prepared the gorgeous feasts; houses were gayly decorated with laurel and evergreens, and presents passed between parents and friends after the same fashion customary to-day, while the children invoked Saturn, as they now do the good old Santa Clause. Games and amusements of all sorts were indulged in by the citizens; music and dancing was heard and seen on every hand, and the very air rang with shouts and laughter, and the wassail bowl was a part of the Saturnalia now regarded as a mystic form in the festivities and games of every day.

When the eagerly awaited winter festival arrived the Druids went forth, attended by great pomp, to gather the mystic evergreen, that, in addition to the religious reverence in which it was held, was believed to possess wonderful curative properties and prove a safeguard against evil of all sorts. Two white bulls were carried along in the procession, and when the oak was reached upon which the plant twined they were bound to its trunk, and the chief Druid, robed

All in Spotless White.

As symbolic of purity, ascended the tree, and with a golden sickle cut the vine. As it fell it contained the gown of a similarly garbed priest, who stood beneath ready to receive it. When the cutting was over the two bulls were sacrificed, and not being kindled in this strange worship of false gods. Then followed various festive ceremonies indicative of the joy they experienced over the advent of the annual feast of the sun. The mistletoe thus gathered was then divided into small portions and distributed amongst the people, who took it home and hung it up in the

entrances of their dwellings, hoping thereby to propitiate the gods, while they imagined, amidst the boughs, a shelter from the bitter winter weather, until spring. Sprays of the same were also hung up within doors, suspended from the wall or ceiling, and any one of the fair sex who chanced, inadvertently, or on purpose, to pass under the mistletoe, she incurred the penalty of being kissed by the opposite sex, a member of the opposite sex as desired to avail himself of the privilege.

Hence the legend of the mistletoe that has excused so many stolen kisses, which has proven a boon to pretty maidens and lovelocks, swims through ages without number; and doubtless until the end of time it will figure in the decorations of Christmas, if for nothing more than its romantic history of love and kisses, the part it has played in song and story almost since the world began.

YULE TIDE OF OUR ANCESTORS

The Yule Doughs or Doos, were kind of Christmas cake, found of old in many parts of Northern Europe. They were especially for distribution among the young people. In shape they were a rough imitation of a human figure of varying lengths, from six to twelve inches, with raisins for nose and eyes. Presumably these figures were intended to represent the infant Saviour.

Other cakes of different kinds baked only at this season were to be found in many places. In Cornwall, for instance, each family baked a quantity of currant cakes on Xmas eve, on the top of each of which the dough was pulled up to form a sort of head-piece called "the Christmas." A special cake was made for each member of the household, but when eating time came each one tasted a little of everybody else's cake.

Yule babies is the term applied to the sweetmeats given the juveniles of Athwily, at Yule. A character called Baby Cake is found in Ben Jonson's "Masque of Christmas," but this, we are told, refers to the Twelfth Night cake.

An Ancient Custom.

Jul, or Yule, was anciently the name

given by the Goths and Saxons to the festive period occurring at the winter solstice; thus the name Yule has come down to us through the Scotch and English, and it still obtains among all English speaking nations. The most commonly heard expression in connection with it is the Yule Log. This burning of the Yule log, or oak, originated with the very old Christmas custom (with them partaking rather more of the nature of ceremony), among the Scandinavians of the burning of huge bonfires in honor of their god Thor at their feast of Jul, occurring at the winter solstice.

In England the bringing in and burning of the Yule log on Christmas eve still survives in some localities, with more or less of its original picturesqueness. Of old this custom was attended by much ceremony and festivity. A log was chosen, usually a very massive and rugged piece of oak. Then was begun a sort of triumphal procession with it to its resting place in the hall. Each passer by was expected to uncover his head to it; there was much merriment and shouting, and upon its reaching the entrance to the hall, if there were family minstrels, they greeted it with music and song. If there were no minstrels then the members of the family in turn performed this office. Yule doughs were eaten, wassail bowls were drained and an endless round of Yule games were played.

After these amusements palled the

kindling of the log began. This was done with a portion of the Yule log of the Christmas previous, which had been carefully preserved for the purpose. Security from fire was supposed to accrue to the house from the saving of last year's log. Woe betide, too, if during the burning of the Yule log a barefooted or flat-footed, or squinting person should come in, as this meant the worst kind of bad luck.

The Christmas or Yule candle, a candle of huge proportions, was always lit on the supper table on those occasions as a sort of accompaniment to the Yule log. The Yule log, with accompanying festivities of various kinds, is also a prominent feature of the Christmas celebrations in Provence, where it is called the "Cachofio," and among the Servians.

Wassail Bowl.

The wassail bowl, which in days gone by played such a prominent part in Yuletide celebrations, was in the beginning just a toast or pledge drunk between friends. The word wassail is from the Anglo-Saxon, "was hal," meaning "be whole, be well," or, as in modern usage, "here's to your health." No mediaeval English Yule celebration but had its wassail bowl with well-spiced contents. It was the centre of the board not only then, but on New Year's day.

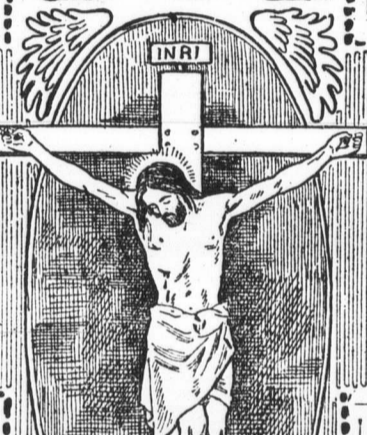
The drink it contained was composed of good ale, sugar, nutmeg, and roasted apples—apples being frequently used instead of the larger kind. This brew was also known as "imb's wool."

While the gentry were regaling themselves indoors the young women of the poorer classes went round from house to house with gaily decorated wassail bowls, singing carols called "wassail songs." For this of course, they expected gratuities.

Christmas in Other Countries

The Christmas feeding of the birds is prevalent in many of the provinces of Norway and Sweden. Branches of oats are placed on the roofs of houses, on trees and fences, for them to feed upon. Two or three days before, cartloads of sheaves are brought into town for this purpose. Both rich and poor buy and place

"I bring you good tidings of great joy."



them everywhere. Every poor man and every head of a family has saved a penny or two, or even one farthing, to buy a bunch of oats for the birds to have their Christmas. On this day, on many farms, the dear old horse, the young colt, the cattle, the sheep, the goats, and even the pig, get double the usual amount of food given them. It is a beautiful custom and speaks well for the natural goodness of heart of the Scandinavians.

Some Don'ts for Christmas

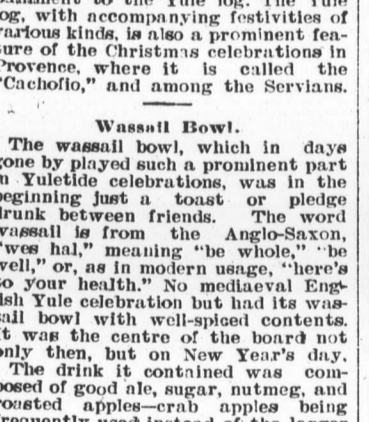
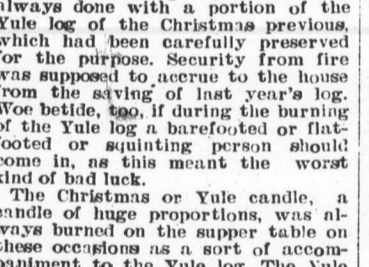
Don't forget X-mas is the day to bow to individuality. Never buy things for the whole family, therefore.

Don't repeat yourself. Don't give to others this year what they did to you last. That is very bad taste.

Don't buy father, brothers or husband ties, slippers or pipes. Choose rather something they will not wear out and will appeal to their taste.

Don't give your mother a "useful" gift, unless you are too poor for aught ornamental. She may be "getting on," but she still loves pretty trinkets. Gratify her.

Don't decide not to give at all be-



cause you cannot give handsomely. Good will is the watchword, and good sense will help you to choose lovely gifts for little money.

Making presents literally with your own fair (or tanned) hands doubles the value literally and sentimentally very often. Busy times are these to every one, and the stores overflow with things that require small outlay.

Don't miss book departments. There never was such a harvest of books, at astoundingly low prices, as now.

Pictures of antiques and Sargent

Hark! the Herald Angels Sing.

Hark! the herald angels sing,
"Glory to the new-born King;
Peace on earth, and mercy mild,
God and sinners reconciled!"
Joyful all ye nations rise,
Join the triumph of the skies;
With the angel host proclaim,
"Christ is born in Bethlehem!"

Christ, by highest heaven adored,
Christ, the everlasting Lord;
In the manger born a King,
While angels sang, "Gloria in excelsis deo."
"Peace on earth, to man good will,"
Bid the trembling soul be still,
Christ on earth has come to dwell,
Jesus, our Emmanuel!

Hail! the heaven-born Prince of Peace,
Hail! the Son of righteousess!
Life and light to all He brings,
Risen with healing in His wings,
Mild He lays His glory by,
Born that man no more may die,
Born to raise the sons of earth,
Born to give them second birth.

panels, framed in dull black, are artistic in the extreme, and cost very little. Tapestry panel pieces, set in black frames, are quaint and inexpensive for lovers of the house beautiful.

Unless you know the fads of your acquaintances don't buy them freaky gifts. A plaster dog to a girl who detests the real animal would be ill chosen.

Cushions "go" with collegians; so do rugs, silk blankets, gun-metal military brushes and all men like books.

The Yule Log.

Oh, the Yule log snapped and sparkled
Till the red flame quivered high,
Steeping wall and roof and rafter
In its rich and vivid dye,
And around the bowl of wassail
Ran a soft, incessant chime—
'Twas the greybeards clinking glasses
To the joy of Christmas time.

Oh, the dance waxed mad and merry
With the light heels overhead,
Huds across and down the middle
Went the gaily measured tread,
While "Away with Melancholy"
Squeaked the fiddles, and the air
Swept a str of revel o'er us
As we sat beneath the stair.

Oh, the sweet and subtle magic
That at work within the heart
Drew us tenderly together,
Held us, tremulous, apart!
Why, we thought our lips were touch-
ing
Just for love—we did not know
It was all because above us
Hung a bough of mistletoe.

—Anon.

Christmas Greeting.

Sing a song of Christmas!
Pockets full of gold;
Plums and cakes for stockings,
More than they can hold,
Pudding in the great pot,
Turkey on the spit,
Merry faces round the fire,
Sorrow! Not a bit!

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