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The editor of THE CRITIC is responsible for the views expressed in Editorial Notes and Articles, and for such only; but the editor is not to be understood as endorsing the sentiments expressed in the articles contributed to this journal. Our readers are capable of approving or disapproving of any part of an article or contents of the paper; and after exercising due care as to what is to appear in our columns, we shall leave the rest to their intelligent judgment.

EDITORIAL NOTES.

Preparatory to Christmas, the bells are rung at dead midnight throughout England and the continent, and after the solemn celebration of the mass, for which the churches in France, Italy, Belgium, Spain and Portugal are magnificently adorned, it is usual for the revellers to partake of a collation, that they may be better able to sustain the fatigues of the night.

During the last days preceding Christmas it is still the custom for Calabrian minstrels to descend from the mountains to Naples and Rome, saluting the shrines of the Virgin Mother with their wild music, under the poetical notion of cheering her until the birth-time of her infant at the approaching Christmas. In a picture of the Nativity by Raphael, he has introduced a shepherd at the door playing on a sort of bagpipe.

In the Protestant districts of Germany, and the north of Europe, Christmas is often called the "children's festival," and Christmas eve is devoted to giving presents, especially between parents and children, and brothers and sisters, by means of the so-called Christmas-tree, which has now been long familiar enough to us. There is a heartiness and simplicity about many Scandinavian and Teutonic customs we have borrowed which, when we do so, always appeals to our best instincts. Such customs seem to flourish with us like a plant reverting to a congenial soil.

It was an old English superstition that, on Christmas eve, the oxen and sheep were always to be found on their knees as in an attitude of devotion, at midnight; and that, after the change from old to new style, they continued to do this only on the eve of Old Christmas day. Superstition though it was, it always struck us to be a beautiful, devout and poetical idea. It was derived from a prevalent mediæval notion that an ox and an ass which were present at the Nativity fell upon their knees in a suppliant posture, as appears from numerous old prints, and from a Latin poem of Saunazaro of the 16th century.

The custom of singing canticles, called Carols, at Christmas, which recalled the songs of the shepherds at the birth of Christ, dates from the time when the common people ceased to understand Latin. The bishops and lower clergy often joined with the populace in carolling, and the songs were enlivened by dancing, and the music of tambours, guitars, violins and organs. Fathers, sons, mothers and daughters mingled together in the dance; if in the night, each bore in his hand a lighted wax taper. Many collections have been made of these naive and æreal carols, which filled the hours between the nocturnal masses, and sometimes took the place of psalms in the churches.

Who rescued Jerry Toomey, who fell off a staging into the water on Tuesday? The *Mail* of that evening says:—"He would probably have been drowned but for *Harry O'Toole*, who jumped overboard and rescued him." The *Chronicle* reports:—"His cries were heard by the men on the 'Charger,' and *Captain Burrows* jumped over and rescued the man." While the *Recorder* has it:—"Wm. *Banbrich* jumped overboard and rescued him just in time." And again on Wednesday evening the *Recorder* says:—"Raymond *Byers* was the person who rescued Jeremiah Toomey." "Which is Napoleon and which is Wellington, Mr Showman?" "Whichever you likes, my little dears, you pays your money, and you takes your choice?"

The common custom of decking houses and churches at Christmas with evergreens is derived from ancient Druidic practices. It was an old belief that sylvan spirits might flock to the evergreens, and remain untripped by frost till a milder season. The holly, ivy, rosemary, bay, laurel and mistletoe furnished the favorite trimmings, which were not removed till Candlemas (2nd Feby.) In old church calendars Christmas eve is marked *Templa exornantur* (the temples are adorned.) Holly and ivy still remain in England the most esteemed Christmas evergreens, tho' at the two universities the windows of the college chapels are decked with laurel. With us the ubiquitous and almost equally beautiful spruces and firs take the place of the more numerous varieties of evergreens available in Europe, and we think most of us are well satisfied with the substitute.

There seems to be bad weather in the *Chronicle* office on Monday mornings. We were again honored last Monday by the notice of that journal, this time to the extent of about three-quarters of a column of good, sound, hearty abuse. Our offence is that we think differently to the *Chronicle* on some national questions, and that we do not devote our columns to abuse of the Dominion Government and Conservatives generally. Not to agree with the *Chronicle* is to be "anathema maranatha." Moreover, our modes of expression seem to be extremely distasteful to our contemporary. This we regret, because, as we have no idea of enacting the roles of the old man, the boy and the ass, in the endeavor to please everybody, there is not much probability of an amendment in the eyes of our censor. We shall expect next Monday to be solemnly cursed with bell, book and candle, as a new variety of Christmas function.

Christmas celebrations in England have long lost their primitive boisterous character, the gambols and carols are nearly gone by, and family reunions and evergreen trimmings are nearly all that remain of the various rough merriments which used to mark the festival. The last memorable appointment of a "Lord of Misrule" was in 1627, when he had come to be denominated a "grand captain of mischief." In the United States, as the Puritans were at first stern opponents of Christmas pastimes, the day was for a long time less generally celebrated in New England than in the middle and southern States. But it was made a legal holiday in several of the States, and is usually observed, as with us, by a religious service, by making presents, by trimming houses and churches with evergreens, and by imitating the German custom of Christmas trees. When Christmas weather is what we are in the habit of thinking it should be, bright and clear, with plenty of snow and sound ice, Canadians can revel in the pleasures of sleighing and skating, among the purest and most exhilarating of enjoyments. These, however, have often of late years been wanting, owing to the apparently growing uncertainty of climatic influences. But whatever fails, the brilliancy of the shops at Christmas-time is perennial, and imparts a general sense of comfort and joyousness to young and old. May all, tho' in widely different degrees, be able at this season to profit by some of their alluring wares! The Christmas cards, which have for some years past become so prominent and graceful a feature of the general kindness and goodwill of the season, are this year perhaps more costly and gorgeous than ever before, tho' not in the least behind those of former years in taste and elegance. Moreover, they are of all grades of value, and there are many, as beautiful in artistic simplicity as the more costly, which are within the compass of the most modest purse. Altogether, we have little regret in exchanging for the rude merriment and clumsy pageantry of our forefathers, the milder and more polished methods now at our command, wherewith to give expression to the feelings natural to the season.

CHRISTMAS.

The institution of Christmas is attributed to Pope Telesphorus, who died A. D. 138, and throughout the subsequent history of the Church it has been the most noted of Christian solemnities.

It was at first a "movable feast," often confounded with the Epiphany,