

WOMAN AND HER INTERESTS

Some Christmas Customs



CANADIAN children associate Santa Claus with the cold north, because of his reindeer and the furry garments in which he is always pictured, but in reality he comes to us from the Netherlands. "Santa Claus" is an Anglicized form of the Dutch "Sinter Klaas," by whom is meant St. Nicholas, the patron saint of children and maidens. St. Nicholas was a bishop of Myra, in Asia Minor, about the end of the third century. Not much is known of his personal history, but legends ascribe to him great kindness and generosity, hence it was appropriate that he should become the gift bringer at the Christmas tide. He died on December 6, and this is the date on which children in Holland and some parts of Germany look for their gifts. We have adopted the custom of hanging up the stockings, only changing from St. Nicholas eve to Christmas eve. There is a legend to explain why stockings were chosen as receptacles for the gifts. St. Nicholas being the patron saint of maidens, young women looked to him to provide them with husbands and a marriage dowry. The legend relates that once, under cover of the night, the good saint threw three purses of gold into the house of a nobleman who had three daughters for whom he was unable to provide. The purses being shaped much like stockings, these articles were henceforth placed to receive the gifts. It was at one time the custom to have some one impersonate Santa Claus—as is done now at Christmas tree parties—and distribute the gifts to the various members of the family; gradually this gave place to leaving the presents on the hearthstone, and as some explanation was necessary, what so likely as that Santa Claus had come down the chimney in the night and left them there. This was all very well in houses where the open fireplace was ample enough for Santa and his pack, but a little puzzling to the children of succeeding generations for whom, in this country, the "chimney" was only the small brick structure on the house top, and who found it somewhat difficult to reconcile the size of the fat and jolly Santa Claus with that of the stove pipe, the only means of ingress by way of the chimney. But childhood does not care to destroy its pleasure by inquiring too closely into the logic of things. The reindeer that transport Santa Claus seem to have come from a legend of the far north of Europe, where reindeer are regarded almost as part of the families, so many comforts are derived from their use. The legend held that once a year particularly beneficent reindeer, bearing certain special marks, came from some unknown country still farther north. So have legends, traditions, and customs of foreign lands and different times, been interwoven into the story that Canadian children love, and that has its most popular version in the poem "Twas the night before Christmas," first published nearly a century ago, in 1822.

The custom of making presents at Christmas time is a very old one. Like a number of other observances of Christianity, it had its origin in a custom of times before the Christian era, but through the ages it has become associated with the festival of goodwill. The term "Christmas box" is derived from a custom of the early days of the Christian Church, when boxes were placed in the churches to receive offerings for the poor. These boxes were opened on Christmas Day, and the distribution was made the day following. In England the day after



London's New Lady Mayoress At the Lord Mayor's Show last month Lady Strong was attended by eight maids of honor.

Christmas has long been observed—although not so generally of late—as "Boxing Day," when presents are made by the well-to-do to their servants, the postmen, messengers, and those in dependent circumstances.

The Christmas tree comes to us by way of the Mother Country, from Germany, and with them it was a plant of heathen origin trained to nobler uses. After the German peoples accepted Christianity, the "sacred tree" of their old mythology gradually became associated with the central observance of their new religion. In no country is the Christmas tree such a general institution as it is in Germany. In the cities and towns as the great "Fest" draws near, perfect little forests of evergreen trees appear in the squares and market-places, and on the street corners, and thither the heads of families resort to select the indispensable "Weihnachtsbaume." The sway of the Christmas tree in the Scandinavian countries is of much the same origin as in Germany. In Sweden, on Christmas morning, one meets everywhere men and boys carrying home from the woods the most perfectly shaped little evergreen trees they can find. In the afternoon, as it begins to grow dark, the children are sent to bed, that they may be fresh for the evening's fun, and while the father and mother finish sealing the presents and decorate the tree. Then, when all is ready, the whole household gathers round the "Julgran," bright with its glittering ornaments and many little colored candles. The lighting of candles on Christmas trees is traceable to a Jewish celebration which culminated on December 25, the celebration of the Dedication of the Temple, when in every house candles were lighted.

The plum pudding, without which Christmas, to Anglo-Saxons, would be incomplete, is said to be emblematical of the rich offerings made by the wise men. However that may be—and the explanation seems far-fetched—plum-pudding has been the distinguishing feature of the Christmas dinner for centuries.

Burning the Yule Log—a custom once general in English homes—has never been adopted in this country. "Yule" was the name of the festival of the winter solstice, or turning of the year to the sun.

The mistletoe was adopted into the Christmas from the heathen festivities. The Druids, who venerated the mistletoe when it grew on the oak tree, gathered it with ceremony at the time of the winter solstice, and the people hung sprays of it over their doors, it is said, as an offer of shelter to the forest spirits during the cold weather. The idea of kissing under the mistletoe came from an old Scandinavian myth. The mistletoe, which had been made into an arrow for the wounding of Balder, the Apollo of the North, was then given to the Goddess of Love to keep, and everyone who passed under it received a kiss as a token that it was the emblem of love, not of death. When the mistletoe first found its way into English homes, in this connection, it was hung in the servants' hall but soon was added to the decorations of the drawing-room.

MERRY CHRISTMAS CHIMES



It came upon the midnight clear,
That glorious song of old,
From angels bending near the earth
To touch their harps of gold.
"Peace on earth, good will to men,
From heav'n's all gracious King,"
The earth in solemn stillness lay,
To hear the angels sing.

Still through the cloven skies they come,
With peaceful wings unfurled,
And still celestial music floats
O'er all the weary world;
Above its sad and lonely plains
They bend on hov'ring wing,
And ever o'er its babel sounds,
The blessed angels sing.

O ye, beneath life's crushing load,
Whose forms are bending low,
Who toil along the climbing way
With painful steps and slow,
Look up! for glad and golden hours
Come swiftly on the wing.
O rest beside the weary road
And hear the angels sing.

For lo! the days are hast'ning on
By prophet bards foretold,
When with the ever circling years
Comes round the age of gold;
When peace shall over all the earth
Its final splendors fling,
And the whole world send back the song
Which now the angels sing.

