



Mother and Child find equal delight
in the creamy, abundant, skin-
healing, flower-fragrant lather of

BABY'S OWN SOAP

The particles of pure, vegetable oil which are
rubbed with the lather into the pores, help
nature along, assuring a white and healthy skin.

Best for Baby—Baby's Own Soap is Best for you
Sold almost everywhere.

ALBERT SOAPS LIMITED, Mfrs., MONTREAL.

Christmas Before Christ

Continued from
Page 7

upward to the frosty heavens. Amid all this maze of mystic pillars, the flames of countless fires glared at night, at the Druids, crowned with chaplets of green, moved in their imposing procession. At a distance, the uninitiated gazed with awe upon the spectacle, perceiving on the cliffs the frantic figures of the Druidesses, their hair streaming in a sort of fiery mist, as they waved their torches wildly and shrieked out cabalistic words and litanies, while the myriad pillars echoed to the fearful chanting of the Druids. Here was, indeed, an awful precursor of the Christmas that we know—a heathen Christmas before Christ, kept by tall, skin-clad savages, on whose volcanic passions a check was placed only by the reputed magic powers of their mysterious priests.

Rome's Great Winter Holiday

But, closer far to our Christmas was that riotous holiday which the Romans knew under the name of Saturnalia, and in which were merged two other festivals, the Brumalia and Juvenalia, so that finally not a single day, but the entire period from the 10th of December to the early part of January, was given up to revelry. No one can tell—the Romans themselves had quite forgotten it—just how the custom of the Saturnalia began. It was older than their recorded history, and it lasted until it passed under the purifying influence of Christianity and became the Christmas cycle of the Middle Ages.

In name, of course, it was a feast in honor of the old Italic deity Saturnus, who according to tradition, taught the art of agriculture to the rude inhabitants of Italy. In reality, like the Egyptian and Jewish and German and Celtic feasts, it was a welcome to the coming of the sun and to the first stirrings of the vernal, germinating impulse in the earth. On the evening of the 19th of December—corresponding roughly to our Christmas Eve—a pontiff took his place before Saturn's temple, and exclaimed with a sonorous voice:

"Saturnalia! Io, Saturnalia!"

The cry was taken up by thousands, and was repeated exultantly throughout the Forum and along the Sacred Way. It flew from mouth to mouth until all Rome was ringing with the shout of "Io, Saturnalia!"

A Day of Social License

Then, just as the earth was soon to be freed from the bonds of winter, so the fetters of convention were relaxed among the Roman people. No man could be convicted of a crime, for the courts were closed. No man could be punished for a crime, for to punish was to be polluted. The slaves who swarmed in Rome put upon their heads the cap of liberty and mocked their masters with impunity. Burly Germans and sleek Cilicians invaded the beautiful dining-halls, and, sprawling upon the couches, ordered up the choicest vintages of the Greek islands, gulping down the perfumed wines as these were poured from the smoky amphoras. No one checked their license. If the master entered, he was roughly bidden to serve the men whom at any other time he might order to be lashed or branded, or even burned alive. Drink-inflamed revelers would often tear the togas from the Roman gentlemen of the family, and swathe themselves in the white folds of the stately garments, hiccuping out ribald songs and insults without the slightest fear of punishment.

The cleverer Greek slaves would find their fun in a way less gross but possibly still more irritating to their Roman owners. Gathering together, they would go through the form of electing new officers and magistrates from among themselves—consuls, pretors, prefects, ediles, pontiffs, and the rest. Then these mock officials would go forth with the badges of their rank and wittily burlesque the real magistrates with every kind of grotesque exaggeration, to the intense delight of the crowds who

watched them. The pomposity of one high officer, the meanness of another, the personal peculiarities of still another, would be held up to universal ridicule by these mischievous and impudent creatures; for the Saturnalia gave them license to do and say just what they pleased. For the time, master was slave and slave was master. Society was turned upside down.

Among free-born Romans the celebration was somewhat less boisterous, and was marked by many a custom which has been perpetuated in our own Christmas usages. The giving of presents was as universal then as now, but with the sensible restriction that they should never be expensive. At one time the modern plague of elaborate giving appeared at Rome, but it was checked by a sumptuary law; and after that, if any one received a very costly present, he was not allowed to keep it, but must sell it at auction to the highest bidder. The proceeds of the sale went into the treasury of the temple of Saturn. Therefore, gifts were simple and inexpensive—a jar of olives, a box of toothpicks, a few napkins, a crock of jellied fish, a lacerna or short cloak, some sweetmeats made of honey and cheese, and other things of the same character. Most common, however, at a present at the Saturnalia were thick wax candles, thousands of which were exchanged by friends and lighted in a general illumination.

Banquets of the Saturnalia

Late in the afternoon began the revels, which were held in every large household. All formality was dispensed with. The guests reclined on whatever couch each might select, ignoring all precedence. They ate of each course as often as they liked, and no course was removed until all present voted that they had had enough of it. Drinking went on at pleasure. Every one called for what he wanted, from the costly Chian wines of Greece, slightly dashed with salt, to the strong Massic and Falernian vintage of Italy. The dishes were as various as the wines. Oysters and snails, game pies, anchovies, every kind of fish, granules of pork, and dormice broiled upon the embers, meats hot with mustard, larks, pheasants, guinea-fowl, and deviled eggs—the abundance would have matched the most lavish Christmas cheer of later medieval times.

As the guests became gorged with the rich food and flushed with wine, they chose a master of the feast, or "king," whose duty was to contrive amusement, and whose orders every person present was bound to carry out, no matter how absurd they were. At the command of the "king," there trooped in acrobats, and Spanish dancing girls, Ionian flute-players, and clowns, each set doing a "turn" for the enjoyment of the company.

Finally, the "king" would give the most extravagant commands to his temporary subjects. The oldest and most dignified person present would be made to dance on the dining-table and sing the latest popular song. Another was ordered to pick up a flute-girl and carry her three times around the house. Still another would receive a whispered command to walk up to some prominent senator who was there and insult him grossly. Others were forced to drink beakers of brine, or to have a jar of wine poured down their backs, or to be plunged in the water of the cisterna in the adjacent conservatory.

As the night wore on, the fun grew fast and furious. The pungent smoke of the lamps thickened the air, and the fumes of wine mingled with it. The feast became an orgy, with a pandemonium of shouts and songs, of chinking dice, and of dishes falling on the marble floor. The scenes enacted here, when the drunken slaves came in and climbed upon the couches with their masters, have given a dark significance to the very name of Saturnalia.

The Advent of Christianity

When Christianity first made its influence felt in Italy, and, later, over the entire world, it took these heathen rites and ceremonies and consecrated them to its own beneficent and noble ends. The

Continued on Page 72

