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HARK! THE HERALD ANGELS SING

The church is quaint, and carved, and olden;
The slight streams in waflets golden,
This Christmas morn,
Through stained glass as scenes from Bible stories,
On ancient knights whose sculptured glories,
The aisle adorn.

The rays are shed in chastened splendor
On many a dead and gon- defender
Of Church and crown;
On Lanzelot, the brave Crusader,
And Guy, who slew the French invader,
And saved a town.

The major leads in line unbroken
Rest here legit with eyes and token
(Of ages past),
And fames and maidens, proud and stately;
Lie here with folded hands sedately,
And eyes shut fast.

Among their tombs the sunlight lingers,
Then hails betwixt the arches-singers,
And warms grim
For there amidst many a warlike helix,
Fair children sing the song angelic,
Christ's birthday hymn.

In wre'th wrap, I pause and listen,
I watch the dashing soldiers glisten
On floor and wall;
Then pass from dead to living grasses,
And on the children's happy faces,
In splendor fall.

This song of peace, those gentle voices,
These glad young hearts that life rejoices,
They fancy thought,
Are dearest unto the Master
Than all the Church's "lost" disaster
These dead knights wrought.

These are the days of gloom and error,
Love's scepter breaks the rod of terror
In our fair isle,
And as the children sing His message
Of Peace on Earth the joyful message,
They win God's smile.

—GEOFFREY R. STUE.

ROYAL CHRISTMASSES.

Many interesting particulars of how Christmas was kept by our Sovereigns in days gone by have been bequeathed to us, from which it appears that it was not only celebrated with the utmost hospitality and splendor, but was the occasion for the most extensive festivities, which, says an old writer, exceeded those of any other realm in Europe. Thus, going as far back as the time of William the Conqueror, we read how this monarch kept the festival in the year 1085 at Gloucester, when its observance was marked with every outward show worthy of a state ceremonial. Later on, Henry II, following the example of his predecessors, honored this anniversary with profuse feasting, plays and masques forming part of the Royal festivities; and it is related that in the year 1171 he kept his Christmas at Dublin, when a wooden house was specially erected for the occasion. Still more imposing was the feasting which took place in Westminster Hall, where many of our Sovereigns from time to time held their Christmas. We even read, too, how, when Henry III., in the year 1248, stayed at Winchester, he commanded his Treasurer "to fill the King's great hall from Christmas Day to the Day of Circumcision with poor people, and feast them there," and it is further on record how Edward II., in the year 1323, kept Christmas at Westminster Hall "with great honour and glorie." Referring more, however, to the feasting connected with this season, some idea of the extent to which it was carried may be gathered from the fact that in 1241, Henry III. gave orders to the Sheriff of Gloucester, to buy twenty salmons for the Christmas pies; and in the books of the Salters' Company, London, we find the following:—"Receipt:—Fit to make a moost choyce Pastye of Gamys to be eten at yo Feste of Chrystmasse" (17th Richard II., A.D. 1394). A pie so made by the company's cook in 1836 was found excellent. It consisted of a pheasant, hare and capon; two partridges, two pigeons and two rabbits; all boned and put into paste in the shape of a bird, with the livers and hearts, two mutton kidneys, forced meats, and egg

balls, seasoning, spice, catsup, and pickled mushrooms, filled up from gravy made from the various bones. Indeed, the more we read of the festive doings of our early Sovereigns at this season, the more it must be admitted that they far exceeded those of after years; and at the present day, it would create no small sensation if our worthy Queen, after the example of Richard III., should "wear the crown, and hold a splendid feast in Westminster Hall, similar to that of a coronation."

Apart, however, from the feasting of these Royal Christmas festivities, various diversions on a very elaborate scale was kept up, neither trouble nor expense being spared to make them as grand as possible. Thus, in the revuls of the olden times, the mummery occupied a prominent place, and we are informed that in 1400, when Henry IV. was holding his Christmas at Eltham, he was visited by twelve aldermen and their sons as mummery, and that these imposing personages "had great thanks" from his Majesty for their performance. This kind of diversion, however, did not find equal favor with all our Sovereigns, for Henry VIII. issued an ordinance against this Christmas pastime, declaring all those who disobeyed his command liable to be arrested and put in prison for three months.

The Lord of Miracle, again, was an important personage in the olden festivities of former years—his duties consisting in directing the numerous revuls of the season. Thus Stow, in his "Survey of London," speaking of this custom, says:—"In the feast of Christmas there was in the King's house, whosoever he lodged, a Lord of Miracle, or Master of Merry Disports." It appears that some of our Sovereigns expended large sums of money upon the sports of the Lord of Miracle, various entries occurring in the "Privy" Expences." Thus, for instance, in those of Henry VII. we find such items as these:—"To the Abbot of Mirsale, in reward, £6 13s. 4d.," and to Jacques Haute, in full payment for the disguising at Christenmas, £32 18s. 6d." At Court, too, plays, and the past was not infrequently held by a poet of some reputation. Such was George Ferrer, "in whose pastimes," we are told by Warton, "Edward VI. had great delight," and Holingshead further tells us that "being of better calling than commonly his predecessors had been before, he received all his commissions and warrants by the name of the Master of the King's Pastimes." In spite, however, of the encouragement which the Lord of Miracle and his merry doings met with at Court, yet there can be no doubt that scandalous abuses often resulted from the exuberant license assumed by him. Stubbs, a Puritan writer in the time of Elizabeth, denounces the Lord of Miracle as "a grand captain of mischief," and has left us a full account of the extravagant acts of this mock officer.

Another characteristic of the observance of Christmas at Court in years gone by was the performance of various plays, which, it seems, were often conducted on a magnificent scale. In the reign of Queen Elizabeth, these were much encouraged; and it has been suggested that even Shakespeare himself may have acted before the Queen at Christmas. At any rate, one Christmas play which was highly popular was that of "St. George"; and we know that on different occasions the children of St. Paul's and Westminster not only performed before Elizabeth, but that in 1593 the Heads of Colleges at Cambridge had the honor of acting a Latin comedy before her. In the ensuing reigns of James I. and Charles I. these plays and revuls continued to be the fashion, but with the century wealth all was changed. Evelyn tells us that in 1654, there was not even a church open, so that he had "to pass the devotions of that Blessed Day with his family at home." After this period Christmas observances at Court never regained their former grandeur. A Christmas pastime, however, which found special favor with Charles II. was gaming

at the groom-porter's, an attraction which retained its popularity as late as the reign of George III. "The groom-porter of old," says Mr. Tims in his "Romance of London," "is described as an officer of the Royal Household whose business it was to see the King's lodging furnished with tables, stools, chairs and bring; as also, to provide dice, etc. Formerly he was allowed to keep an open gaming table at Christmas." Among other ancient customs, we are told how a branch of the Glastonbury thorn used to be presented to the King and Queen of England on Christmas morning. Carol-singing, too, seems to have formed a part of the Royal festivities, and to have gladdened the Court feasts.

Although in modern years a great part of the festivities with which our Sovereigns once celebrated this joyous season are now things of the past, yet during the present reign many a charitable custom and hospitable practice have been instituted which, if lacking the grandeur of the state pageants and revuls of bygone times, are, perhaps, more suitable to the proper observance of a festival which is essentially of a homely character. At the Royal table at Windsor Castle, a noted joint in the "Baron of Beef"; and the Boar's Head, which from time immemorial has been a favorite item of Christmas fare in this country, still regularly makes its appearance at the state Christmas banquet.

T. F. THIRLSTON-DYER.

OLD CHRISTMAS GAMES.

One of the interesting features of a Christmas in the olden times was the varied assortment of games which were so heartily joined in by both old and young assembled round the blazing hearth. Most of these merry pastimes have long ago passed away; only a few, such as snapdragon, hide-and-seek, etc., being known by the present generation out of the long list of Christmas games formerly kept up. Thus, an old game played especially at Christmas was "hot cockles," a species of blindman's-buff, in which the person kneeling down, and being struck behind, was to guess who laid the blow. It is described by Gay in the following lines:—

As at hot cockles once I laid me down,
And felt the weighty hand of many a clown,
Buryms gave a gentle tap, and I
Quick rose, and read oft mischief in her eye.

In an old tract, "Round About our Coal Fire; or, Christmas Entertainments," published in the early part of the last century, mention is made of a game called "Questions and Commands." The writer says that the commander may oblige his subjects to answer any lawful question, and make the same obey him instantly under the penalty of paying any such forfeit as may be held on the aggressors. "Handy-dandy" was much in request at this season. One of the party conceived some-thing in his hand, making his neighbours guess in which one it was. If the latter guessed rightly he won the article; if wrongly, he lost an equivalent. It is alluded to in "Piers Ploughman," and it is, perhaps, noticed by Shakespeare where King Lear (act iv., sc. 6) says to Gloucester:—"Look with thine ears; see how you' justice takes upon you' simple thief. Hark, in this ear; change places; and, handy-dandy, which is the justice, which is the thief?" Browne, too, in one of his "Pastorals," tells how boys

With the pibbles play at handy-dandy.

A childish diversion also usually introduced at Christmas in the bygone days was the "Game of Goose." It was, says Stowe, played by two persons, although it really admitted of many more, and was well calculated to make the young people sharp at reckoning the produce of two given numbers. The table for playing "Goose" was about the size of a sheet of music, and divided into six or eight small compartments, arranged in a spiral form, with a large open space in the centre marked with the number 63; the other compartments were denoted by numbers from one to sixty-two, inclusive. The game was played with two dice,