

suggests the John Doe and Richard Roe of the English law courts:

Your pardon, gentles, while we this im-
plore,
In strains not less awakening than of
yore,
Those smiles we deem our best re-
ward to catch
And for the which we've long been on
the watch,
Well pleased if we that recompense ob-
tain
Which we have taken so many steps to
gain:
Think of the perils in our calling past,
The chilling coldness of the midnight
blast,
The bleating rain, the swiftly driving
snow,
The various ills that we must undergo,
Who roam like glowworms of the
human race,
The living Jack-o-Lanterns of the
place.

In his "Sketch Book" Washington Ir-
ving gives a most charming account of
an old English Christmas, and some
time since, looking through an old
volume of curious odds and ends, I
came upon a lively description of
"Christmas at Old Court," the seat of
a fine country gentleman, one of the
olden time.

Let me cull a few verses to show
what were the relationship between
Peers and People in those old days.

Come help me to raise
Loud songs to the praise
Of good old English pleasures:
To the Christmas cheer
And the foaming beer
And the butler's solid treasures.

To the tuneful wait
At the mansion gate
O' the glad sweet voices blending:
When the carol rose
At the midnight's close
To the sleeper's ear ascending.

To all pleasant ways
In those ancient days
When the good folks knew their station,
When God was feared,
And the King was revered
By the hearts of the grateful nation.

When a father's will
Was sacred still
As a law by his children heeded,
And none would brook
The mild, sweet look
When a mother gently pleaded.

Christmas Trees

But Christmas, like all other things
in this changeable sphere, has sadly
altered with the times, and the spirit
of the season is not quite the same as
before. For one thing the place of
Christmas carols has been taken by
Christmas cards, of which the produc-
tion has opened up a new and very con-
siderable industry; more especially in
the German nation, which supplies so
many of the things we want; and has
it ever occurred to any of my readers
that even our Christmas trees are of
German origin? I rather think that you
will find no mention of the Christmas
trees, ornamental with wool, snow and
candles, and hung with presents—in any
Yuletide revels up to the middle of the
last century—but when Prince Albert
married Queen Victoria he brought over
many German customs with him, in-
cluding that of the Christmas tree, and
in England it found congenial enough
soil, soon spreading into an immense pine
forest. The Christmas tree would seem
to be traceable to the Roman saturnalia,
and was probably first imported into
Germany by the conquering legions of
Drusus. Such a tree with its pendant
toys and mannikins, is distinctly re-
ferred to in Virgil in one of his
Georgics.

The Nativity

Learned writers have shown that
many of our Christmas customs had a
pagan origin, and even that Christmas
itself is of this character.

How is it that December 25th has
come to be celebrated as our Saviour's
natal day? "It does not appear," says
one researcher, "that there was any uni-
formity in the period of observing the

Nativity among the early Churches.
Some held the festival in the month of
May or April, others in January. It is
nevertheless almost certain that Decem-
ber 25th cannot be the Nativity of our
Saviour, for it is then the height of the
rainy season in Judea, and shepherds
could hardly be watching their flocks by
night on the plains."

We know that the late King
Edward—if I may draw a compari-
son without irreverence—was born in
November, but for ceremonial reasons he
chose to celebrate his birthday in June.
Yet what has that to do with the selec-
tion of December 25th as the birthday
of our Saviour? Says the writer al-
ready quoted, "Not casually or arbitrarily
was this done. One of the principal
causes that operated in fixing this period
was that almost all the heathen nations
regarded the winter solstice as the
turning point of the year, the beginning
of the renewed life and activity of the
powers of Nature, and of the gods, who
were originally merely the symbolical
personifications of these."

The Church sought to combat and
banish the deep-rooted heathen feeling
by adding, for the purification of the
heathen customs and feasts which it re-
tained, its grandly devised liturgy, be-
sides dramatic representations of the
birth of Christ and the first events of
His life.

A Merry Yuletide

Hence sprang the so-called "Manger
Songs" and a multitude of Christmas
carols, as well as dramas, which some-
times degenerated into "Fool Feasts" or
farces, and the custom of reciprocal
presents and festive Christmas fare as

The stout sirloin
And the rich spiced wine
And the boar's head grimly staring,
The fromenty,
And the hot mince pie
Which all folks were for sharing

in the hospital hall of "the fine old Eng-
lish gentleman, one of the olden line."
But now, alas! there is a growing
tendency to prefer the city hotel for
the family hall as the seat of our Yule-
tide festivity. The tendency began to
manifest itself soon after the Battle of
Waterloo, as I gather from another old
Christmas ditty:

For many a winter in Billiter Lane
My wife, Mrs. Brown, was ne'er heard
to complain;
At Christmas the family met there to
dine
On beef and plum pudding, and tur-
key and chine.

Our bark has now a contrary heel,
My wife has found out that the sea is
genteel;
To Brighton we duly go scampering
down,
For nobody now spends his Christmas
in town.

For my part to spend Christmas at
home is good enough for me, even
though this year it is robbed of many
cheerful surroundings, but none the less
heartily shall I drink the health of all
my readers, as well as confusion to my
enemies.

The Variations of Love

Into a telegraph office in an Eastern
town there recently came a much
agitated young woman. She wrote up-
on one telegraph blank, tore it in
halves, wrote a second, which she
treated in the same manner, and at
last a third. This she handed to the
operator, requesting, in a trembling
voice, that he "hurry it up."

The operator obeyed instructions, and
when the young woman had gone he
read the two messages that she had
torn in halves.

The first was:

All is over. I never wish to see you
again.

The second read:

Do not write or try to see me at
present.

And the third ran:

Can you take the next train? Please
answer.

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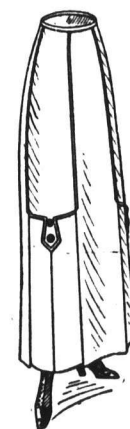


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