

CHRISTMAS CUSTOMS AND FESTIVITIES.

CHRISTMAS DAY in the primitive church was observed like Sunday and was preceded by a solemn vigil. To this vigil is due perhaps the importance given now to the keeping of Christmas Eve, even by those who ignore the Church's teaching on this and kindred subjects.

At this time it was the custom of our ancestors (and one still practiced in many parts of England) to turn night into day by lighting immense tapers made for the occasion and called Christmas candles, and the burning of the Yule log, or the Christmas block, as it was variously termed. These illuminations, which have come to be expressions of festivity and victory, were doubtless first used as religious symbols, and were typical of Christ, the Light of all lights, who came into the world at this time. Making bright the whole house, and giving a tone of comfort and good cheer, it is not to be wondered at that the Christmas candles and Yule blocks came to be regarded as harbingers of good fortune, and to form the nucleus about which is associated a host of superstitions.

The Yule blocks were great logs cut from large trees, which required the strength of several brawny hands and arms to roll them into the wide, open fire-place.

The decking of houses and Churches with evergreens is of very ancient origin.

Our pagan ancestors were accustomed to strew their homes at this season with boughs and vines, to insure the favor of the sylvan spirits by affording them a place of resort, where they could remain, untripped by frost and cold winds, until a mild season renewed the foliage of their own abodes. The Christians who persevered in the custom, did it with an entirely different spirit; they looked upon the ivy, holly, box and mistletoe as so many figurative expressions relative to Christ, the branch of righteousness.

The playing of the "Waits," during the Yule tide is an institution still maintained in England, particularly in the northern and midland counties. The practice may be traced back to the time of the minstrels, or musical watchmen, attached to the households of kings and nobles, whose duty it was to parade an assigned district, for the purpose of musically indicating the hours of the night.

"Waits," or "Waightes," were included among the minstrels in the service of King Edward III. These played on the hautboy, which, according to Dr. Busby, was also termed Waight. In the following reign their duties were very definitely defined in the "Liber niger domus Regis, thus; "A WAITE that nightely from Mychelmas to Shreve Thorsdaye pipeth watche within the courte fowre tymes; in the Somere nightes three times, and makythe RON GAYTE at every chambre, doar and offyce as well for feare of pyckeres and pillers."

The popularity of carol-singing appears to have been so universal in the days of our English ancestors as to have been practiced by the peasants, the clergy and the throne. Bishops caroled at Christmas among the clergy, and Henry VI., in the third year of his reign, kept his Christmas at Greenwich, where, after the King's first course, the dean, and those of the Chapel Royal, "sang a carol." On Christmas days, formerly, carols were sung instead of psalms, the whole congregation joining, the clerk closing by wishing all present a Merry Christmas and a happy New Year. The Welsh seem to have indulged in a practice of carol-singing even to a greater extent than either England or Ireland (the custom being unknown in Scotland), for they had Christmas, Winter and Summer carols.

The term carol was originally used to designate a song accompanied by dancing, the per-

formers forming a ring and having joined hands, singing as they went round; and in this sense it is frequently alluded to by the old secular poets. But the majority of the traditional songs coming under this designation are of sacred character, the oldest carol being, according to the happy conceit of Bishop Taylor, that "sung by the Heavenly Host when the birth of the Saviour was announced to the shepherds on the plains of Bethlehem." It is probable that the practice of thus musically celebrating Christmas-tide owes its origin to the circumstance here referred to, as the majority of carols allude to the "tidings of great joy;" and the ancient term *Noel*, or *Nowell*, applied to them seems to bear out the fact. There is extant a singular old carol by Anrelius Prudentius, containing twenty nine verses, which dates from the early part of the fourth century, proving that the custom of caroling amongst Christian communities is of great antiquity.

The Christmas pies are described as long and deep in shape and size, in imitation of the manger wherein the Infant Jesus was laid. These pastry receptacles were filled with (to quote from an old recipe) "a most learned mixture of neats'-tongue, chicken, eggs, sugar, lemon and orange peel, various kinds of spices," etc., etc. At the same period was also concocted a sort of soup with plums, which was considered as not inferior to the pies, and which was known as plum porridge. This dish formed the basis for the Christmas plum-pudding so popular to day.

The Christmas-tree, though peculiar to Germany, is now of general occasion throughout the whole civilized world. Originally the presents were hung upon the tree, bearing the names only of the favored ones, who found much of their amusement in attempts at discovering the donors. The custom of giving presents at Christmas was doubtless founded on the pagan practice of New Year's gifts. The Christmas-box of old contained the bounty of well disposed people, who contributed something toward rewarding the industrious poor and supplying them with necessaries.

In Italy the presents are placed in packages upon a table and drawn for from the Urn of Fate. Not much of the Christian spirit in that.

In Norway, there is the sleigh-ride to Church and the procession of boys in white mantles bearing a large colored lantern shaped like a star.

And who does not love to read of one good Swedish custom? How on Christmas Eve, a sheaf of corn is tied to a pole outside, for the poor little starving birds. There they remember the birds; here, some forget even the orphan and the widow on this Blessed Night.—*Church News*.

SO GOD LOVED THE WORLD.

ST. JOHN III. 16.

Advent and Christmas tide are upon us, with all their crowding thoughts of Mercy and Duty and Judgment. Now are we prayerfully to review the past; to consider how we have used the spiritual advantages of the year just coming to a close, and to pledge ourselves to a more devoted service, with hearts full of loving gratitude for all the manifold mercies of Our Father and Redeemer.

For of all those mercies there is none to be compared with that we commemorate on Christmas Day. The greatest of all because it includes them all. "God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son." Was there ever record like this? Was there ever gift like this, that God should give His only Son? Was there ever love like this that the Father should give His well beloved Son; that the Son should empty Himself of His glory to

take upon Himself our weak human nature? It is a love which passeth man's understanding. It is an infinite love. It is the majesty of God seeking for a gift that shall be worthy of His dignity and honor, and finding none thus worthy but Himself! It is the love of the Father endeavoring to kindle in us a love toward Him! It is the Son offering Himself that He might come to us, to draw us and lead us, His younger brethren unto the Father. Was ever gift a love like this? Angels, to whom no such love had ever been shown no such gift been ever given, shouted Hosannas at the descending of the Son of God to earth, and shall men not welcome him with loving and rejoicing hearts?"

It is a blessed thing year by year to read, as we are taught, the story of the coming of the Son of God. A story which must awaken in our hearts, if they be not harder than the nether millstone, an answering impulse of gratitude and thankfulness, which shall not be able to content itself with words.

And so the day has come to be a time of giving of gifts and bestowing of charity, of remembering the poor and the fatherless, of the forgiveness of injuries, and generally of making crooked things straight, or at least a little straighter than they were; and so may it ever be!—*Church News*.

NEWS FROM THE HOME FIELD.

DIOCESE OF NOVA SCOTIA.

HANTSPOBT.—We referred last week to the opening of the new church here. The following additional particulars and brief account of Church work in Hantsport will be of interest to our readers: For many years since work was begun in this little town, there was no house wherein the few Churchmen here could worship in a decent and orderly manner. Yet rather than not assemble to give unto God the glory due unto His name, the services of the Anglican Church have been conducted from time to time by priests of the Anglican Church. Hantsport is as yet part of the parish of Falmouth and has so far depended upon the priest in charge of it for its spiritual ministrations. It is hoped that the day is not far distant when this part of the Lord's vineyard will either be a distinct parish, or else be united with Wolfville, which is now part of the well worked parish of Horton. In a few years this no doubt will be effected.

As far as the writer can learn a number of clergymen have been instrumental, in spite of great temporal difficulties, in keeping alive the germ of Church life in Hantsport. About the year 1874 or 1875 the Rev. Augustus Hiltz, the late Rector of the parish of Derby, N.B., officiated as often as he could here. He was followed by the Rev. Professor Wilson, late of King's College, Windsor, N.S., and Rev. Dr. Maynard, who conducted services for a short time. The Rev. G. W. Peters, Rector of Bathurst, when lay reader at Wolfville, at the urgent request of a few faithful Church members came to Hantsport about 1883, and held a few services in the basement of the Methodist meeting house, till ordered for some reason or other to discontinue. Afterwards no services were held for about the space of three years. In January, 1886, the Rev. John Harrison, incumbent of Falmouth was requested by the late Bishop Binney to hold services at Hantsport. He did for a time conduct them in a public hall rented from Churchhill Bros. On the hall being refused us, the Odd Fellows kindly threw open their hall in the same building and ever since till the opening of St. Andrew's Church on Nov. 27th, the little band of Anglicans have assembled the first Sunday in each month of the year to worship God. Since Dec. 1886, every effort has been put forth to