

Points of Interest

(By F. S. G.)

Why Christmas Presents Are Called "Boxes."

We always call a present given at Christmas a "Christmas box," whether it is really a box or not. In olden times almshouses were placed in the churches on Christmas Day to receive gifts of money for the poor, and these gifts were distributed on the following day, which thus came to be called "Boxing Day." Later, the watchmen, apprentices, and others used to go round collecting for their own benefit, and to receive the money gifts they had little earthenware boxes. Ever since those times Christmas presents have been known as Christmas boxes.

Why We Put Holly in Our Homes at Christmas.

The custom of decorating the inside of our homes at Christmas with holly, mistletoe, and other evergreens, is very ancient and can be traced back to the old heathen festivals that took place at the same time of the year as we celebrate Christmas. At these festivals the temples used to be decorated with evergreens, and as one of the Scripture lessons usually read on Christmas Eve contained the passage from Isaiah—chapter 60, and verse 13—"The glory of Lebanon shall come unto thee, the fir tree, the pine tree, and the box together; to beautify the place of My sanctuary," the practice of decorating the churches grew up. This, however, was much opposed at first, owing to the pagan custom, but gradually it got a firm hold, and at last even dwelling houses were decorated.

Why Children Have Christmas Trees.

The Christmas tree was very little known in England before the coming of Prince Albert, the husband of Queen Victoria, who introduced the custom from Germany. It is supposed to have been derived from a custom of the ancient Egyptians, who used to deck their houses at this period of the year with branches of date-palm, their symbol of life triumphing over death. In Germany, far more than here, the trees are gaily illuminated with lighted candles, a practice that grew out of the custom of keeping a large candle alight at Christmas time in churches, to show that "Jesus, the Light of the World," had come.

Why We Have Christmas Plum Pudding

Plum puddings and mince pies have only been made in their present form during the last two or three hundred years. It was in ancient times the practice for people to give one another at Christmas time little cakes, roughly shaped in the human form, and these represented the infant Jesus and His mother. These became more elaborate as time went on, and developed into a great Christmas pie made up of all kinds of things—chicken, eggs, spices, raisins, currants, sugar, candied peel, and so on. The pies were made in the supposed shape of the manger in which Jesus was laid. The various ingredients, coming, as many did, from the east, were said to represent the gifts of the wise men to Jesus. Later the pies were made in the more convenient round shape, and developed into our plum puddings and mince pies.

Beginning of the Cotton Industry.

Long before the dawn of history the cotton plant was cultivated in various parts of the world, and the earliest records of spinning its fleecy bolls are of such antiquity that it is difficult to obtain satisfactory evidence of its beginning. The name "cotton" itself is of Oriental origin, being derived from the Arabic "koton" or "gootn." India is known as the motherland of cotton, and its earliest history is found in the Rig Veda hymn, composed fifteen centuries before the Christian era, which honors the "threads of the loom," and also 3,000 years ago it was used as an ornamental shrub in Egypt.

Alexander the Great acquainted Europe with India, and with that singular plant, "vegetable wool," and often referred to "the trees of India bearing wool." Cotton was first im-

ported into England in 1298 A. D., and the manufacture of cotton goods thereafter became one of its greatest industries. In the United States cotton became an early experimental plant, beginning in Virginia in 1600 A. D., and after that date its growth was very rapid. During the war of the American Revolution and immediately thereafter, cotton culture began to receive considerable attention in the Southern States; along the coast the valuable sea island cotton was raised, and later, in the interior, the upland or green-seed cotton was raised.

Cotton goods are in the front rank of American exports today, but the name of Anderson gingham and Horocks' cottons from England are still household words when quality and best value are demanded.

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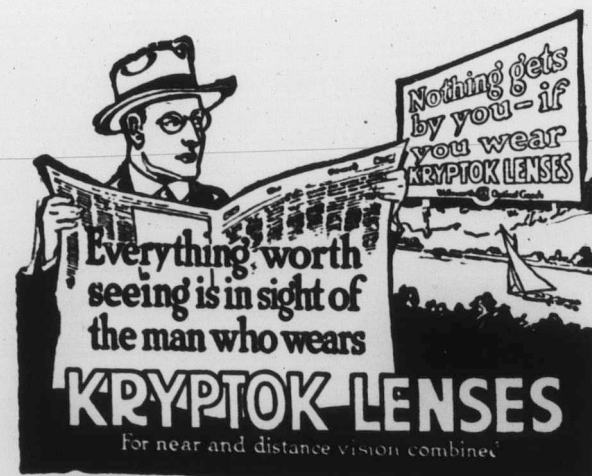
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