

of Christmas can be traced. Some of the early churches held the Christmas festival in April or May, others in January. Several causes probably co-operated to cause the 25th of December to be finally fixed as the day of the Christmas celebration. The chief perhaps was that almost all the heathen nations regarded the period of the winter solstice as a central or turning point, so to speak, in the year. It symbolized to them the end of the old and the beginning of the new year. Then the powers of nature were supposed to put forth new activities, the world to awaken into new life. It was at this season that the Germans and other Northern nations were accustomed to hold their great Yule feast; as a part of their system of sun-worship. Many of the usages of both Germans and Romans were afterwards incorporated into the Christian observances. The Christian churches sought afterwards to root out or purify the heathen notions that came in with the customs, by the establishment of the liturgy, the so-called 'Manger-Songs,' and even by dramatic representations of the birth of Christ and the events of his early years.

The custom of gift-giving may have been one of those transplanted from paganism, or may have been adopted by the Church in celebration of the gifts brought by the wise men of the East for the infant Saviour. Ovid alludes to the practice among the Romans of giving small presents both of coins and of dates, dried figs, honey, &c., as well wishes and good omens at the commencement of the new year. The Christmas box, or money-gift is essentially an English custom. The custom for a long time was almost universal of giving a small piece of money to persons in an inferior position. This finally became so serious a draft, and so great a nuisance, that tradesmen used to put up notices in their shop windows that no Christmas boxes would be given, and the public authorities were even constrained to take action to put a stop to the practice. But happily we have no law to forbid the pleasant custom of giving presents to friends, and especially to children on Christmas Day. The Anglo-Saxon has no more delightful usage. The little myth of Santa Claus and his visits stands alone as a pretty and salutary exercise of the fancy amongst us. We are, as a people, too much inclined to be matter-of-fact, not to say sordid. Let us by all means keep up this little illusion which really can scarcely be said to deceive even the little children, and which constitutes the one recurring green spot in the lives of too many of them. In some families, what with months of anticipation, and weeks of planning, and the after stores of pleasant memories, Christmas is almost a perpetual pleasure. Who would deprive himself of so rare an opportunity to make some little hearts happier, if but once a year? Let not the children be disappointed on this Christmas day. The gift-giving with its innocent plottings and plannings, its happy surprises, and its delight in the joy of others, is an education in itself. Anything which leads either children or adults, in this selfish world, to give days or weeks, or even minutes, to earnest thought and device for conferring pleasure on others is in itself an excellent lesson in practical benevolence, and a brief fulfilment of the moral law.

The greatest literary event of the season in England is, no doubt, the appearance of a new volume of poetry by Tennyson. The well-won reputation of the Laureate has unfortunately been injured since the publication of those productions which have placed him in the very front rank of the world's great poets, by the appearance from time to time of ephemeral bits of rhyme, or jingle, quite unworthy of his pen. Some of them undoubtedly merited all the ridicule which was freely bestowed on them. One could but wonder how such effusions could possibly come from the same brain which gave to literature *In Memoriam*, *The Princess*, and *The Idyls*. In this last volume the poet, if we may judge from the specimens which have crossed the water, has grandly redeemed his reputation. We give in another column one of the shorter pieces, on "Early Spring." It is charming, almost perfect, in sentiment, style, and diction. The word-painting is exquisite in its simplicity. Almost every word is pure Anglo-Saxon. We suggest that from this point of view alone it is worthy of being made a study in the literature classes. It would be a profitable exercise for pupils to cull out all the words of Latin or Greek origin in the poem. The result can scarcely fail to give them such a conception of the beauty and power of pure English as will be to many a surprise and a revelation.

The series of war papers which have been appearing for months past in the American magazines have emphasized one phase in the intellectual activity of our neighbors. The popularity of these papers, due in part to the theme, and in part to the fact that the writers discoursed of events in which they themselves bore a leading part, has been almost beyond precedent. This is especially true of those written for the *Century*, which was the first to hit upon the happy idea, and which has profited immensely by it. The death of ex President Grant, the chief actor in the events described, has placed in a striking light a feature in the character of our republican neighbors which has always been a puzzle to us, viz., their immense capacity for hero-worship. They have enshrined the dead General amongst the *demi-gods of the National Pantheon*, and continue even yet to pay him almost more than mortal honors.

1885 bids fair to be famous amongst years for the number of unsettled political problems it will hand over to its successor. It has been a year of events, and will claim a large place in history. The nations are comparatively few which have enjoyed uninterrupted internal and external peace. There have been, it is true, no wars of great magnitude actually fought out by sea and land, but cloud after cloud has hung on the European horizon, and even now no one can feel sure that the next few months or weeks may not see the beginning of the long expected struggle, whose end no human prescience can foresee. Happy in her comparative isolation, the Great Republic south of us is perhaps the only really great nation which has no reason to fear embroilment in some great conflict.

In Germany the mighty, and in some respects baneful, influence of Bismarck has within the last few weeks been felt in