

Early Day Yuletides Along the Red River

Written for The Western Home Monthly by Athelney Evans

YULETIDE has been celebrated in Manitoba from the days when Selkirk's settlers trekked into the "colony" from Scottish shores. A few days ago the writer was standing on the Red River bank near the Rapids of St. Andrews. Walking through a piece of poplar coppice adjacent to the roadway was a man, who, as he slowly ambled along, plainly demonstrated the fact that the hallmark of advanced old age was stamped upon him. An old-time resident of the locality, his years permit him to glance back into the period when the settler trekked along the crooked trail through Middlechurch and Kildonan to the store of the Great Company in Fort Garry.

"Beautiful morning for the time of year," remarked the venerable man as he stepped toward the writer. "And Christmas will soon be here, too, won't it?"

"Yes," responded the writer, "and I wish you a merry Christmas and lots of them yet. You old timers along the river have spent the day in various queer fashions years ago."

"No. We generally spent it in one way. We've always observed Christmas," was the response. "But we never looked forward to it as with New Year's. That was the great time in the colony."

It may be well to remark that in early days Manitoba was known as the "Colony." Indeed, frequently when an old-time resident is in conversation he is prone to refer to the colony and Fort Garry.

"People in the colony were few and far between when I was a young man," he continued, a smile passing over his much wrinkled face. "Perhaps we might start out on Christmas afternoon to visit relatives or friends, may be at Headingly or Selkirk. Most of the folks in St. Andrew's parish went to church in the morning to hear the Christmas hymns and—"

"Bishop Anderson," remarked the listener, momentarily interrupting. "There's not an old-timer on the river who did not recognize him as a friend."

"Yes," answered the octogenarian. "That's quite right what you say about Anderson. I've heard him preach in the old stone church on several Christmas mornings."

Anderson. He the intrepid path-finder whose name is ever green at St. Andrew's on the Red river. He was likewise the hero who penetrated the fastnesses of distant Yukon, carrying to its Indian people the Gospels.

In response to a query concerning Christmas and New Year's at Fort Garry and bastioned Lower Fort, the old resident remarked that it was customary with many Indians to come from Lake Winnipeg and the vicinity. The Indian would bring with him a bundle of furs to barter for a few extra supplies. It was a usual happening for the Indians to usher in the New Year with a feast and dance, the latter celebration frequently lasting an entire week.

The statement has been made that in the early days of Manitoba the time-honored adjunct to the Christmas dinner table, the proverbial plum pudding was an unknown factor with the settlers. In speaking of this subject, the St. Andrew's octogenarian remarks: "That's the silliest idea I've heard of in a long while. The folks Lord Selkirk brought here—my father was one of them—knew more than some people yet give them credit for. At most of the company's stores flour and raisins were always in stock."

"The lively strains of the Red River Jig have apparently vanished," remarked the writer, who last heard its merry music at a Christmas spent at Mapleton years ago. "Perhaps old-timers along the Red River have forgotten the tune," he added. "Sometimes you'll hear it yet," was the response. There are several men around the Rapids who can play the old tune yet, and if you were here on Christmas night you might hear it."

The writer does, however, recollect that at Christmas parties along the Red River much enthusiasm was evoked when the time honored jig was commenced by the violinist.

"That's a car going to Winnipeg," remarked the octogenarian, as the shrill whistle sounded through the bush 'twixt the electric railway and the river bank. "Things have altered the last few years. Last Christmas Eve I went with one of my sons to the city, and he took me to the corner of Main street and Portage avenue. No I can't say what my thoughts were as I looked at the crowds of people, the splendid store windows, and the automobiles. The change is too wonderful for me to talk about. Did we ever fancy Fort Garry would be more than it was in the early days, you ask? No, we never did; we made a wrong guess didn't we?"

A few minutes later the writer wished the aged resident farewell and expressed the hope that several Christmas days would yet be enjoyed by him.

"Can't expect many more," he replied. "I've spent nearly ninety of them in Mani-

stition that the holly is to remind us of Christ's suffering is of later origin than most of the Christmas customs. A little Christmas carol, in the Christmas number of "Harper's Magazine," 1898, prettily embodies this idea:

"The holly berry's red as blood,
And the holly bears a thorn;
And the manger-bed is a Holy Rood,
When Jesus Christ was born."

In the Black Mountains at the present day the custom of bearing home the Yule log is still carefully observed in all its ancient detail. The house-father fells the chosen tree, then he utters a prayer, and carefully lifts up his log and bears it home on his shoulder. His sons follow his example, each bearing a log for himself. The father then leans his log up against the house, being careful that the freshly cut end is uppermost, the lesser logs or ends surround it. As the father places each log he says, "A merry log day."

The fire thus kindled is not allowed to go out until the following year, or great evil will befall the household. Portions of the preceding Yule log lighted the new

Continent called Souche de Noel. In Norfolk and other counties, as long as any part of the Yule log remained burning, all the servants were regaled at their meals with the best of cider and ale.

The early English and Irish people called Christmas the "Feast of Lights" and used to burn the "Christmas candle," which was so large as to burn several nights before being consumed. It is one of the most interesting of the Christmas customs, for very early it was made symbolical of the "Light of the World," and its burning became a religious observance. Whether it was, as is claimed, a pagan rite, offered to the sun for its returning warmth at Yuletide, is not really known.

Used as a Christian symbol, however, the Christmas candle grew larger and larger until it assumed such huge dimensions as to last the whole twelve nights of the holidays. The candle was often ornamented with a lamb, typical of the Lamb of God. These candles are still sold in various places at Christmas time. In the buttery at St. John's College, Oxford, may still be seen an ancient stone candlestick bearing a figure of the Lamb. This candlestick used to be placed upon the "high table" each of the twelve nights of the Christmas festival, and in it burned the famous candle of St. John's.

One of the Christmas games used to be "jumping the candles." Twelve candles, representing the months of the year, were placed at intervals on the floor, and each person in turn was required to jump over them. If all were successfully passed over and still burned brightly, good fortune would be the jumper's during the coming year; but if any candle flame was put out it betokened ill-luck coming in the month it represented. If all were put out, the bachelor or maid who committed the direful deed would not only not marry during the coming year but might expect a disappointment in love. This custom is now used on Halloween-night.

A hundred years ago the English chandlers used to pay tribute to their patrons in the form of huge mould candles, and the coopers presented their patrons with great logs, called Yule dogs or blocks, and direct descendants of the Yule log.

The poor little Puritan children were not allowed to keep Christmas, because to do so savored of popery in their elders' eyes. Governor Bradford, on the second Christmas in the New World, 1621, wished people to work, but if they would not work they must not play; if they kept Christmas at all it must be as a "matter of devotion." One thing, however, the children did have in the early days of New England was the "Christmas candle." This candle was home-made, of tallow, large, with the wick divided at the lower end to form three legs, while at its heart was concealed a quill well filled with gunpowder. On Christmas Eve it was lighted, and the quaint little Puritan folk sat around it, telling stories, until suddenly the candle went off with a bang, filling the children with glee, and giving them their only taste of holiday fun.

It is said that Christmas trees were used to place gifts upon as early as 1632; they certainly were by 1744, as Goethe in "The Sorrows of Werther" alludes to the custom. France adopted the Christmas tree about 1840, and Prince Albert introduced it into England the first Christmas after his marriage. The Queen keeps up this custom, having a tree for her own gifts, one for her children and grandchildren, and one for the household. Since then the custom has become world-wide.

The "Tree of Candles" is of more ancient date. There is an old French romance of the thirteenth century in which the hero sees a tree whose branches from top to bottom are covered with burning candles, while on the top is a figure of a child shining with a still greater radiance. This tree symbolized humanity—the upper lights being the souls of the good, those below, of the wicked, while the child represented Christ. From the Norse mythology comes the suggestion of the Christmas tree

CANADIAN'S DO OR DIE

By Isabel Crawford

There's many a heart in the Northland
That longs for an absent one—
There's many a widowed mother
Who mourns for an only son.

They left the plow in the furrow,
And the axe in the half-felled tree
Offering their lives for the honor
Of the Motherland o'er the sea.

They sprang into line at the bugle,
And waved us a gay good-bye,
But their hearts as steel were welded,
For Canadians do—or die!

And some of them fell at Ypres
In the thick of the first advance;
And some of them sleep unlisted
Heroes, Somewhere in France!

Dear God! We are glad we gave them,
Though they sleep 'neath an alien sky,
We are proud of our race of heroes—
Canadians do—or die!

Aye back to back they are fighting,
Rich man, and farmer's son,
The artist has left his canvas
And wields the sword and gun.

The playwright has left his drama
Unfinished as years go by—
They have placed their all on the altar,
Canadians do—or die!

With a thought for home and loved ones,
And a prayer for the passing soul,
They have held their lines undaunted,
They have kept the Hun from his goal.

They have carved them a niche in story,
With the torch of patriot flame,
They have blazed the path to conquest—
But never the way of shame

toba, and perhaps before another Christmas Day I may be laid in the cemetery at Kildonan, where my father, mother and several of our family are buried."

A hearty shake hands, and the old man started off for the Locks. And once again the writer heard the strains of the Red River Jig.

Many English girls believe that they will not be wedded inside of twelve months unless they have at least one kiss under the mistletoe. In many countries a berry is plucked from the mistletoe with each kiss, and when there are no berries no kisses are allowed. Mistletoe used to be considered a charm or amulet to ward off the baneful influence of witches. It was also considered that its influence was irresistible, that no one could possibly pass beneath it without yielding to its power, and hence both matron and maid must submit to the salutation which has since become customary.

The holly, with its traditions and customs, comes down to us from the old Romans and Teutons, and "bringing in the holly" used to be a matter of some ceremony. The good folk of Rutland, England, never bring holly into the house before Christmas Eve, believing that to do so would entail upon them a year of ill luck; and in Derbyshire it is believed that the roughness or smoothness of the holly that comes into a house at Christmas foreshadows whether husband or wife will rule during the coming year. The super-

logs, and the remains of each year's fire were carefully stored away among the household treasures for this purpose.

In the Highlands of Scotland it is, to this day, considered a great misfortune if the fire goes out, and it is said, "Tae nae luck, ye've let out the fire." The Yule log of England is chosen for its knots and rugged roots, a cross-grained block of elm being usually chosen, as it will burn longer. This used to be decorated with garlands of greens and ribbons and drawn to its place with much merriment.

Formerly the members of a family and the guests sat down in turn upon the Yule log as the throne of the Master of Revels or the Lord of Misrule, sang Yule songs, drank to the Merry Christmas and Happy New Year, and as part of the frolic ate Yule dough or Yule cakes, drank fermenty, spiced ale, and from the wassail bowl.

Then they played Yule games, and finally kindled the Yule log from brands kept from the previous year. Herrick writes:

"Kindle the Christmas brand, and then
Till sunset let it burne;
Which quencht, then lay it up agen,
Till Christmas next returne.

"Part must be kept, wherewith to teend
The Christmas log next yeare;
And where 'tis safely kept, the fiend
Can do no mischief there."

A similar custom was retained on the