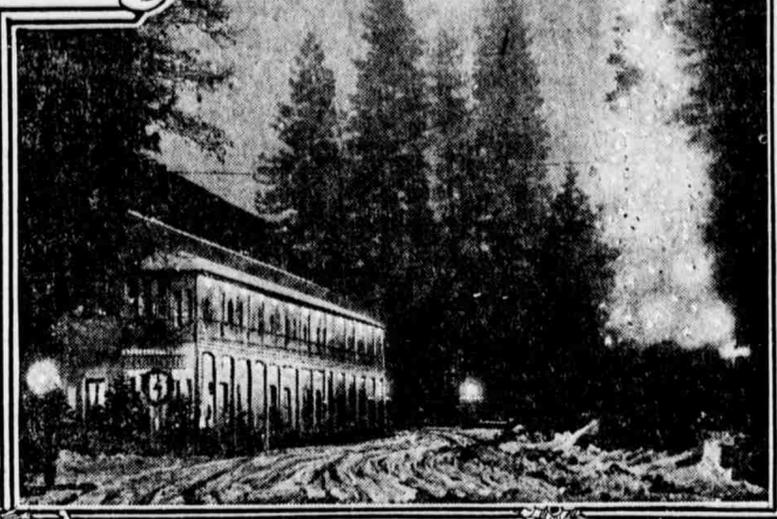


Christmas Facts and Fancies



By JOHN DICKINSON SHERMAN

THREE WISE MEN, as everyone knows, paid homage to Jesus at his birth. Their story is told in part thus in the Gospel according to St. Matthew:

Now when Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judea in the days of Herod the King, behold, there came wise men from the East to Jerusalem.

Saying, where is he that is born King of the Jews? for we have seen his star in the East, and are come to worship him.

When Herod the King had heard these things, he was troubled, and all Jerusalem with him.

And when he had gathered all the chief priests and scribes of the people together, he demanded of them where Christ should be born.

And they said unto him, In Bethlehem of Judea, for thus it is written by the prophet.

And thou, Bethlehem, in the land of Judea, art not the least among the princes of Judea; for out of thee shall come a Governor, that shall rule my people Israel.

Then Herod, when he had privily called the wise men, inquired of them diligently what time the star appeared.

And he sent them to Bethlehem, and said, Go and search diligently for the young child; and when ye have found him, bring me word again, that I may come and worship him also.

When they had heard the king, they departed, and, lo, the star, which they saw in the East, went before them, till it came and stood over where the young child was.

When they saw the star, they rejoiced with exceeding great joy.

And when they were come into the house, they saw the young child with Mary his mother, and fell down, and worshipped him: and when they had opened their treasure, they presented unto him gifts; gold, and frankincense and myrrh.

And being warned of God in a dream that they should not return to Herod, they departed into their own country another way.

These Three Wise Men were named Melchior, Kaspar and Balthazar. They are sometimes called the "Three Kings of Cologne." Their bones are said to rest in the cathedral of Cologne. This is the finest specimen of Gothic architecture in Europe and its building took more than 600 years—1248 to 1880. Anyway, skulls purporting to be theirs were exhibited as late as the Eighteenth century. To touch them was to be healed. An old prayer charm reads:

To three holy kings,
Kaspar, Melchior and Balthazar,
Pray for us now
And in the hour of death.

Early tradition supplemented this account by adding a fourth wise man. And the story of this fourth wise man is one for us all to keep in mind at Christmas time.

This fourth wise man started with the other three to make the journey to Jerusalem and pay homage to the new-born King. But he never reached the manger where lay the child. Instead he sacrificed his life to render service. Nevertheless, before he died he was granted a vision of the Christ. Henry Van Dyke's "The Story of the Other Wise Man" tells the tradition most excellently well:

Detained by his efforts to save a dying stranger, Artaban becomes separated from his companions. He, therefore, seeks the Christ alone, traveling from place to place, feeding the hungry as he goes, clothing the naked, nursing the sick, comforting the oppressed.

One after another he spends for others the precious gifts which he had hoped to offer to the Christ. At last he surrenders his one remaining pearl in order to ransom a tormented slave girl.

Struck on the temple by a falling tile, he lies bleeding and breathless. But he hears a Voice commending him.

Unable to believe the testimony of his own ears, the Other Wise Man murmurs:

"Not so, my Lord! For when saw I Thee an hungered and fed Thee? Or thirsty, and gave Thee drink? When saw I Thee a stranger, and took Thee in? Or naked, and clothed Thee? When saw I Thee sick and in prison and came unto Thee? Three-and-thirty years have I looked after Thee; but I have never seen Thy face, nor ministered to Thee my King."

But the Voice replies:

"Inasmuch as thou hast done it unto one of the least of these, my brethren, thou hast done it unto me."

Is it hard to imagine the Fourth Wise Man re-

appearing on earth at Christmas time with a message to all mankind? Certainly he has a message well worth delivering. And certainly it is a message well worth listening to. For from his experience he could say to us:

"You have served God only as you have served men."

The Christian citizen should be serving God in relation to his home, his community and his nation. There are those who are serving God by trying to improve the conditions under which their less privileged fellows live and work, by trying to bring more of justice, beauty, peace and love into the life of the world. It is to be feared that most of us fall far short here. But he is a poor Christian and a poor citizen indeed who, having, can pass Christmas without doing something in keeping with the day for those who have not.

Everywhere in our modern Twentieth century life we meet the very people whom Jesus painted in living words 2,000 years ago—the prodigal son, who "came to himself"; the elder brother, who "was angry and would not go in"; the priest and the Levite, who "passed by on the other side"; the good Samaritan, who "was moved with compassion"; the Pharisee, who thanked God that he was "not as other men are"; the publican, who cried "God be merciful unto me, a sinner!"

At Christmas time, if at no other, it is well for us to be the publican and the good Samaritan.

Without Christmas tree, holly and mistletoe Christmas would seem strange indeed to most Americans. The balsam fir is most used for Christmas trees, but doubtless almost any kind of evergreen can be used in an emergency. And some of the municipal and community center Christmas trees nowadays are of great size, especially when they are set up outdoors.

The photograph of the Christmas tree reproduced herewith is worth studying as something quite out of the ordinary in several respects. In the first place, in the original photograph three separate exposures of the plate were made—the first for the building and its lights; the second for the Christmas tree and its lights, and the third for the moon. Each exposure varied in length to suit the different degrees of brilliancy.

And where do you suppose this unusual photograph was taken? Why, at the annual Christmas celebration in Yosemite valley, Yosemite National park, California. Most people think that all the national parks are closed in the winter time. Well, they are not. Rocky Mountain National park in Colorado has a carnival of winter sports in February. Mount Rainier National park in Washington has winter sports and a ski tournament as late as July. And Yosemite is open the year 'round. And Yosemite's Christmas celebration includes a fat, jolly, fur-clad Santa Claus who drives up in the old-fashioned way in his sleigh and distributes his gifts to the village children.

But that isn't all about this unusual picture. What kind of a tree do you suppose the Christmas tree is? You could not guess if your Christmas gift depended upon your guess. That's because it is the only one of its kind in the whole world.

This Christmas tree is nothing less than a living Sequoia tree. The Sequoia (Sequoia gigantea) is the oldest and biggest living thing in the world.

Some of the biggest and oldest of them are 35 feet in diameter and at least 5,000 years old. So you see many of these Big Trees in Sequoia and Yosemite national parks were not even middle-aged when Christ was born in Bethlehem.

This particular Sequoia Christmas tree was planted in 1890. From a seedling it has grown to a height of more than 60 feet. A thousand years from now it will probably be nearly 300 feet tall and have a diameter of 15 or 20 feet.

One wonders if there will be a similar Christmas celebration in Yosemite valley then—a thousand years from now. Why not? Christmas will still be celebrated then—if the world endures. And our nineteen national parks have been set apart by congress as public playgrounds for the people forever. So, if the United States of America endures, why not a Christmas celebration in Yosemite A. D. 2922? All that seems to be necessary is the planting of a Sequoia seedling every thirty years or so.

Christmas and mince pie! Nobody ought to have to tell anybody that Christmas is the time for mince pie. Why, the two go together—just like Thanksgiving and pumpkin pie and the Fourth of July and spring lamb and green peas. The first mince pie of the winter should grace the Christmas board; and any housewife who gives her family even a taste of one before Christmas day should go without a new Easter hat—that's the punishment to fit the crime. And any man who eats mince pie at a restaurant or at his club before Christmas day should go without mince pie all winter.

However, if he should, his punishment would likely fit the crime. For nowadays the making of mince pies is largely a lost art. The ordinary restaurant mince pie is nothing but minced fruit.

There is a saying that every really good woman cook must have a temper. Maybe. Certainly she should be nice and plump—as if she ate her own mince pies and thrived on them. And it's easy to tell by watching a woman make mince pies whether or not they're going to be a success. If she goes at it, you know, as if it were sort of a religious rite—as if the fate of the nation hung on her work—why, all is well.

"Pies like mother used to make!" Tenderloin of beef and Northern Spy apples and real cider and everything else to correspond! Maybe mother used to bake her pies a dozen at a time and set them away in a cold store room to freeze. Maybe mother got her mince meat ready and set it aside in a big stone jar to ripen. It doesn't make any difference. They were real mince pies when they got to the Christmas dinner. The looks of them! The smell of them! The taste of them! Yum, yum! There's a memory a fellow can carry with him to his grave.

Do you remember Isaac Walton's friend Dr. Boteler and his famous appreciation of the strawberry? Well, it's quite evident the good doctor never sat down to just the right kind of a Christmas dinner or he would have ignored the strawberry as unworthy of his cleverness and would have said instead that doubtless God could have inspired some heaven-born cook to make a more appropriate dessert for December 25 than mince pie but that doubtless God never did.

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