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OLDEN FESTIVITIES.

WILD REVELS CELEBRATED THE CHRISTMAS OF LONG AGO.

Survivals of the Roman Saturnalia and the Feasts of Janus—Episodes of the Fourteenth Century in Paris, When Four Nobles Perished at Court.

In spite of clerical protests, in spite of anathemas, in spite of the condemnation of the more thoughtful and the more virtuous, Christmas in the earlier days frequently reproduced all the worst organs, the debauchery and indecency of the bacchanalia and the saturnalia. Even the clergy were whirled into the vortex.

If even among the clergy heathen traditions survived so strenuously, what wonder that they survived among the laity? The wild revels indeed of the Christmas period in olden times almost stagger belief.

"If we compare," he says in his "Hystrio-Mastix," "our bacchanalian Christmas and New Year's tides with these saturnalia and feasts of Janus, we shall find such near affinity between them both in regard of time—they being both in the end of December and on the 1st of January—and in their manner solemnizing—both being spent in reveling, epicurism, wantonness, idleness, dancing, drinking, stage plays, masques and carnal pomp and jollity—that we must needs conclude the one to be but the ape, or issue, of the other."

Yet the practices which Stubbes and Pryne condemned were mild and tame compared with the excesses practiced at the French court for centuries. Inebriety ran rampant. No wonder that in the period of torches and wooden palaces accidents frequently occurred which more than once involved provinces in mourning.

Memorable above all other episodes of this sort was the catastrophe which occurred at Paris in 1393. The Christmas festivities had been pertaken of in the wildest spirit of riot and disorder. But the court was not yet satisfied. Then Sir Hugonin de Guisay, the most reckless among all the reckless spirits of the period, suggested that as an excuse for prolonging the merriment a marriage should be arranged between two of the court attendants. This was eagerly agreed upon.

The management was intrusted to Sir Hugonin himself. He was well fitted for anything wild and unusual. He was loved and admired by the disorderly as ardently as he was hated and feared by the orderly, for it was his pleasant habit to exercise his wit upon tradesmen and mechanics, whom he would accost in the street, prick with his spurs and compel to creep on all fours and bark like dogs before he released them.

The marriage passed off in a blaze of glory with an accompaniment of attendant gargantuan pleasantries. At the height of the ceremonies Sir Hugonin quietly withdrew with the king and four other wild ones—actions of the noblest houses in France. With a pot of tar and a quantity of tow the six conspirators were speedily changed into very fair imitations of the dancing bears then very common in mountebanks' booths. A mask completed the transformation. Five were then bound together by means of a silken rope cut from the tapestry. The sixth, the king himself, led them into the hall. Their appearance created a general sensation. "Who are they?" was the cry. No one could answer.

At this moment entered the wildest of all the wild dukes of Orleans. "Who are they?" he echoed between hicoughs. "Well, we'll soon find out." Seizing a brand from one of the torchbearers ranged along the wall, he staggered forward. Some gentlemen attempted to stay him. But he was obstinate and quarrelsome. Main force could not be thought of against a prince of the blood. He was given his way. He thrust his torch under the chin of the nearest of the maskers. The tow caught fire. In a moment the whole group was enveloped in flames. Presence of mind or common sobriety might have saved them. But there was none of the latter there and but two instances of the former.

The young Duchess of Berry seized the king and enveloped him in her ample robe. Thus he was saved. Another masker, the lord of Nantouillet—noted for strength and agility, rent the silken rope with a wrench of his strong teeth, pitched himself like a flaming comet through the first window and dived into a cistern in the court, whence he emerged black and smoking, but almost unharmed.

As for the other four, they whirled hither and thither through the horrified mob, struggling with each other, fighting with the flames, cursing, shrieking with pain. Women fainted by scores. Men who had never faltered in a hundred fights sickened at the hideous spectacle. All Paris was roused by the uproar and gathered, an excited mob, about the palace. All sorts of reports were current, that the princes were engaged in deadly strife being the one most credited. At last the flames burned out. The four maskers lay a black and writhing heap on the floor. One was a mere cinder. A second survived till day-break. A third died at noon the next day. The fourth—no other than Sir Hugonin himself—survived for three days, while all Paris rejoiced over his agonies. "Bark, dog, bark!" was the cry with which the citizens saluted his charred and mangled corpse when it was set last home to the grave.—New York Herald.

KRIS KRINGLE.

A Corruption of the Word Christ Child Now Applied to Santa Claus.

In these days Kris Kringle is looked upon as an alternative name for Santa Claus; but, in fact, he is, etymologically and historically, a totally different being, though the two personages have been welded into one in the popular imagination. A very small knowledge of German reveals the fact that Kris Kringle is simply a corruption of the word "Christkindlein," or Christ child, whose connection with the Christmas festival is too obvious to need explanation. But what seems inexplicable is how the Christ child of the past, the Holy One, whose nativity is the subject of commemoration in that feast which we call Christmas, should have evolved into the white haired, white bearded, merry hearted and kindly old pagan whom we call indifferently Kris Kringle or Santa Claus.

Yet at the very moment when we have come face to face with this apparently insoluble paradox we have reached the solution which seemed impossible when we strove to understand the much less startling transformation of St. Nicholas into Santa Claus.

We remember that the Christmas festival of today is a gradual evolution from times that long antedated the Christian period; that though it celebrates the mightiest fact in the history of Christendom it was overlaid upon heathen festivals, and many of its attendant observances are more adaptations of pagan to Christian ceremonial.

This was no mere accident. It was a necessary measure at a time when the new religion was forced on a deeply superstitious population. In order to reconcile heathen converts to the new faith and to make the wrenching of the old ties as painless as possible these relics of paganism were preserved under modified externals, exactly as the antique columns were transferred from ancient temples to adorn the Christian basilicas.

In course of time, as the idea of mundane merriment rather than religious sanctification at the period of Christmas became the predominant one, St. Nicholas or Santa Claus lost his asceticism, became ruddier, jollier, more rubicund in aspect, while the Christ child faded more and more into the background, until at last the very name of the latter under the slightly different form of Kris Kringle was transferred to his successor.—Selected.

Yuletide Superstitions.

While traveling at Christmas time in the old English county of Devon a few years ago, I found it peculiarly affluent in these odd Christmas superstitions and customs. Every family I visited provided, if able to afford them, a "Yule cheese" and a "Yule cake" for the Christmas season, and it is considered very unlucky to cut them before Christmas day.

The same superstition prevails with regard to the "Yule candle"—a very tall one specially provided—and the "Yule dog" or log—a large stick for the Christmas fire. Misfortune is regarded as certain to follow if either candle or log is lighted until just as the family are sitting down to supper on Christmas eve, and it is also considered a sure precursor of evil for any one to stir the log or snuff the candle during the progress of the meal.

On Christmas morning no member of the family must stir out of the house until its threshold has been crossed by the footsteps of some male outsider. If a woman or girl is the first to enter on Christmas morning, ill luck is sure to follow. Another Devonshire superstition is that if the sun shines brightly at noon on Christmas day there will be a plentiful crop of apples in the succeeding summer.—Buffalo Express.

The Christmas Stocking.

A jolly device to take the place of the tree is a big stocking with its top held open by a circle of wire. The stocking is made of striped calico or any available stuff and must be big enough to hold all the gifts, which are to be done up stoutly in pasteboard and paper. Each is tied with twine, and a long end is left. A tag is fastened to each string bearing the name of the one for whom the package is destined. Then all the packages are put into the stocking. When it is time for the distribution, each must find a string with his or her name on it and take hold. At a given signal all pull at once.

The fun will be increased if it be the rule that no one can get a gift except by pulling at the string, and that no one must use the hands to disentangle strings. It would perhaps be better to put in only one gift for each person at one time. Then, when all have got their packages, a second batch is arranged; then a third and so on. A big horn of plenty, suspended so the gifts can be easily drawn out by strings, is a slight variation of this suggestion. If preferred, in either case the strings may be pulled one by one by a single person who has been chosen giftmaster.—New York Press.

Christmas Bells.

How many memories gather round the sound of bells, those silver monitors to us! Whom they peal dire dangers, and the ground trembles to tramp of feet fear furious; Whom they toll above some burial mound. Again, they summon souls to praise or prayer; They mingle in with music when it plays Melodious, so that all of life seems fair, Or tinkle dimly in the covert ways Where wethers lead the flock that is their care.

Whom at sea they hoarsely boom, and fright The good ships from the rocks; on land they tell The time of day by morning, noon and night, Chime o'er the sleeping city, all is well, Or bid the folk be up with early light.

But where he bells so buoyant, sweet and strong Upon the air as these of Christmas time? So fraught with precious meanings is their chime. So swelling with a hope and joy sublime, Christ's bells, to you all bunsoms toll, Herald.—Richard Burton.

OLD CHRISTMAS SONGS.

Familiar but Reverent Treatment of the Sacred—Words of a Simple Folk.

For the most part the old songs speak with the voice of poverty appealing to wealth, and so it is not strange that Christ's humble birth should be dwelt upon. On that ground at least the supplicants seem to feel their nearness to the Man of Sorrows who had nowhere to lay his head. The ever recurring plea to the rich to give alms of their goods—"gifts of the day's gladness"—is a reminder of the one who "came not to be ministered unto, but to minister." The familiarity with which sacred things are touched is not irreverence, but rather the innocent freedom of the child to whom God seems a kind father and Jesus a gentle elder brother.

The holy names are almost always coupled with some adjective expressive of affection—"sweet Jesus," "Mary mild"—and the pretty Cornish carol tells how the Virgin was called Modryb Marya, "our dear Aunt Mary," by the people on the Tamar side. The honest Christian must often feel inclined to avert his face from the asperities, controversies and persecutions of warring creeds, but in these strains that survive from an age that is past we find only the loving and tender side of religion—the words of a simple folk who were not afraid to creep close to the Father's knee and lay hold upon his robe.

In many of these old songs the good cheer peculiar to the day is dwelt upon, with a frank delight which reminds one of the child's "innocent joy of anything sweet in the mouth." Thus runs one exultant strain:

O you merry, merry souls, Christmas is a-coming, We shall have fowling bowls, Dancing, piping, mummings,

The materialistic bard waxed enthusiastic over

The larders full of beef and pork, The garners filled with corn,

and each stanza of one of the carols winds up with the appetizing burden, "Plum pudding, goose, capon, mince pie and roast beef." Father Christmas was esteemed as "entering like a man," when "armed with spit and dripping-pan." After a year of hard work and hard living the poor folk looked forward to a lavish feast, and it is small wonder that their minds dwelt chiefly upon such dainties as

Delicate minced pies To feast every evening; Capon and goose, likewise, Brown and a dish of sturgeon.

From Sedding's "Ancient Christmas Carols" is taken "Masters, In This Hall"—one of the quaintest and most pleasing of the lays that were sung by the Yuletide minstrels in the days of old:

To Bethlehem did they go, the shepherds three, To Bethlehem did they go, to see who 't was soot of us.

Whether Christ was born or no, To set men free.

Masters, in this hall, Hear ye news today, Brought over sea, And ever I you pray, Nowell, Nowell, Nowell! Sing we clear: Helpen are all folk on earth By God's Son so dear.

—New Orleans Times-Democrat.

When Christ Was Born.

Now, it happened when the Saviour was born that certain wise men in the far east had seen a star.

They knew the meaning of the light, and they repaired on camels across the desert to the city of Jerusalem.

Arriving at the court of Herod they inquired, saying: "Where is he that is born king of the Jews, for we have seen his star in the east and have come to worship him?"

Herod was sorely troubled by this question, and he asked of the wise men where this ruler was born.

"And they said unto him, in Bethlehem of Judaea; for thus it is written by the prophet.

"And thou, Bethlehem, in the land of Judah are not the least among the princes of Judah, for out of thee shall come a governor that shall rule my people Israel."

Herod was wroth and jealous of the new monarch, who seemed to be destined to overthrow him.

He told the wise men to go on to Bethlehem, and after they had found the Saviour to return to him with the news of his whereabouts.

Guided by the star, which had gone before them for many weeks, they arrived at the little home where the Saviour was dwelling.

They fell upon their knees and worshipped him, and when they had opened their treasures they presented him with gold and frankincense and myrrh.

Hence it is that every year in the beautiful Christmastide the parents give presents to their children in celebration of the Saviour's birth.

Christmas Pleasantries.

Lord Henry Boutinck, though he was shortsighted and had to wear glasses, was an admirable rider and a most popular master of hounds. It was he who inquired from a rash cavalier who was overriding his hounds, "May I ask, sir, do you smell the fox?" and who said to a large landed proprietor suspected of vulpecular acts, on his remarking that he regarded a particular wood as quite a seminary for foxes, "I think, general, you mean cemetery."

Spending Christmas with a friend, Lord Henry was asked at luncheon by the rector after service in a church which had been profusely adorned with evergreens, but in which the congregation had been small, what he thought of the decorations. "I thought," he replied, "that there was plenty of cover, but very little game."—San Francisco Argonaut.

An English Christmastide Custom.

In Staffordshire, England, the children when hanging up their stockings on Christmas eve repeat the following rhyme addressed to the good fairy of Christmas, believing that it will infallibly insure the bringing of whatever gift they most desire:

Christmas day of Christmas day, Let me wish what I may, Let me wish, with love, of you, You will make my wish come true.

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Castoria is Dr. Samuel Fitcher's prescription for Infants and Children. It contains neither Opium, Morphine nor other Narcotic substance. It is a harmless substitute for Paregoric, Drops, Soothing Syrup, and Castor Oil. It is Pleasant. Its guarantee is thirty years' use by Millions of Mothers. Castoria destroys Worms and allays feverishness. Castoria prevents vomiting Sour Caud, cures Diarrhoea and Wind Colic. Castoria relieves teething troubles, cures constipation and flatulency. Castoria assimilates the food, regulates the stomach and bowels, giving healthy and natural sleep. Castoria is the Children's Panacea—the Mother's Friend.

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"Castoria is the best remedy for children of which I am acquainted. I hope the day is not far distant when mothers will consider the real interest of their children, and use Castoria instead of the various quack nostrums which are destroying their loved ones, by forcing opium, morphine, soothing syrup and other hurtful agents down their throats, thereby sending them to premature graves."

Dr. J. F. Kitching, Conway, Ark.

"Castoria is so well adapted to children that I recommend it as superior to any preparation known to me."

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"Our physicians in the children's department have spoken highly of their experience in their outside practice with Castoria, and although we only have among our medical supplies what is known as regular products, yet we are free to confess that the merits of Castoria has won us to look with favor upon it."

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