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We Speak of Merry Christmas

And A Happy New Year



Adorning the lucky Gymnosperm in Memorial Room are Cathy Dayton, Gil Freese and Olive Draper.

The staff of the Nittany Cub and the faculty of Behrend Campus join together in this issue to speak of Christmas with stories, with humorous prose and verse with pictures and with their sincere wishes.

Christmas, for most of us, is a time to catch up; to catch up with sleep, with our education and sociality, with our families and friends and, most of all, with our feelings for the mystery of a birth.

It happened so long ago that hardly any of us remember it any more. And like any birthday, each succeeding year brings us further away from a desire to remember it. Jesus, too, seems to possess this attitude. He is like any one growing old in years and wise in human understanding. All He really wants is for us to share warmly with each other because of Him and not because it is His birthday.

It is a marvel to realize how much His birth has affected our philosophy and morality and it is interesting to realize how much we capitalize on this event and yet how much we cry. Yes, even the cynics cry; even they have a heart for something as beautiful and as intangible as this. But then we laugh and have a merry Christmas to cover up this childishness. We cannot be maudlin about the thing. We must make merry and make jokes —

Sammy was the hero of the neighborhood cafe,
For he was plastered every night
And glad to be that way.
On Christmas he drank egg-nog
And guzzled Gordon's Gin,
And, since they had no Yule log,
They carried Sammy in.

— for laughter helps to make a memorable Christmas and one a little different from the one just past and those to come, and it is so nice to have a birthday that does not obligate us to do anything but be kind to our fellow men and to ourselves.

Christmas is, therefore, a time to catch up with our life and our environment and a time to remember Jesus, Mary and Joseph.

The Origin Of Our Christmas Tree

The Christmas Tree is the main feature of modern Christmas celebrations. It is completely Christian in origin and historians have never been able to connect it in any way with ancient Germanic or Asiatic mythology. Surprising as it may seem, the use of Christmas trees is a fairly recent custom in all countries outside of Germany, and even in Germany it attained its immense popularity as recently as the beginning of the last century, although there is some evidence of its use in certain sections of Germany much earlier.

The origin of the Christmas tree goes back to the medieval German mystery plays. One of the most popular "mysteries" was the Paradise play, representing the creation of man, the sin of Adam and Eve, and their expulsion from Paradise. It usually closed with the consoling promise of the coming Saviour and with a reference to His incarnation. This made the Paradise Play a favorite pageant for Advent, and its closing scenes were used to lead directly into the story of Bethlehem.

These plays were performed

either in the open, or on the large squares in front of churches, or inside the House of God. The garden of Eden was indicated by a fir tree hung with apples; it represented both the "Tree of Life" and the "Tree of discernment of good and evil" which stood in the center of Paradise (Genesis 2, 9). When the pageant was performed in church, the Paradeisbaum (tree of Paradise) was usually surrounded by lighted candles. Inside the ring of lights the play was enacted.

After the suppression of the mystery plays in churches, the Paradise tree, the only symbolic object of the play, found its way into the homes of the faithful, especially since many plays had interpreted it as a symbol of the coming Saviour. Following this symbolism, in the fifteenth century the custom developed of decorating the Paradise tree, already bearing apples, with small white wafers representing the Holy Eucharist; thus, in legendary usage, the tree which had borne the fruit of sin for Adam and Eve, now bore the saving fruit of the Sacrament, sym-

bolized by the wafers. These wafers were later replaced by little pieces of pastry cut in the shape of stars, angels, hearts, flowers and bells. And finally, other cookies were introduced bearing the shape of men, birds, dogs, roosters, lions and other animals. Tradition, however, called for the latter being cut from brown dough while the first group was made of white dough.

Up to the middle of the seventeenth century, the Christbaum (as the tree is called in German) had no lights. The Christmas candles, generally used in medieval times, were placed on the Christmas pyramid made of graduated wooden shelves. As time went on, however, the tree replaced the pyramid in its function of representing Christ as the Light of the World; the candles and glittering decoration were transferred from the pyramid to the tree; and thus the modern Christmas tree was finally evolved with its familiar features: lights, candy canes and glass balls. A star in some form usually decorates the top of the tree.

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