

MERRY CHRISTMAS.

The Crowning Festival of the Whole Year.

Some of its Time-honored Customs which are Still in Vogue, and Some which have Fallen into Neglect.

When Christ was born of Mary true, In Bethlehem, that first of years, Angels sang there with mirth and glee, In Eccelesis Gloria!

Christmas Day, the Christ Child's Birth-day, that season of rejoicing, of merry making, of gift giving, of feasting, of gladness of heart, and of peace and good-will to all classes and conditions of men, is again upon us.

The season is not only a time for rejoicing, but is also a time for conveying joy. To fully observe Christmas, we must endeavor to make others happy as much as we strive to minister to our own enjoyment; and let all remember, while in the height of their rejoicing, that there are many human beings who are not highly favored in this world's goods.

It is pre-eminently becoming that the day which saw the great gift of God to man—the Christ-child—should be observed in a joyous manner, and by the giving of gifts from man to man.

The Source of the Christmas Festivities. Considering that Christmas is pre-eminently a Christian festival, it would seem strange that many of the customs peculiar to the day are to be traced back to heathenish sources for their origin.

At different times, and to the peculiarities of the Saturnalia were added the weird rites of the Druids and the grim observances of the Saxon mythology; and from this old mingling of pagan customs sprang the Christmas festivities of our forefathers.

Having received the countenance of the Church, and being based on customs which were revered by the common people, Christmas continued down to the Reformation to be celebrated throughout the Christian world with great rejoicing.

The crowning glory of the Christmas season is the Christmas tree. It is the expectation of this that the young hearts of every Christian household beat high and wild with hope for many weeks.

The History of Christmas. Having received the countenance of the Church, and being based on customs which were revered by the common people, Christmas continued down to the Reformation to be celebrated throughout the Christian world with great rejoicing.

Ancient Christmas Sports and Customs. The gathering of the sacred mistletoe was among the great events of Christmas time with the ancients; Britons and Druids, by whom the plant was held in great veneration, especially when found clinging to the oak.

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One of the most enticing games of Christmas eve is connected with this plant. A branch of it is suspended from the wall or ceiling, and when one of the gentler sex passes under it, either purposely or by accident, she incurs the penalty of being kissed by any one of the less genteel specimens of humanity who covets the privilege.

As time advanced the dish came into some disrepute; and when Parliament, during the Commonwealth, endeavored to extinguish Christmas by statute, the boar's head became a thing of the past.

Christmas Dishes, Ancient and Modern. The dish that ranked next to the boar's head in ancient times was the peacock. This vainglorious bird was considered a rare treat, and was served in a corresponding style.

In this country, where many of the more appropriate evergreens are but scantily produced, the cedar, box, and pine are employed, from the necessities of the case.

For houses, every available shoot of green is pressed into service, although holly and ivy have usually the preference. In Oxfordshire, England, there was a peculiar penalty attached to the neglect of this ceremony.

The procession and lighting of the Yule log is another time-honored institution, though now mostly disused. A modified form, sadly shorn of the pomp and ceremony which formerly attended it, is still retained in some sections of England.

The ceremony of bringing in the Yule-log was conducted in the following manner:—The party repaired to the woods where the log lay, and having placed themselves in the harness, dragged it in triumph to the hall, each wayfarer raising his hat as it passed.

Next in order to ruddings and portidge come the Christmas or mince pies, and of these the Englishman is not permitted to make a monopoly, although he is entitled to the high honor of their invention.

One of the most ancient and curious of these was that concerning the crowing of the cocks. Silent during the hours of darkness throughout the rest of the year, it was believed in olden times that "the bird of dawn" was crowned from the setting of the sun on Christmas eve to its rising on Christmas morn.

In the University of Cambridge this functionary, regularly elected from among the Masters of Arts, was deemed *Imperator*, or *Profectus Ludorum*, and his duties were not only to superintend the divisions of Christmas, but of the annual representation of the Latin plays by the students as well.

As an illustration of the outrageous license enjoyed by these functionaries, we submit an extract from the "Wonders" by which the Right Honorable Richard Evelyn, Esq., constituted Owen Flood, his trumpeter, the "Lord of Mistle of all good orders during the twelve days:—"

"I give free leave to the said Owen Flood to command all and every person or persons whatsoever, well or ill known, to be at his command, whensoever he shall sound his trumpet or music, and to do him good service, as though I were present myself, at their peril; I give full power and authority to his lordship to break up all locks, bolts, bars, doors, and latches, and to ring up all doors out of hinges to come at those who presume to disobey his lordship's commands."

The Lord of Mistle commanded his reign by absolving all his subjects from their wisdom, commanding them to remain just enough sense to know how to conduct themselves like fools.

A distinguishing feature of the "Merry Christmas" time is its music. In England there is a class of musicians who are termed "Christmas minstrels," and whose duty it is to parade through the streets at night for two or three weeks before Christmas, performing the popular airs of the day on various wind instruments.

The singing of Christmas carols is another custom which has long prevailed in England. The Christmas carol is as old as the festival itself, and in the primitive days of the Church it was customary for the bishop, surrounded by his clergy, to take part in this simple and beautiful ceremony.

Our Christmas tree is usually of pine or cedar, and copies substantially after the German model, though probably as a rule not quite so elaborate.

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Many of the churches are handsomely decorated, and services appropriate to the occasion are held on Christmas morning. The remainder of the day, as well as the preceding evening, and as a general thing, the entire week between Christmas and New Year, is given up to social enjoyment, especially on the part of the children.

And now, having given the principal facts about the history and observance of the Christmas anniversary, we close by giving to every kind reader and, of necessity, firm friend of THE EVENING TELEGRAPH, the time-honored and beautiful compliments of the season—A MERRY CHRISTMAS AND A HAPPY NEW YEAR.

First stripping of the skin without disturbing the glittering plumage, the bird was roasted whole, and then recommitting to his original covering; the beak, and frequently the whole body, was then covered with gold-leaf, and sometimes a piece of cotton, dipped in spirits and ignited, was placed in his bill.

Sometimes, however, the peacock was served in a pie, at one end of which his crest appeared, while at the other protruded the gorgeous feathers of his tail. But the dish that has an irresistible charm for the Englishman all over the world, is his Christmas pudding.

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CHRISTMAS GIFTS. CARVED PAPER KNIVES, BOOK-MARKERS, PEN-HOLDERS, TRAYS, MATCH AND STAMP BOXES, IN WOOD AND IVORY.

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CHRISTMAS GIFTS. MISKEY, MERRILL & THACKARA, No. 718 CHESTNUT STREET, PHILADELPHIA.

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