Quaint Customs of Many Lands

Once a year, as Christmas comes round, from wreaths of mistletoe and many other characteristics there looks forth the face of an old man, with snow-white beard and locks still whiter, with cheeks aglow with the cheeriest of red color and eyes that glisten with the sunshine of a merry heart.

To every child this face is familiar and welcome, because they recognize it as that of the mysterious visitor whose Christmas coming is always attended by the bringing of many presents and the eating of candy and many other good things.

Down the Chimney.

Of course he is a mystery to them. His coming in the night: long after the sandman has closed their eyes with his magic grain, is never quite understood, although explained by the chimney theory, and in many other ways accounting for his presence in the house, when doors and windows are securely locked. And on Christmas day the mystery is deepened still further when he appears suddenly from some closet or hallway, and while greeting them in rough but hearty voice, leaves those treasured remembrances of his visit.

At times all of us have worried about the history of Santa Claus and some have even gone so far as to trace it way back through many countries, into centuries so old that time seems hardly to have made record of them.

In fact, Santa Claus has been a great rover, and he has travelled farther and longer than any known character in the world's history, and always Santa Claus has been the same. Long before he came with gifts to the little babe at Bethlehem, he had been doing the same kind of thing for babes through long ages of paganism. Is it any wonder, then, that children love him for, old man as he has always been, he has naturally understood the child heart, for the heart of old age is the heart of child, even though it beat under the scarlet fur-trimmed coat of old Santa.

An Ancient Saint.

Kriss Kringle, as Santa Claus is popularly known, comes from the middle of the fourth century, having his origin in Rome. From there he travelled into Germany, where he modified certain old traditions and underwent modification himself. From the woods of Germany he crossed the channel to England. In those days he was a rather gaunt looking individual, tall, wrinkled, thin of waist, and he wore a high peaked hat with a white tassel. His costume likewise was medieval. The coat was long, coming to the tops of his boots and was rarely held in by a belt. After his arrival in England he appears to have improved somewhat in personal appearance, but it was not until he had emigrated to America, where he had a chance to become acquainted with himself in his various aspects, that he developed into the familiar figure now seen all over the world at Christmas time.

Many quaint traditions have followed in his footsteps and many superstitions have grown up about the Christmastide.

English Legends.

In England it is still generally believed that those who quarrel on Christmas Day or night will have no luck in friendship, love or pocket. This tradition followed Santa Claus from Germany, and is traceable through the Frankland of the middle ages.

It is also considered very unlucky to allow carol singers to leave the front of the house without being compensated. It has also been proverbial that all undertakings started on Christmas Day will prove successful, and in many countries peasants and farmers sow samples of grain and wheat in their snow-covered fields Christmas morning.

A Superstition.

Among the superstitions is one of peculiar interest to women. It is said that to launder a Christmas present will destroy its good luck. Coupled with it, is the advice that to secure good luck we must save a piece of wood from the Christmas fire, to start the Christmas fire next year.

Since time immemorial a belief has existed all through Europe that a stick charred in the Christmas fire and kept under the bed will protect the house from being struck by lightning, and the custom is largely followed.

In Albania, food from the Christmas supper is thrown on the fire and a branch of cherry is left there for luck.

Every one is familiar with the saying that a green Christmas makes a fat graveyard.

Possibly it was inspired by a desire for a holiday, but in England there exists the saying that nothing which runs round, may be set in motion between Christmas and New Year. As it comes down from the day of the spinning wheel its application will be understood.

Christmas weddings in the world over are regarded as insuring future happiness, and the belief is that a Christmas bride will never want for home, children and husband.

In Servia.

In Servian Christmas celebrations a cake is provided in which a silver coin is hid. When the cake is cut the one getting the Christmas coin is assured of a prosperous year.

In Germany, it is believed that by watching the shadows thrown by the candles on the Christmas tree, it may be known which member of the family will be first to die.

A Peace Token.

Scandinavians have a pretty custom. In a row before the Christmas fire, Christmas night all of the shoes of the family are placed as a token that peace will reign in the house during the year.

In Prussia the belief exists that all clothes lines must be left unhung on Christmas Day, to insure good luck.

Sweden has a tradition that it is unlucky to allow the candles of Christmas fire to go out, and that it is equally unlucky to have any of the dishes unwashed on Christmas eve.

The practice of kissing under the mistletoe arose from the belief that whatever was done under the enchanted shrub, would never become known, as the plant would seal the lips of all who went under it.

To bring good luck to a house on Christmas Eve, every one entering is expected to strike the Yule log with a piece of iron. This custom still prevails in rural Europe.

In the Azores, wheat, maize and leaves are put in water on Christmas eve, and the way they germinate will indicate what crops may be expected the following year.

A Christmas spell is given as follows in parts of northern Germany: Steep mistletoe berries to the number of nine, in a mixture of ale, vinegar and wine; then dip them in honey, and eat on retiring what you dream you may rest sure of finding.

The Boar's Head.

In medieval England Christmuas commenced with a great feast, in which the boar's head first appeared. In many of her educational institutions the boar's head is still to be seen at Christmas dinners. Queen Victoria had this custom retained at her last Christmas dinner. The custom is a relic of the pre-Christmas Druidical times, when a boar was killed at the festival of the winter solstice and sacrificed to Frey or the goddess of peace and plenty. As this period is coincident with Yuletide, the custom was retained.

To Coleridge is given the distinction of introducing the Christmas tree in England. At least it was he who first called public attention to its beauty in a letter from Ratzburg, North Germany. It was adapted at once by some of the leading families and at once became popular, spreading in a single year throughout the length and breadth of the land, and instantly crossing to America.

The Christmas Tree.

In Germany the tree is identified with the apostolic labors of St. Maternus, it being supposed he slept under a fir tree and that a miracle occurred on that occasion.

But the Christmas tree is really of Roman origin, being traceable to the Roman Saturnalia.

With all of these traditions and superstitions, Santa Claus is closely connected, and how this came may be told briefly by tracing the amiable old gentleman through some of his past rambles.

In Italian folklore there is an old woman whose name is Befana. She is a sort of wandering Jew and Santa Claus combined. She was the good fairy, who filled children's stockings with presents. If the children had been naughty, she left only ashes, although sometimes she returned to comfort the little penitents with gifts. Tradition is that she was too busy sweeping, to see the three wise men when they passed on their way to Jerusalem, but agreed to see them when they came back.

Of all the beautiful legends, those connected with Christmas are the most beautiful, and of all characters familiarly known throughout Christendom, Santa Claus is the best loved of any. From the days when a tiny little worsted sock is hung up at the foot of the crib, to be reached for Christmas morning and found filled with sugar plums or perchance holding a brilliantly colored cornucopia, filled with sugar-coated caraway seeds and snapper-jacks, to the unfortunate day of emancipation from childhood's fancies, no greater reality than this beloved Icelandic visitor who comes once a year ever existed.

And, after all, is he not a reality? Ask any 5-year-old what he thinks about it, and depend upon it he will be a whole lot nearer the truth than he will ever be later in life. And, after all, in later life is he not just as much of a reality as many friends who are gone? Are the cherry red lips and the jelly-like belly, and the jolly laugh, and the fur-trimmed coat and cap with its tassel of red and the clattering reindeers and wonderful sleigh, less distinctly a feature of old-time memories than the peculiarities of hundreds of people we remember as children?

Of all the characters about whom history has so many strange and interesting tales to tell, can one be named whose perennial activities rival those of St. Nicholas?

The Empty Stocking!

Home-Made Curtains as a Token for the Yuletide

If you are aware of the size of your friend's windows, buy net by the yard, decorate it with darned borders in mercerized cottons used for Hardanger work, and give curtains for a Christmas gift.

Get a firm, square-meshed net. Measure the windows and allow for hem and casing at the top. Use tapestry needles as their blunt point will not catch. Long skeined, heavy cottons can be had in white or ecru as required by tone of net.

Conventional patterns for darning may be bought separately or can be picked out from books on this popular form of needlework. Choose those whose lines are not too intricate and call for many cuttings of the thread.

When ends must be jointed, run them together for a half-inch and with a fine thread overcast on the wrong side and hide fastening under a stitch.

The difficulty in darning is to make an even pattern. Where there is a border on both sides and across the bottom lay the front and bottom hem and leave the other until the darning is done, that the hems may be an equal distance from the design. It is often easier to start the pattern in the corner and work in two directions.

Do not finish one line entirely and then begin on the cross lines. Use two or three needles at the same time. A mistake is then easily detected. It will be impossible to count meshes accurately, but do have a general idea of distance and how many times the design must be repeated to come out evenly at the corners. Where there is only a border across the bottom counting is simplified.

Sometimes the nets are darned in colored cottons, but as the effect against the light is poor, use a heavier tone than if the work were to be done on an opaque surface.

Those who like cross-stitch embroidery will rejoice in a rather new material called mosaic canvas. It is divided into blocks by a heavy thread which, when worked gives a peculiar mosaic effect. The canvas is 68 inches wide, so it cuts economically.

Besides being adapted to cross-stitching, this canvas makes an effective background for bullion stitch, the lazy daisy stitch, tapestry and even satin stitch. Its soft neutral tone makes it an admirable background for colored embroideries.

QUAINT CHRISTMAS CUSTOMS.

A pretty custom is still observed in parts of Devonshire at Christmas-time. The farmer, with his family and friends, partake of a meal of hot cakes and cider—the cakes being dipped in the cider before being eaten.

The whole party then repair to the orchard, led by the farmer bearing hot cakes and cider as an offering to the principal apple-tree. The cake is ceremoniously deposited in a fork of the tree, while cider is thrown over it.

During this operation the men fire off guns and pistols, and the girls sing a song asking the tree to bear "barnfuls' bagfuls, and sackfuls."

It used to be, and perhaps still is, a custom in Cheshire for farm servants to engage themselves to their masters from New Year's Eve to Christmas Day. This left them the days between for jollity befitting the season, though it must often have been somewhat inconvenient for the farmer and his family.

A belief still lingers on in parts of Cornwall that at midnight on Christmas Eve the cattle in their stalls fall down on their knees. Bees are also said to sing in their hives at this hour, and it is believed that bread baked then will never go mouldy! — London Answers.

SANTA CLAUS KIDDIES

Do Your Duty Now.

These are some of the unfortunate little ones whom St. Nicholas may have to pass over unless you do your part soon.

Saved Her the Trouble.

Tramp—Your dog jest bit a piece of flesh outer me leg, mum.

Woman—Glad you mentioned it. I was just going to feed him

ORIGIN OF PLUM PUDDING.

Queen Anne Gave a Prize for the Recipe.

The exact origin of the English plum pudding is so obscure it is difficult to obtain any information other than an occasional note in records covering the early part of the eighteenth century. It is supposed to have been in use many years before this, but the first mention of "pudding made from flower and raisins" is found under the date of 1711.

Under the same date we find an old book of recipes written by the chef who had charge of the kitchen for King Charles II., James II., and Queen Anne. He writes: "Pudding is a Dish very difficult to be described, because of the several Sorts there are of it; Flower, Milk, Eggs, Butter, Sugar, Suet, Marrow, Raisins, etc., etc., are the most common Ingredients of a Pudding. They bake them in an Oven, they boil them with Meat, they make them fifty several Ways; Blessed be he that invented Pudding for it is a Manna that hits all Sorts of People; a Manna better than that of the Wilderness because the People are never weary of it. Ah, what an excellent Thing is an English Pudding."

In the latter part of the same year Queen Anne offered a prize of two guineas for the best plum pudding recipe and out of 500 answers she awarded the prize to the one sending the following:

One pound of raisins, one pound of suet chopped fine, three-quarters pound of stale bread crumbs, one-quarter pound of brown sugar, one-quarter pound of flour, one pound of currants, one-half of nutmeg grated, five eggs, one-half pint of brandy, one-half pound of minced candied orange peel. Clean, wash, and dry the currants, stone the raisins, mix all dry ingredients well together. Beat the eggs, add to them the brandy, then pour them over the dry ingredients and thoroughly mix. Pack into greased small kettles or molds (this will make about six pounds) and boil six hours at the time of making and six hours when wanted for use. Serve with hard or brandy sauce.

The number of answers the queen received proves that such a dish was fairly well known throughout England at that time. As such news did not travel as fast then as with the modern system, it is safe to estimate that the plum pudding was served in England at least 150 years pevious.

But even with a 200 year old recipe before us we find it as a whole much the same as those in use to-day. The slight changes found in the modern recipes are due in some respects to the high cost of the ingredients. These changes were made in order that all classes may enjoy their English plum pudding which Christmas has assigned to the Christmas dinner, and it is appropriate as the decorations and gifts themselves. So with the coming of the holly and mistletoe comes the thought of the plum pudding, which must be prepared ahead of time and allowed to "mellow."

The pudding is usually prepared and baked from a week to two weeks before Christmas and this is out of the way before the real preparations for the Christmas dinner begin. In England in many instances the pudding is baked a year ahead and hung from the ceiling along with the ham, bacon and popcorn, where it is kept dry and out of the way. There is no danger of it spoiling if the top is covered with a clean paper moistened with brandy.

If you would be lucky the coming year you and all your family must stir the mixture in the process of making. This is an old custom and is observed even to-day among certain classes.

Brood over your troubles if you want to hatch more.

HOME-MADE CANDIES

Cream Nut Fudge.—Place in a saucepan two cups of granulated sugar, two-thirds cup of good milk, and one tablespoon of butter. Boil until it will form a soft ball between the finger when dropped into cold water. Remove from the fire and add one teaspoon of vanilla and one cup of chopped nut meats. Beat up until creamy, then pour into buttered tins and when slightly cool mark off into squares.

Maple Fudge.—Place in a saucepan two cups of maple sugar, one-half cup of cream and one-half cup of milk. Boil until a soft ball is formed when dropped into cold water. Remove from fire and add one cup of chopped nut meats; stir until creamy and pour into buttered tins and mark off into squares. The nut meats need not be added unless desired. A very good substitute for maple sugar is made by using brown sugar and a few drops of maple flavoring.

Chocolate Fudge.—Make the same as cream nut fudge only adding in addition four ounces of grated chocolate to the other ingredients, and the nuts can be omitted if you wish a plain chocolate fudge.

Fruit Caramels.—Moisten two cups of brown sugar with a little vinegar or lemon juice, and a heaping teaspoon of butter, and cook until it makes a firm ball when dropped into cold water; add one-half cup each of chopped dates, raisins, figs, citron and candied peel. Beat well and roll out into a sheet, an inch thick, then cut into small squares and wrap in paraffin paper.

Vanilla Caramels.—Place in a saucepan one cup of golden corn syrup, one cup of light brown sugar and a cup of good milk. Stir until mixed. Boil until when dropped into cold water it will form a soft ball between the fingers. Remove from fire and add a tablespoon of vanilla, and one cup of English walnut meats, although it will be very good without the nuts. Pour into a buttered pan about an inch thick, and when slightly cool mark off into small squares. When nearly cool cut into squares.

Chocolate Caramels.—Put in a saucepan two cups of granulated sugar, one-half pint of cream and one-half cup of milk and one-fourth of grated unsweetened chocolate, stir constantly until the mixture forms a soft ball when dropped into cold water. Pour into greased pans, first flavoring it with vanilla; cut into inch squares.

Peanut Nougat. — Place in a saucepan a half cup of water, two cups of granulated sugar and one tablespoon of lemon juice. Boil until it spins a thread or makes a hard ball between the fingers when dropped into cold water. Pour this over a cup of peanuts from which the skins have been removed and halved. Spread smoothly and mark into squares.

Hazel Nut Toffee.—Melt one-half cup of butter in a saucepan, add one cup of molasses, one cup of brown sugar and one tablespoon of vinegar. Boil until it cracks brittle when dropped into cold water, stir in a half cup of chopped hazel nut meats and a tablespoon of vanilla. Pour into a buttered pan and cut into squares when nearly cold.

Sunshine Drops.—Place two cups of granulated sugar in a saucepan and add one-half cup of golden corn syrup, a half cup of water, and one-fourth teaspoon of cream-of-tartar. Boil until it makes a firm ball when dropped into cold water. In the meantime whip up the whites of two eggs very stiff. Just before removing the syrup from the fire add one cup of English walnut meats and a teaspoon of vanilla. Pour over the beaten whites and beat up until foamy and light. Drop from spoon on greased plates or paper.

Stuffed Prunes.—Procure some large prunes and let stand in cold water over night. Drain and wipe dry, then remove stones and fill the cavity thus formed with dates and nutmeats chopped fine. Coat the outside of the prunes with powdered sugar.

A CHRISTMAS SONG.

Hail, Redeemer, Saviour, Friend,
Who didst stoop our woes to end,
Who a little child became
Born to poverty and shame:
Gladly we acclaim the morn
When thou wast of virgin born.

Angel lips did Thee proclaim,
And announce Thy royal name
To the shepherds in the field
Keeping watch their flocks to shield;
Angel choirs sang in the sky
Glory be to God on high.

Men Thy glorious star did see
As it beckoned them to Thee.
Humbly followed they its light
Till beheld the wondrous sight,
God in mortal flesh displayed
And in lowly manger laid.

Hail! Thou helper of the weak,
Come lost, erring man to seek,
Joyful voices now we raise
In a song of holy praise;
Hail again the happy morn
When Thou, Christ, our hope wast born.