MERRY CHRISTMAS

In That Little Town

In Bethlehem Was Born "A Saviour Who is Christ the Lord."

Bethlehem or The House of Bread, was more anciently known as Ephrath or Fruitful, but in modern times is called Beit-lahm or "House of Flesh."

All three names are significant to Christians whose interest in it arises from the tremendous fact that in that little town was born Him Who was rightly called "The Bread of Life;" Who was to be the fruitful Head of a new race, widespread as the world itself; and Who was there born in human flesh, though the Almighty Son of God.

Its history was by no means all bright and holy Jacob hurrying along with a deathly sick wife, was compelled to halt nearby, while his greatly beloved Rachel gave birth to the little Benjamin, and then in her husband's arms died there. Her grave is still marked by a rough stone monument!

It was in Bethlehem that the young Levite lived, who Micah hired to be his chaplain, and with whom is connected the tragic story in the last chapters of the book of Judges. The terrible tale of wrong doing and reprisals came perilously near to the destroying of the whole tribe of Benjamin, within whose limits Bethlehem was situated.

Thither came the widow, Naomi, and her daughter-in-law, Ruth, the Moabitess, mourners, bereft of all they held dear. There the young widow Ruth was wedded to her wealthy kinsman, Boaz, thereby becoming great-grandmother of the Psalmist-King David, and also one of the progenitors of the Christmas King, the Lord and Saviour of Mankind

Rehoboam, son of Solomon, made a fortified city of Bethlehem (2 Chronicles XI. 16) and later a famous khan (corresponding to our hotel) was built there probably by Chimham, son of Barzillai the Gileadite who befriended David (2 Samuel XVII.) when in trouble and was named after him (Jeremiah XLI. 17). This khan appears to have been a place where caravans were made up for long journeys, and it was from thence that the rebellious Jews, disregarding God's orders, set off for Egyot carrying the prophet Jeremiah with them It may have been that same khan, or in New Testament terms that inn, at which Joseph and Mary (Luke II) applied for lodging, but could find no other accommodation than a stable in a grotto under, or near it wherein to spend the first of all Christmas Eves, although they were both of royal descent, descendants of King David himself!

That poor stable became the most famous bed-chamber in the whole world, for there amidst the cattle was born the holy Baby, Who was God, the Creator of all things, clothed in mortal flesh, and that He might become the Saviour of all who wished it from their sins!

To the stable came the shepherds called away from their sheep-folds by a herald in the heavens, accompanied by singing choirs of angels, who made the thrilling momentous announcement: "Unto you is born this day in the City of David, a Saviour Who is Christ the Lord" (Luke II,II).

Countless thousands have knelt in sacred worship before that most holy shrine, once "a lowly cattle shed," the only shelter this evil world could provide for its Maker, Redeemer and King, when in pitying love and tender saving mercy He came to visit it, at the Christmas tide!

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Mumming Old York Custom

What Remains of St. George Plays, Early Form of English Drama

Of all the quaint old Christmas customs which have not yet been forgotten, none is more interesting than the mumming which is given every year in some of the villages in Yorkshire.

With blackened faces grinning under paper caps, some half-dozen of the village boys make their way from house to house. Trooping into the room where the family is sitting, they enact a strange scene. Fiercely brandishing wooden swords, they all rush upon one boy, reciting verses of which the meaning appears to be unknown both to performers and audience. Suddenly this boy falls as though dead. His vanquishers gloat over him, they bow, and file out of the room. The vanquished one then gets up sheepishly, bows, and follows the rest.

This old Christmas custom embodies all that now remains of one of the earliest forms of English drama, the St. George plays. These plays were originally performed on the feast of the national saint, but in course of time they became attracted to the bigger festival of Christmas. At first their theme was St. George's fight with the dragon, but in later versions many other characters were introduced, and St. George was killed and raised to life again by a character called the Doctor. It is undoubtedly this play which the Yorkshire boys enact each Christmas, though they may not realize it. The saint's revival has been forgotten, so that in the modern version the unfortunate St. George has to get up and get out rather lamely.

The wooden swords are derived from the still older sword dances which were incorporated into the St. George plays, while the blackened faces are a legacy of the old Morris

dance, which in these festivals was frequently confused with the sword dances. In the original Morris dances the performers always blackened their faces, from which fact it has been thought that the dance got its name of Morris from the Moors or the Blackamoors, who introduced it into Europe.

It would be interesting to know exactly what the modern performers of this very ancient play really say. The words, when account has been taken of the inaccuracies and changes of pronunciation, would probably be found to be those which were composed by some minstrel, or perhaps by a parish priest, for a St. George play, as early or even earlier than the thirteenth century. Such words were never written down, and so in the course of centuries may well have become the unintelligible babble laughed at every Christmas.

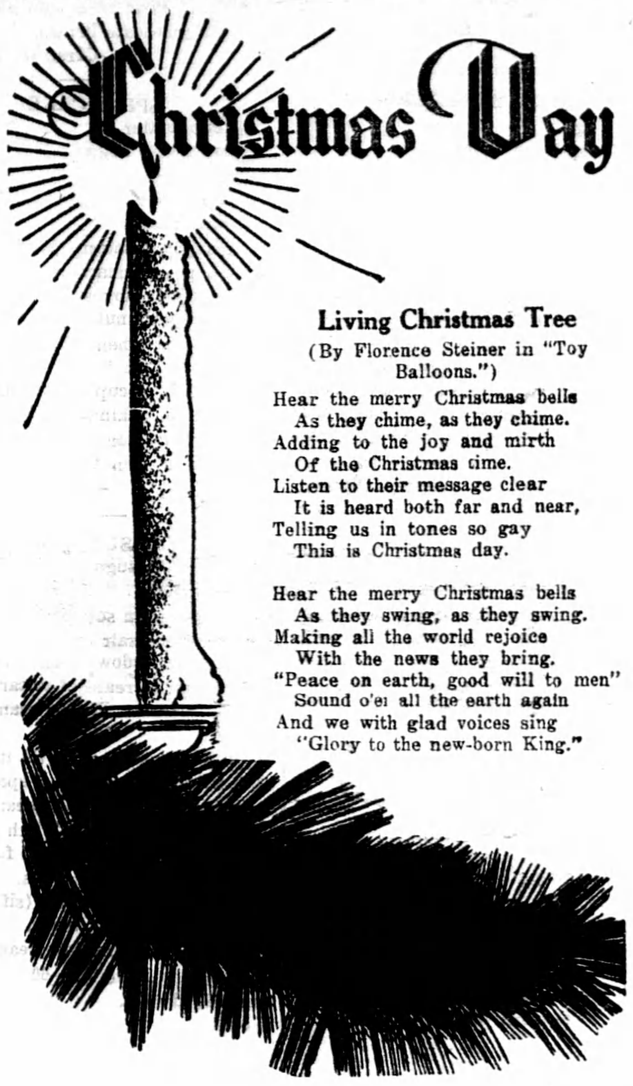
Queer Christmas Dishes of the Past

Roasted Badgers Seasonal Dish in Somerset—Boar's Head Served at Oxford.

A badger, roasted before an open fire, was the chief dish at a Christmas Eve dinner eaten in an ancient hostelry at Ilchester, Somerset. Badger ham was once regarded as a delicacy, and Ilchester's "badger feast," as it is called, has been held every Christmas for many years past. Slices were cut from the joints as they hung before the bar fire. The guests washed down the badger with strong ale, which should, according to tradition, be served in horn cups.

Boar's head, the true Yuletide dish in Britain, is always served at the Christmas Day dinner held annually at Queen's College, Oxford. The reason given for the survival of the custom at Oxford is that it commemorates the escape of a medieval undergraduate from a wild boar. The undergraduate was walking abroad, conning his Aristotle, when the boar rushed at him open-mouthed. With a loud cry of "Graecum est," the student thrust the volume down the throat of the monster, which, choked by the tough morsel, then and there expired. The frills and mistletoe with which the boar's head was decorated were distributed among the choristers The brawn should, by right, be sent to the King.

At this banquet also strong ale was practically the only drink to be served. Under the injunctions of the founder the liquor must be brewed on the College premises by its own servants, acting under the supervision of the steward of the week and the treasurer's clerk. The gravity of the ale could only be indicated by a whole row of "X's." It is, in fact, so potent that it is sipped as a liqueur. Mulled ale, concocted with cloves, sugar, nutmeg and beaten egg and served with dry toast was brewed according to a recipe at least two hundred years old at a Shrewsbury hotel where Paganini, the violinist, once performed.



Living Christmas Tree

(By Florence Steiner in "Toy Balloons.")

Hear the merry Christmas bells
As they chime, as they chime.
Adding to the joy and mirth
Of the Christmas time.
Listen to their message clear
It is heard both far and near,
Telling us in tones so gay
This is Christmas day.

Hear the merry Christmas bells
As they swing, as they swing.
Making all the world rejoice
With the news they bring.
"Peace on earth, good will to men"
Sound o'er all the earth again
And we with glad voices sing
"Glory to the new-born King."

Old Christmas Carol

Here we come a-waissailing,
Among the leaves so green,
Here we come a-waissailing,
So fair to be seen.

Love and joy come to you,
And to your waissail, too,
God send you happy, God send you happy,
God send you a happy New Year!

We are not daily beggars,
That beg from door to door,
But we are neighbors' children
Whom you have seen before.

We have got a little purse
Made of stretching leather skin,
We want a little of your money
To line it well within.

God bless the master of this house
Likewise the mistress, too.
And all your loving children
That around the table go.

Ye Christmas Tree

While some very justly deplore the wholesale slaughter of millions of young spruce and cedar each year, the delightful German custom of the Christmas tree will doubtless linger on for many years yet.

The wide world knows a tree, full strong,
And fairer yet than each and all;
More worthy of the minstrel's song
In cottage low or princely hall.
The Christmas tree whose thought of love.

TRACING THE ORIGIN OF SEASON'S CUSTOMS

King Arthur Supposed to Have Celebrated the First Christmas in England by a Festival in York in 521; Peacocks Instead of Turkeys

King Arthur is supposed to have celebrated the first Christmas in England by a festival held in the city of York in 521, and which lasted several days. By the Middle Ages the Christmas festivals had become the most popular of celebrations. The became extremely elaborate in Shakespeare's time, on occasions until Twelfth Day, or Epiphany, twelve days after Christmas. During this period there was no work of any kind, and people gave themselves over to festivities.

Aside from the purely religious observances connected with the commemoration of the Nativity it is interesting to trace the origin of some of the customs and objects so cherished at this season.

The popular myth of Santa Claus entering sleeping homes by way of the chimney seems to have arisen from the custom among the early English of cleaning their chimneys on New Year's Day so that luck could descend and remain all year. For many years Santa found only wooden shoes awaiting him in the chimney corners, but as the wise little heads found that stockings held more, the shoes were displaced. Santa would leave no gifts unless he saw th little shoes or stockings all in a row by the fireplace and so knew that the children were tucked away in bed. Evidently this myth was invented by some parents of long ago for their own convenience, and it spread rapidly.

Laurel was used in olden days in England at Christmas time in imitation of the ancient Romans to whom laurel stood for peace, joy and victory. A house decorated with

laurel indicates that Christ had entered there. Gradually the laurel was replaced in popular esteem by the holly and ivy.

Christmas Trees

Many legends have been written on the origin of the Christmas tree. One popular German tale makes St. Winfrid the originator of the idea. Another credits it to Martin Luther.

The development of the Christmas tree tradition, resulting probably from many vague stories and customs from different countries, was most marked in Germany. A German manuscript of 1608 refers to the tree as a regular feature of the Christmas season. It arrived in England at a much later date and in fact, did not become a regular English institution until the time of the marriage of Queen Victoria to Prince Albert, who popularized the custom. Mention is made in the memoirs of Greville of trees being used in Christmas celebrations in 1529 at a fete given in honor of Henry VIII. It reads: "Three trees, in great pots, were put upon a long table covered with pink linen."

One writer describes the custom of gift giving in olden days as follows: "In Old England St. Stephen's Day was chiefly celebrated under the name of Boxing Day—not for pubilistic reasons, but because on that day it was the custom for persons in the humbler walks of life to go the rounds with a Christmas box and solicit money from patrons and employers. Hence the phrase "Christmas box" came to signify gifts made at this season, even after the boxes themselves had gone out of use.

Christmas Spirit Important Factor

Grown-Ups Lay Aside Dignity On Joyous Occasion

What is the Christmas "spirit?"

It consists of many things. First, or this should be first, the gentle influence of the Holy Child who gave us the greatest uplift of soul the world has ever known. Peace, service and forgiveness, faith, hope and love.

Second, is the more materialistic sentiment of gifts and gaiety, secrets and shopping.

Actually it is a relief to every grown-up to lay aside his dignity and slip out of his responsible mantle of office.

Parents need no longer play a role. If Dad gets gay and foolish and works the street vendor's jumping-jack, or nudges the bank manager and hands him a somer-saulting-turtle to wind up, neither of them need to feel ashamed or look over their shoulder to see of the Board of Directors is near The chances are that the Board of Directors are, each and every one of them, enjoying a relapse into childhood in one way or another themselves.

Mother's Pepped Up, Too

Mother feels a peculiar elevation of spirit, with added zest for life and work.

She gets up a bit earlier, filled with the days' plans, because something mystical is at work within her. She is back in her own pre-Christmas days, looking ahead as she used to. And she wants her family to feel the same way she used to feel. Perhaps she pretends to be tired and complains about her back or rough hands, but inside she is humming with the spirit of Christmas

The children are happy, exceedingly happy, but you'd never guess why. We have missed part of the answer if we think it is Santa Claus and a tree and stockings

Break For Children

The other half is this: Everyone around them, including mother and daddy, have become almost, if not quite, children-like themselves It is just about the only time of the year that the big, top-heavy grown-up world gives them, a break. People suddenly become child minded and act and think like boys and girls. A common ground is reached The child finds himself king instead of pawn. He is not being played down to because he likes toys or "is just a kid." Everyone, for some strange reason, has become toy-minded, too. And out for a good time, with duty and routine in the background

Through the year, children feel that the world stoops to them, and they are forever looking up. Now everybody is waisthigh, and all the same size.

The spirit of Christmas is multiple, and good for all men.

Appetite in Ye Olden Days

A report from the year 1590 gives us an idea of the huge quantities of food which in those days people were able to eat. A party of 50 men consumed at one dinner 12 capons, eight turkeys, two hens, 18 partridges, 33 pounds of veal, 20 pounds of beef, 10 pounds of sausages, not to mention vegetables, sweets, cheese and fruit.

All kinds of spices, especially pepper, were highly favored and used, or better, abused in such quantities that people's breath often "reeked like a dispensary." Those people did not eat for the sole purpose of keeping themselves alive."

HAIL ALL HAIL THE CHRISTMAS FEAST