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The Farm and Christmas

Christmas 1936 should see a revival of this ancient Christmas toast. Those were the days when the value of the farm was universally recognized, but in the whirl of modern life the farm, as the sure foundation of material civilization, is apt to be forgotten. The word farm means food and was so called because in older times the tenant was required to provide the landlord with food by way of rent. Today this definition has been considerably extended in that the farm supplies the nation with food, and without food, without the feeding of the multitude, it is not given to human beings to be able openly to express that spirit of universal kindness and peace and good will evoked by the teachings of the Master in the celebration of the festival of Christmas.

The connection between agriculture and Christmas has been intimate from the beginning. It was to shepherds watching their flocks by night that the words "Fear not: for, behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy" were addressed. It was in a lowly stable attached to a farm-khan that the Saviour of the World was born, and a few days later it was on the back of the most humble farm animal, the ass, that He was borne to Egypt in safety.

It was from the agricultural population mainly that the early Christians drew their adherents, and many years later it was over the farms and orchards in the vicinity of Rome that the early Christians scoured the country in search of holly branches to decorate their churches and dwellings at Christmas.

Meanwhile, the farm, as ever, continued to furnish the wherewithal for the feast, and at the same time, as centuries rolled by and towns became swamped in their own activities, it was the farm that kept alive the kindly, ancient rites of the feast. Many centuries later, Charles Dickens restored to the townfolk of England something of the joy and beauty of the spirit of Christmas which still flourished among agricultural communities. Even today many of the ancient agricultural Christmas celebrations, as distinct from the towns, survive, some of them under limited conditions. There is Plough Monday, for example, which is still observed in several countries, including the British Isles. In olden times in Europe, Plough Monday marked the end of the Christmas holidays. It was held on the first Monday in January after the Twelfth Day. It was customary on Plough Monday, before the ploughman returned to work on the following day, to draw a plough from door to door of the parish to solicit "plough money" to spend in a frolic. The queen of the banquet was called Bessy.

Then there was the ancient feast of the boar's head which still exists in at least three distinct communities in England—at Queen's College, Oxford, on Christmas Day, and at the annual Christmas banquets of the City of London at the Guildhall and of the Worshipful Company of Cutlers in London. The proceedings are much the same. Trumpets sound and the boar's head is carried in procession, escorted by choristers singing the old carol "The boar's head in hand bring I." At the City of London feast, the master takes the lemon from the boar's jaws and at Oxford the Provost takes the orange and presents it to the principal singer. At the Cutlers' Hall, the president of the feast accepts the present of a pot of mustard, and extols the circumstances of the feast. This reference to mustard must be very old, because in a carol that had been in vogue for centuries before, Wynkyn de Worde printed the words in 1521 A.D., the last line of which runs "the bore's heed with mustard."

The phrase "Christmas Box" originated in the early Christian times. It was really then a box which was placed in the church for promiscuous charities and was opened on Christmas Day. The contents were distributed the next day (Boxing Day) by the priest, and where the contributions consisted of cash were known as box money. However, farmers were accustomed to leave their contributions, in kind, eggs, butter, flour, meat, and other agricultural products, much the same as the farmers of Quebec today place fruits at the church entrance on Thanksgiving Day, the results of the sales of which go towards masses for the souls of relatives. In many churches in Canada, the accumulation of Christmas gifts is distributed in much the same manner as in the

earliest Christian days. And at this Christmastide, as in the days gone by, the farm has furnished the chief necessities for the Christmas feast, such as the meats, the turkeys, the geese, the ducks and chickens, the cereal foods, the vegetables, the cream, milk, eggs, and cheese, not forgetting that many of the other essentials, the candies and confectionery, the pickles, cigars and cigarettes, are all of agricultural origin.

So once more, the ancient toast: "Christmas and the Farm: the Farm and Food".

THE BIRTH OF A CAROL

The romantic story of this famous carol has almost become so hackneyed at Christmas time that the people who sing it forget the hero prince who is the central figure of the Wenceslas legend.

"Wenceslas" was officially banned by the Austrian army as being an unpatriotic tune during the Great War! Unlucky was the ordinary soldier who even hummed the curious lilting melody to alleviate the grimness of war!

This "Wenceslas" tune is not exactly the same as that of our own familiar carol. It is Wenceslas canticle, which for merely five hundred years has been the Czech National Anthem. It has not always been a carol of peace, or even of Christianity. It was almost a war cry during the revolution of 1848, when the Czechs revolted against Austrian terrorism. There is a quotation of two lines of this carol mentioning St. Wenceslas, on the enormous statue of the King himself in a public square at Prague.

Our own Wenceslas carol has a less warlike history. The carol as we know it to-day is Protestant. The words were written by the man who wrote "Jerusalem the Golden"—the Reverend J. M. Neale.

Has it ever struck you that although carols should be cheerful, the tune of "Wenceslas" is almost gay for any church festivity? Actually, the quaint mediaeval tune which we now associate with Wenceslas's adventures on the feast of Stephen was previously that of a special hymn for the springtime. The reverend author based his carol on the National Anthem of the Czechs, and one of the most famous King Wenceslas legends is used in the theme.

Although the Wenceslas carol is a Protestant one, St. Wenceslas is a Catholic saint, who was martyred just over a thousand years ago.

Wenceslas was born in 907, and was the grandson of Ludmilla, the first Czech saint, but he was also a descendant of the first Christian prince of Bohemia, and Wenceslas seemed cut out for a very stormy time when, at the age of only eighteen, he took over the reins of his kingdom.

His kindly, generous nature enabled him to win through when success in battle alone might have proved fatal. In the end it was his success which resulted in his martyrdom, for his brother Boleslav (not a Christian) eventually became jealous of his power.

The King was invited to a banquet at his brother's palace, and late that night they conspired to murder him, but the wine was too strong and they lost their courage! On waking early the following morning, they realized that they might be discovered if they did not act quickly. Wenceslas set out for church on his way home, but Boleslav's supporters and followers had made sure that the church was locked and barred so that Wenceslas could not find sanctuary.

Wenceslas's own brother tried to strike the first blow, and the King, in self-defence, managed to catch the sword and throw it on the ground. One of Boleslav's henchmen then attacked the King in the back, and after a brief struggle Wenceslas was martyred for his faith.

That much is true. But Wenceslas's kind nature caused a number of beautiful legends to grow up about him. The one thing we can be certain of is that he did make regular pilgrimages out into the country to help his poor subjects, for it was this elementary form of socialism which resulted in Wenceslas being able to unite his principality.

Greetings

At this festive season we are mindful of a deep and abiding sense of appreciation for your good will and consideration.

We sincerely wish you an abundance of Christmas joys with happiness and prosperity throughout the New Year.

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UNDER THE HOLLY BOUGH

Ye who have scorned each other,
Or injured friend or brother
In this fast fading year;
Ye who by word or deed
Have made a kind heart bleed,
Come gather here.
Let sinned-against and sinning
Forget their strife's beginning
And join in friendship now;
Be links no longer broken,
Be sweet forgiveness spoken,
Under the holly bough.
Ye who have loved each other,
Sister and friend and brother,
In this fast-fading year;
Mother and sire and child,
Young man and maiden mild,
Come gather here.
And let your hearts grow tender,
And memory shall ponder
Each past unbroken vow;
Old loves and younger wooing
Are sweet in the renewing
Under the holly bough.
—Charles McKay.

THE DOUBLE-BARRED CROSS

International Symbol of the Crusade against Tuberculosis

As armies march across the pages of history, fighting for their rights or their wrongs as the case may be, one custom seems to have been common to them all: each carried flags and banners on which appeared the emblem of the cause. Good or bad, the cause was always blazoned forth in heraldry which gradually became a highly specialized study. After the dawn of the Christian era the cross became a tremendously popular symbol and with this emblem upon their banner, many a doughty knight rode forth to do battle for his principles and to save or reclaim the Holy Land from the Infidel.

Crosses of all shapes, sizes and ornate decorations have been used by innumerable families, cities, orders, guilds, nations and causes. The Spaniards found a religious symbol among the Aztecs which was very similar to our cross. The swastika of Hitlerism is an old symbol made of several crosses. Thus the habit of choosing emblems has carried over into our modern civilization and such peacetime associations still follow that age-old custom.

It was therefore quite the natural thing that as the war against tuberculosis gathered momentum, and nation after nation took up the cause, that some international emblem should be chosen which would be symbolic. The matter was given careful consideration for it was important that the symbol should be internationally accepted and have a universal appeal, and yet it should be decidedly distinct from any already adopted international symbol such as the Red Cross.

It would seem that the tuberculosis campaigners of the eighteen-nineties or thereabout, deliberately went out after a symbol that would have something like the significance and universal acceptance of the Red (Geneva) Cross, and yet be quite distinguishable from it. They had to avoid not only the Red Cross, but those of the various saints, George, Anthony, Andrew and so on. They had also to avoid the Celtic, the Greek, the Maltese and the Papal. In the words of Dr. D. A. Stewart, "After that, it would seem that what they thought they might require they went and took." And so we have the patriarchal cross, the Lorraine cross of the two crusades recombined, now a symbol in every land of a new popular, enthusiastic and successful crusade against entrenched tuberculosis, a new crusade to win back for all the people of the world the Holy Land of Health.

This is the banner under which the Muskoka, the Toronto and the Queen Mary Hospitals for Consumptives have marched these many years—the banner under which they and other sanatorium and tuberculosis workers' organizations in the Province have won such marked success.

But victory can only be won with the continued effort and the financial support of the people at large.

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