

1. THIS most widely-observed holiday of modern times is not the oldest of Christian festivals. The keeping of Epiphany preceded observance of Christmas. Dec. 25 was made a church feast about 336 A.D.

Various historians have set the time of the actual birth of Jesus to dates corresponding to our present January 6, March 25, May 20, April 19 or 20, November 17, etc. Christmas has been celebrated on more than one hundred different days of the year.

Adoption of December 25 was favored in the early church because it corresponded to the Roman Saturnalia or celebration of the winter solstice. Its establishment assisted in conversion of the observance of the pagan festival into a Christian occasion.

Pope Gregory I, surnamed the Great, enjoined missionaries not to destroy such pagan customs as were innocent and could be woven into the fabric of Christian ceremony. All the festivities of the winter solstice were absorbed in the observance of Christmas Day in the course of time. The Romans practised exchanging gifts at the Saturnalia. Pagans decked their halls with evergreens, holly and mistletoe in Druid times. These green plants were naturally regarded with awe in an otherwise bare winter season.

2. THE traditional figure known as Santa Claus, Father Christmas, Kris Kringle, etc., among various peoples is traced back to Nicholas, the son of a merchant named Epiphanius in the town of Patara, near the port of Myra on the Mediterranean. Nicholas entered the church and became bishop of Myra, in the 4th century, and a notable public benefactor.

He personified the Christian injunction, "It is more blessed to give than to receive" to an unusual extent in an age when the biggest robber was king, and Robin Hood was a hero because he gave back the poor some of the loot. His fame spread till he became established in European hearts as special protector of children, travelers and merchants.

Settlers who followed the Dutch into the Hudson River valley were infected by the jolly good time the Dutch had each December. They adopted the December 6 gift tradition but could not pronounce the Dutch Sant Nikolaas as the Dutch did; it came out Santa Claus.

According to tradition, St. Nicholas was lean and ascetic. In the American mind he came to resemble the good Dutch burghers. This impression took form permanently through the poem, *A Visit from St. Nicholas*, and the drawings of Thomas Nast, the German immigrant who was the most famous cartoonist in the U.S. in the 1860's and 1870's.

3. FEW persons acquainted with the first verse and chorus of John Pierpont's *Jingle Bells* have any knowledge of the second and third of its three verses, which follow:

II
A day or two ago
I thought I'd take a ride,
And soon Miss Fannie Bright
Was seated by my side.
The horse was lean and lank;
Misfortune seem'd his lot;
He got into a drifted bank,
And ice, we got up-sot.

III
Now the ground is white;
Go it while you're young;
Take the girls to-night,
And sing this sleighing song,
Just get a bob-tail'd bay,
Two-forty for his speed;
Then hitch him to an open sleigh,
And crack! you'll take the lead.



4. THE custom of burning a specially chosen and prepared log at festival time goes back into antiquity when fire and the sun were held in special reverence. It was be-

lieved that evil would not descend upon households where the Yule log had been properly burned. Above, observing the custom in the English countryside in the 19th century.

5. CHRISTMAS signifies Christ's Mass, meaning the festival of the Nativity of Christ. At different periods it has been spelled Crystmasse, Crestennas, Kyrsmas, Xtemas, Chrismesse and other ways.

Xmas, thus spelled as an abbreviation for Christmas, had its origin centuries ago in the fact that the Greek letter chi was written as X. This letter was also the initial of the name Christos. Many people naturally identify the X as representing the Cross.

6. THE origin of kissing under the mistletoe goes back to Babylonian times, when mistletoe was the sacred plant of Mylitta, goddess of love and beauty, and the kiss was a rite in her honor. In the early Christian church it was customary to bestow the "kiss of peace" These two symbols became interwoven in the custom of kissing under the mistletoe at Christmas time.



7. THE origin of the Christmas tree tradition is not known. It was a Teutonic custom in ancient times to worship Odin's sacred oak. When the missionary Boniface went from England to Germany, he persuaded the people to substitute for the oak an evergreen tree in honor of the Christ Child.

There were pines and cedars in the Holy Land in the time of Jesus' childhood. The cedars of Lebanon furnished a timber much prized in the construction of palaces and

WHAT DO YOU KNOW ABOUT CHRISTMAS?

By Hargis Earlywine

1. What is the derivation of the word 'Christmas'?
2. From where did the custom of kissing under the mistletoe come?
3. What people were the first to have Christmas trees?
4. What Christians made observance of Christmas illegal?
5. How is the apple used to "tell a fortune" at Christmas?
6. What celebrated English and French ruler had his coronation on Christmas?

7. From whom did the Christmas poinsettia get its name?
8. Who were the Three Wise Men of the New Testament story of the First Christmas?
9. Some beloved Christmas songs were actually written on Christmas Eve or Christmas Day. Can you name one?
10. About how old is the carol, "Adeste Fideles"?
11. What saint was responsible for making the 'creche' a customary Christmas shrine?
12. What is the origin of the word 'carol'?

10. WILLIAM, the Duke of Normandy, who conquered England in 1066, was formally crowned in Westminster Abbey on Christmas Day the same year. The enthronement was accompanied by tragic carnage.

During the coronation service, the Archbishop of Canterbury asked William for his pledge that his rule would be upright and a righteous one. Solemnly William gave his promise. The Archbishop then turned to the congregation of nobles and asked them if they in their turn would accept William as their rightful king.

The formal response was too unanimous. The defeated Saxons rose as one man to accept William, and the sudden movement upset the Norman soldiers. They mistook it as a signal for an attack on their king, and they charged the Saxons with drawn swords. Hearing the tumult, the guards outside the Abbey charged the crowd. Before the riot was halted

leaf, and the fact that it usually came into blossom about Christmastime. Poinsett, a botanist as well as a diplomat, brought specimens of the plant back with him to this country, and he and fellow experimenters soon learned that the flower would thrive in subtropical parts of the United States. Poinsett collected natural history specimens during his travels in foreign countries, enriching the flora of native South Carolina and country. He is remembered chiefly for the Christmas flower which bears his name.

12. THE Three Wise Men were Balthazar, Melchior and Gaspar, who are supposed to have been the rulers of tribes descended from Ham, Shem and Japheth, or the kings of Nubia, Tarsus and Chaldea. They also are sometimes said to have represented, respectively, youth, middle-age and old-age. Of the gifts which they brought, the gold denoted the Christ Child's kingship; the myrra signified His mortality and the frankincense His divinity.

13. THE words of *O Little Town of Bethlehem* were written by the Rev. Phillips Brooks (right), young pastor of Holy Trinity Episcopal Church at Philadelphia, on Christmas Eve, 1868, and given to Lewis H. Redner, organist of the church, for a musical setting. Redner said the music came to him that night in a dream. The beautiful hymn, *Silent Night*, was similarly written at the last minute for Christmas presentation in church by Rev. Joseph Mohr, a Roman Catholic priest at Oberndorf, Austria, in 1818. It was set to music by the organist of the church, Francis X. Gruber. Charles Wesley's *Hark! the Herald Angels Sing* was inspired by his hearing church bells in London on Christmas morning, 1739. Henry Wadsworth Longfellow's *I Heard the Bells on Christmas Day* was inspired by bells and carols at Cambridge, Mass. on Dec. 25, 1863.



Phillips Brooks

14. THE origin of *Adeste Fideles*, perhaps the best known of all carols, is lost in the dust of centuries. About all that is certain is that by the middle of the eighteenth century Roman Catholic congregations were hearing it at Midnight Mass on Christmas Day. Missionaries have translated it into more than 100 languages and dialects. One of the best known translations into English runs:

O come, all ye faithful,
Joyful and triumphant,
O come ye, O come ye to Bethlehem;
Come and behold Him,
Born the King of angels:
O come, let us adore Him,
O come, let us adore Him,
O come, let us adore Him,
Christ the Lord.

Sing, choirs of angels,
Sing in exultation,
Sing, all ye citizens of heaven above;
"Glory to God
In the highest":
O come, let us adore Him,
O come, let us adore Him,
O come, let us adore Him,
Christ the Lord.

Yea, Lord, we greet Thee,
Born this happy morning;
Jesus, to Thee be glory given;
Word of the Father,
Now in flesh appearing:
O come, let us adore Him,
O come, let us adore Him,
O come, let us adore Him,
Christ the Lord.

and William undertook to make amends, the Abbey was filled with dead and wounded, and outside many homes were pillaged and fired.

11. THE poinsettia got its name as a result of its being brought to the attention of botanists and commercial plant growers in 1828 by Joel Robert Poinsett, U.S. Minister to Mexico from 1825-29. He noticed the striking beauty of its scarlet and green

15. ST. FRANCIS of Assisi is said to have made the first "creche" or crib now found during the Christmas season in hundreds of churches and as a domestic shrine in many homes.



16. THE word "carol" itself came into the English language comparatively late in the Middle Ages. Originally, it meant a dance in a ring while singing. This old

woodcut shows child carolers making the rounds in an English town on Christmas morning a century ago. *God Rest You Merry Gentlemen* was a popular carol then.