

Christian Element In Christmas Is Lacking



CHRISTMAS festivities, as the modern world observes them, owe much of their warmth and charm to the survival of pagan customs, Prof. William Warren Sweet of the Divinity School, told a University of Chicago group.

Speaking at a noon-time service in Bond chapel on the campus, Doctor Sweet, who is professor of the History of American Christianity, analyzed the history of the Yuletide celebration, and asked that the small Christian element in it be kept uppermost.

Exchanging gifts at Christmas time is a practice taken over from the Romans, and the Christmas dinner, the holly wreaths, and even the Christmas tree customs can be traced back to the barbarians of northern Europe, Doctor Sweet said.

America's contribution to the occasion has been chiefly its commercialization. "It was not until about the middle of the Fourth century after Christ that a day was formally set aside by the church at Rome for the observance of his physical birth," Doctor Sweet pointed out.

"As it was first observed by the church, Christmas was purely a spiritual festival. There was no gaiety; no bells announced the coming of the glad morn; there were no garlands; no tables heaped with good cheer. "But it was not to remain long in the upper air of pure devotion. There were too many pagan influences about it, one of the most important of which was the feast of Saturn, which began on the 17th of December and lasted until the 24th. Saturn was the oldest and most benign deity of ancient Italy and his fabled reign on earth was supposed to have brought peace and happiness to mankind, and so the feast dedicated to him was fully of joy and feasting. The schools were



Voracious Feasting Ancient Precedent for Modern Christmas Dinner closed, public places were decked with flowers, and presents were exchanged. "Another festival which influenced the Christmas with which we are familiar today is a strange combination of imported pagan and Christian traditions. Though I dislike to say it, it seems that about 1880, Christmas issues of church papers show a decided change in their attitude," Doctor Sweet said.

EXCUSABLE FOLLY

IT IS true that men and women at Christmas time do things which are foolish, especially in the giving of presents. But when did cold wisdom ever make people happy? Who wants to see a Christmas when nobody spends more than he should or when there is no giving of things that are trivial or needless or foolish? A truly sane Christmas would be a miserable one.—American Magazine.

January, which marked the benediction of the celebration of Christmas was the feast of the Kalends of the Roman civil year, and three days of merriment followed it. Mummies clad in women's clothes and animal skins paraded the streets. Presents were given to dear ones. "Honeyed things, that in the year the recipient might be full of sweetness, lamps that might be full of light; copper, silver and gold that wealth might flow in."

Among the early colonists in America Christmas was observed as a festival only by the Church of England adherents and the Roman Catholics, Professor Sweet said. The Puritans, objecting to it because of its pagan origins, banned any observance of the day. On May 11, 1659, the General Court of the Colony of Massachusetts passed the following law: "Whosoever shall be found observing any such day as Christmas or the like, either by forbearing of labor, feasting, or any other way, as a festival, shall be fined five shillings."

This statute was repealed twenty years later, but for more than one hundred years the great "evangelical" religious groups, the Baptists, Congregationalists and Presbyterians officially refused to recognize Christmas. Professor Sweet reported that he has been unable to find any reference to the festival of the nativity in the literature of these churches up to the Civil War. Shortly after the war a religious organ objected to the observance of the day on the grounds that there was no evidence to establish exactly the date of Christ's birth and that there was nothing in the New Testament to indicate that the birthday should be celebrated.

"Ten years later, or about 1880, Christmas issues of church papers show a decided change in their attitude," Doctor Sweet said. Christmas advertisements make their appearance, Christmas poems, and editorials. From this time onward the religious significance of Christmas has been growing in all evangelical churches.

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The Shepherd Boy Who Served The Babe In The Manger

THE stable is draughty and needeth mending—here and there a board is missing and the chill wind blows through the cracks," was the message brought to the carpenter shop by a shepherd, entreating the carpenter to give him his tool box to the Inn at Bethlehem.

It was still the night-time and David, the apprentice boy, standing by the window of the carpenter shop where he had watched the brilliance of the Star of the East, wondered curiously why the need of haste in mending a broken board at the Inn stable, Manassah, the carpenter, shook his head in protest. He had little desire to do odd jobs at night, and beside the shepherd spoke not of payment for the task of repairing the Inn stable.

"The babe lies in the manger with his sweet Mother Mary watching Him, trying to protect Him from the chill drafts," urged the shepherd, yet Manassah was unmoved.

David, the shepherd boy, turned from the window and hobbled, as was his wont because of the crippled spine, nearer the shepherd that he might hear this strange story. Then the shepherd, seeing that his mission was in vain with disappointment shadowing his eyes, turned away from the shop. David, the apprentice boy, sensed a strange pang of sympathy throbbing in his heart for the young mother and the babe sleeping in the manger of the stable because there was no room in the Inn. By the aid of a stick he stumbled to the door and laid his hand on the shepherd's crook.

"Wilt thou trust me with the mending of the stable?" he questioned. "I will go, with thee and carry the box of tools—the babe shall be kept warm in his manger bed."

The shepherd, watching the difficulty with which the young cripple walked, marvelled at the courage of the lad, then answered gently: "Lad, thou wilt be welcome with thy box of tools and thy carpenter's skill. Follow me." Past the lambs, sheltered in the

stable of the Inn, David, the carpenter's apprentice, made his way, stumbling over a mound of hay as his crippled body worked awkwardly toward the manger. He caught a glimpse of the Babe lying in the manger and his heart beat fast with curious excitement. The chill of the wind blowing through the cracks yawning above the manger was an icy blast to the young cripple. He opened his tool box and began his task—he was glad that he had learned to drive a nail with skill.

"Thou hast done well, lad; the Babe sleepeth now in comfort," praised the man who knelt beside the manger and whom the shepherds called Joseph.

His cheeks flushed with the word of praise, David, the apprentice, turned from the mended roof, then with a glad cry leaped forward and with swift sure foot, strode across the floor of the rude stable. Scarcely understanding the miracle that had wrought a healing on his crippled body, the apprentice fell upon his knees before the manger, his heart pouring out its gratitude to God and singing the Psalms his mother had taught him.

In the young Mother's eyes there shone a wondrous tenderness that reminded David of the light radiating from the Star of the East. Perchance she was thinking of that day in the future when the Babe should stand beside His father in the carpenter's shop occupied with the trade that had been hallowed for all time. David, the apprentice, saw the smile upon the face of the Babe in the manger and he was glad that his carpenter's trade had been so blessed that Holy Night in Bethlehem.

Keeps Candles From Dripping

To keep table candles from dripping, stick a pin in the candle alongside the wick and leave it there. It keeps the wick upright, the candle burns longer and more steadily and decorations and tablecloth are kept free from grease.

CHRISTMAS DAY

IT IS not definitely known when Christmas was first celebrated. The institution of the festival is attributed to Telephorus, who flourished in the reign of Antoninus Plus (131-161 A. D.) The reason for the final choice of December 25 cannot now be determined. As Christianity spread, the feast of the winter solstice, the time when the day begins to increase, and light to triumph over darkness, was changed into the Feast of Christ, the Light of Life.

The Christmas Carolers Are Welcome Everywhere

"HERE come the Carolers." So it used to be. Young faces pressed against the window-pane, straining to hear the cheerful carols outside. Perhaps it was the story of the Christ child put to tune or a ballad of love and cheer. When the singers were done the householder invited them in for a bite and a sup or gave them a coin or two for their song.

Then on to the next house, to sing again under the stars or veiled behind sifted snow.

An then, in the early morning, home again to their own firesides. It was a good old custom, this midnight minstrelsy in the season of peace and goodwill. "With the beginning of Yuletide, twelve days before Christmas day," as Percival Chubb tells us in the Standard, published in New York by the American Ethical Union, "small bands of musicians went the rounds and, 'in the mire or on the road or on the steps, played the old folk tunes as a lyrical prelude to the great day. To some of the antique ballad airs, like 'Good King Wenceslaus,' says Mr. Chubb, the singers would add a hymn tune or two—'Once In David's Royal City,' or 'Hark, the Herald Angels Sing.' 'Punctuating the bustle of domestic preparation for the coming feast, these ministrations in the still night gave a breath of poetry that touched the spirit of Christmas with an endearing beauty. Day by day the tide of joyous anticipation rose until the crescendo broke

RIDDLE BOX

Why are quarrels at home very useful for jam and pickles? Because they are family jars, of course.

What letter of the alphabet likes to be burnt? The letter D, because when you set light to it, it becomes D-lighted!

How can you stop a chimney from smoking? Put the fire out.

Why is a slap on the back like a bowler hat? Because it is felt.

Patches over patches without any stitches. What is this? Cabbage patches.

What is the beginning of every end and the end of every place? The letter E.

What has the hardest life—tea or coffee? Tea, for while coffee is allowed to settle tea is compelled to draw.

"A Merry Christmas," as Other Nations Say It

THIS is how the nations of the world express the wish, "A Merry Christmas": France, Bon Noel; China, Tin Hao Nian; Portugal, Boas Festas; Japan, Kinga Shin-nen; Turkey, Ichok Yilari; Hungary, Boldog Karacsanyi Unni-pekert; Greece, Chrystovjens; Croatia, Sretan Bozic; Holland, Een Vrolijk Kerstmis; Spain, Felices Pascuas; Germany, Froehliche Weihnachten; Sweden, Glad Julen; Italy, Felice Natale; Rumania, Craciun Felicitatiune; Bohemia, Vesela Vanoec; Poland, Wesołych Swiat; Denmark, Glaedelig Jul.

into a forte of exuberance." Those simple days of the folk are gone, says Mr. Chubb; the glory is departed.

But the custom of making the rounds on Christmas eve to sing carols of peace and good will on earth still prevails here and there. —Literary Digest.



THE birthday of the Prince of Good-will was at hand. On the frosted windows I hung my holly-wreaths, looking out upon a world glittering in the first snow mantle of the year. Ice-coated trees gleamed with prismatic colors as the breeze stirred the branches; it was zero weather. Dan had dropped in with the season's greeting, and we sat together before the open fire. Dan was a bachelor, and if he didn't speak soon they'd be calling me an old maid! I was rich and he was poor. If I'd been sure that that was the reason for his silence, I'd have spoken myself. But I wasn't and our friendship was too beautiful a thing to spoil, if his love was not mine.



Annette came in and arranged the tea table at my side. "Certain people," he had mused, before Annette entered, "diffuse a charm as real and as hard to define as the perfume of a rose." This was poetical conversation for the practical Dan; there was something on his mind I hurried Annette into the kitchen for more cake before his mood should vanish, but—

The door-bell rang. It was too cool to keep anyone waiting; I answered it myself. A prim and tiny old lady stood there.

"I'm making a little extra for Christmas," she announced, cheerily. "Would you like to look at aprons?"

"Just what I'm in need of," I said. "Come in."

Taking her bag, I led her to the sitting room, and Dan placed a chair for her before the fire.

"Good-day and thank you," she greeted Dan. "How pleasant here by the fire!"

Annette came in with the cake. "Another teacup," I whispered. Her face registered, "You certainly are eccentric," but I ignored this. In warranted self-respect my little visitor had come to the front door and I saw no reason why she should not have tea. With bird-like movements, glancing now at me, now at Dan, she untied the satin strings of her neat but prehistoric bonnet.

"Oh, Haviland," she exclaimed appreciatively, handling her cup daintily. Now I was sure that she had seen better days.

"You have courage to be out today, little mother," said Dan.

"That's what my daughter thinks," twinkled the old dear. "She says at eighty-two one should be through wanting to run around. It's not so much the money," she fibbed proudly "but I like to get out and see life and people. One is always running into such lovely experiences like you—and tea. One can just see that you two are made for each other."

"Alas!" confessed Dan, frankly smiling. "I have not the honor to be the lady's husband."

"Let us look at aprons," I suggested, and the naughty romances spread them out.

Dan fingered the change in his pocket. "I'll take two of those white one for my wife," he announced.

The words were simple, but they fell upon my ear like a death sentence. "You never told me," I gasped reproachfully, as our guest turned to fold her supplies and arrange her bag.

"Well, I must go now," she said. "I'm staying too long. I've got to empty this bag before nightfall."

The door closed behind the unquenchable optimist. "Isn't she a wonder!" we exclaimed simultaneously, at which we locked little fingers and pressed thumbs, laughingly, while we wished.

I drew my hand away, as soon as was decent. No more familiarities now. "Think," said I, "from Haviland to peddling, and still the world is wonderful. It makes one ashamed to have been discontented."

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Games and Tricks

WHISTLING GAME

The "Whistling Game" is popular with young and old alike.

The guests are divided into two groups, one group being lined up against a wall at the end of the room. At the other end, facing them is an equal number of players. On the signal "Go!" each player runs towards his "opposite number" against the wall, and, standing in front of him, whistles—or tries to whistle—a tune. The player against the wall must name the tune, the first to do so correctly being the winner. Any tune may be chosen, and each player may whistle a different one. Few games are productive of more genuine merriment than this.

A TRICK

Have you ever tried this trick on a chum? First of all, half fill a glass with water. Then push a used match-stick into the top of a cork, all the top of the match, and push a square piece of paper into the slit. Now put the cork and "flag" in the water, and ask your chum if he can push it to the bottom of the glass without wetting the paper, match, or top of cork. He will probably give it up, and you can show him how it is done.

You simply take an eggcup, place it over the flag, and push it to the bottom, letting it come up gently again. The air in the eggcup will keep the water out, leaving the "flag" quite dry.

CATCH-HIM-IF-YOU-CAN

You may catch your chum in the following manner. Say, "Do you know why white sheep eat more than black ones?" "Are you sure about that?" he will ask, or make a similar remark. "Well, you see, there are more of them," you reply.

Then ask, "Can you write 'forty fathoms under the sea' in four words?"

If he fails to find the four words, tell him the secret. Simply write the words in the following manner:

the sea
forty fathoms
"There," you add, "I've written 'forty fathoms under the sea' in four words." By this time your chum will be on the alert and he may guess the answer to the following simple catch: Say, "I know where you are going tonight." He may reply, "Where?" or "No, you don't." Then add, "You're going to sleep."



For a Joyful Christmas GOD BLESS US EVERY ONE

"In praying and praising, in giving and receiving, in eating and drinking, in singing and making merry, in parents gladness and in children's mirth, in dear memories of those who have departed, in good comradeship with those who are here, in kind wishes for those who are far away, in patient waiting, sweet contentment, generous cheer, God bless us every one, with the blessing of Jesus."