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QUAINT CHRISTMAS CUSTOMS

'Twas Christmas' broached the mightiest tale, 'Twas Christmas' told the merriest tale; A Christmas gambol oft could cheer the poor man's heart through half the year. -Sir Walter Scott.

OLD SUPERSTITIONS

The world "Yule" - the old name for Christmas - survives in Yule-candle, Yule-cake or dough, and Yule feast. The festive board was always lit by the Yule-candle, which was usually of an enormous size and gaily decorated. The Yule-dough were little cakes frequently distributed by the baker among his customers. The house-wife who desired luck would keep the precious cake all through the year, excepting that she and her family "would not be injured by fire or water, or slain by the sword, and would never be in danger of falling into the hands of the adversary." On Christmas eve it used to be the custom in many parts of the country for the children to sit up till midnight in order that they might taste the Yule-cake and participate of the "furmety" - a decoction of creed corn and milk.

SOME OLD COOKERY CUSTOMS

Every land - indeed almost every family - has its own special dainties for the Christmas season. From remote antiquity has come to us this habit of Christmas feasting; indeed, the Christmas cakes are said to typify a direct connection between the adoration of the God of Light and the expressions of His power on earth in the fire and the hearth. In many of their Christmas customs today the peasantry of Europe is all unwittingly following the traditions of its pagan ancestry. Thus, little do the people of central France, who each year bake small crescent-shaped "gateaux de Noel," called "cornes-beaux," to give to the poor, realize that the odd shape of these cakes, resembling a bullock's horns, is a heritage of their heathen forefathers. Equally ignorant are the Scandinavians, who bake their Christmas cakes in the shape of a pig, and feast on roast pork for their Christmas dinner. They do not think that they are commemorating the sacrificial boar whose life was offered up each Yule-tide.

SOME GERMAN SUPERSTITIONS

In Earth Germany a person must not spin during the Twelve Nights of Christmas lest he or she should walk after death, nor after sunset on Saturday, for then mice will eat the work. If it is desired to have money and luck all the year round, one must not fail to eat herrings on New Year's Day; nor, if you wish to be lucky, must you rock an empty cradle or spill salt wantonly, or cross knives or point at the stars. If a dirty cloth is laid on the table over Christmas night it will make the angels weep; if you point upwards to the rainbow it will make the angels feet bleed; and if you talk of cabbage while looking at the moon you will hurt the feelings of the man in it.

LOOKING FORWARD TO CHRISTMAS.

Christmas is lived a thousand times before it comes. The Christmas sweets are tasted before they are taken from the tree. The Christmas presents are revealed in before Santa Claus puts them on the sled. The human spirit, impatient under the restraints of the clock, breaks away and lives Christmas before the prosaic almanac grants permission. How poor the world would be if deprived of the pleasure of expectation. Good things would lose half their virtue if we could not enjoy them before we get them into our hands. Looking forward is one of the fountains at which we drink the life of joy. Imagine, if you can, dropping into Christmas in the twinkling of an eye, without the privilege of tasting it in advance! Christmas becomes the great day of the year, because it is preceded by such elaborate and long drawn and loving preparation. To cut off all that preceded Christmas would be like shearing the sun of its beams. The whole year becomes brighter to everybody who has Christmas to look forward to.

It is part of the mission of the Christian religion to foster and develop the spirit of anticipation. Hope, says Ruskin, is the distinguishing characteristic of the Christian faith. Christianity keeps us on the tiptoe of expectancy. It entices us to look ahead. It will not permit us to consider present situations final. No matter how high we climb, we are directed to a still loftier height. However great our joy, there is a still sweeter blessedness ahead of us. Satisfaction with present attainments is forbidden, because of the mightier achievements within the compass of our developing powers. It was the habit of Jesus to keep his disciples' eyes on the future. When they were amazed by what they saw He thrilled them by saying, "Ye shall see greater things than these." When they were astounded by His miracles He assured them, "Greater things than these shall ye do." He reminded them of their relationship to a world whose glories man cannot conceive. He Himself had the heart of a child. He was always looking ahead. When He saw dark things immediately in front of Him He looked farther. He always looked through the darkness into the light. He never spoke of His death without referring to what would happen on the third day. For the joy that was set before Him He endured the agony of the cross.

IT MEANT MUCH.

A well known novelist was talking about criticism. "I like pointed criticisms," he said, "criticism such as I heard in the lounge of a theatre the other night at the end of a play." "The critic was an old gentleman. His criticism, which was for his wife's ears alone, consisted of these words: "Well, you would come!"

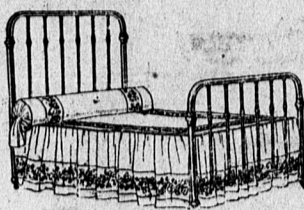
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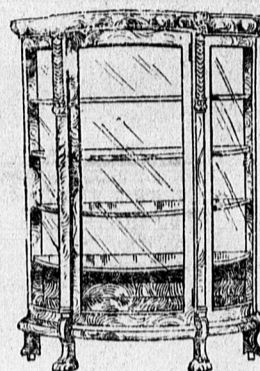
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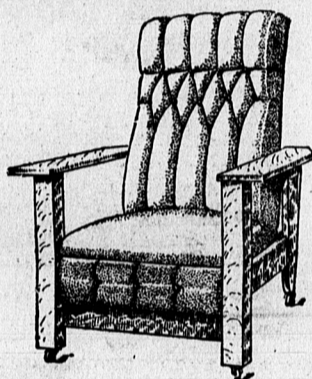


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