

Christmas Feasts

Many curious feasts arose in connection with the celebration of Christmas in early days. Thus, the ass on which Balaam rode in the "Reins Mystery" won the feast the title "Festum Assinarum," the Feast of the Asses. As it was celebrated in France, according to William Hone, it consisted almost entirely of dramatic show. On one occasion the clergy walked on Christmas Day in procession, habited to represent the prophets and other characters.

"Moses appeared in an alb and cope, with a long beard and a pointed hat, and a green vestment. Balaam, with an immense pair of spurs, rode on a wooden ass which encloased a speaker. There were also six Jews and six Gentiles. Among other characters the poor Virgin was introduced, singing mockish rhymes, as a Gentile prophet, and a translator of the sibylline oracles. They thus moved in procession through the body of the Church chanting verses and conversing on the nativity and kingdom of Christ, till they came into the choir.

"This service, as performed in the cathedral at Rouen, commenced with a procession in which the clergy represented the prophets of the Old Testament who foretold the birth of Christ; then followed Balaam mounted on the ass, Zacharias, Elizabeth, John the Baptist, the Sibyl, Erythraeus, Simeon, Virgil, Nebuchadnezzar and the three musicians in the furnace. After the procession entered the cathedral several groups of persons performed the parts of Jews and Gentiles to whom the choristers addressed speeches; afterward they called on the prophets, one by one, who came forward successively and delivered a passage relative to the Messiah. The other characters advanced to occupy their proper situations and reply to the questions of the choristers. They performed the miracle of the furnace; Nebuchadnezzar spoke, the Sibyl appeared, and then an anthem was sung, which concluded the ceremony.

"The Missal of an Archbishop of Sens" indicates that during such a service the animal itself, clad with precious priestly ornaments, was solemnly conducted to the middle of the choir, during which procession a hymn in praise of the ass was sung, ending with:—

"Amen, pray, most honored Ass, Sated now with grain and grass; Amen repeat, amen reply. And disregard antiquity. Hez val hez val hez val."

The service lasted the whole of a night and part of the next day and formed altogether the strangest, most ridiculous medley of whatever was usually sung at church festivals. When the choristers were thirsty wine was served; in the evening on a platform before the church lit by an enormous lantern, the grand chanter of Sens led a jolly band in performing broadly indecorous interludes. At respective divisions of the service the ass was supplied with drink and provender.

The Christ of the Snows

Set wine on the table; And bread on the plate; Cast logs on the ashes, And reverent wait.

The wine of love's sweetness Set out in thy breast, And the white bread of welcome To comfort the Guest.

Lo! shaken by ghost gods, Who angrily fly, The banners of Odin, Flame red on the sky.

The last note hath stricken; Did He pass? Was he here? It is sorrow or joy that Shall rule the new year?

The mother who watcheth The face of the child Sath, Ah! He was with us— The baby hath smiled!

The virgin who bends o'er The cup on the board Cries, Lo! the wine trembleth— 'T was surely the Lord! —From the Norwegian, tr. by Dr. S. Weir Mitchell.

With a Box of Candy

"Sweets to the sweet," the wise old saw, I quote because 'tis fitting, And tribute pay unto the law With gladness unremitting, "Like unto like" is also true, Therefore these candies haste to you.

With Shaving Material

Should you cut yourself in shaving, Don't—blame—me! Small effect has bitter raving, When the wound goes not so deep, But should your razor smoothly glide, Include me in your smile so wide.

With Picture of Some Rural Scene

If your thoughts of town are weary, Rest your eyes and dream, Gazing on this picture cheery, Of woodland (rural) (springtime) (vernal) vale and stream; Remember that had I my way, Such joys would greet you every day.



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Mother's Christmas Gift

It never comes to Christmas, but I think about the times, We used to save our pennies and our nickles and our dimes; And we bunched them all together, even little baby brother, And in something for the present that we always gave to mother.

We began to talk about it early in December, 'Twas a very serious matter to us children, I remember, And we used to whisper nightly our suggestions to each other, For by nothing we show our love for mother.

Hers must be a gift of beauty, fit to symbolize her ways; It must represent the sweetness and the love that marked her days, It must be the best our money, all combined, had power to buy, And be something that she longed for; nothing else would satisfy.

Then it mattered not the token, once the purchase had been made, It was smuggled home and hidden and with other treasures laid, And we placed our present proudly in her lap on Christmas Day, And we smothered her with kisses and we laughed her tears away.

It never comes to Christmas but I think about the times, We used to save our pennies and our dimes; And the only folks I envy are the slaters and the brothers Who still have the precious privilege of buying for their mothers.

A Prayer for a Little Home

(Florence Bone in the London Spectator.)

God send us a little home, To come back to, when we roam.

Low walls and fluted tiles, Wide windows, a view for miles.

Red firelight and deep chairs, Small white beds upstairs.

Great talk in little nooks, Dun colors, rows of books.

One picture on each wall, Not many things at all.

God send us a little ground, Tall trees standing round.

Homely flowers in brown sod, Overhead, thy stars, O God.

God bless, when winds blow, Our home, and all we know.

Old Christmas

Now he who knows old Christmas, He knows a carle of worth; For he is as good a fellow As any upon earth.

He comes warm-cloaked and coated, And buttoned up to the chin, And soon as he comes a-nigh the door We open and let him in.

We know that he will not fall us, So we sweep the hearth up clean; We set him in the old armchair, And a cushion whereon to lean.

And with sprigs of holly and ivy We make the house look gay, Just out of an old regard to him, For it was his ancient way.

He must be a rich old fellow; What money he gives away! There is not a lord in England Could equal him any day.

Good luck unto old Christmas, And long life let us sing, For he doth more good unto the poor Than many a crowned King!

At Christmas Time

'Long 'bout Christmas I remember all the things that I am told, An' it's generally noticed that I'm jus' as good as gold.

I'm not so very careful when it's Decoration Day, Or it's Easter that is comin', with the eggs that rabbits lay.

But when Christmas day is nearin' it's a very curious fact, That my parents seldom ask me; "Bud! is that the way to act?"

'Long 'bout Christmas it's no trouble for me to wash my neck, An' I always scrub my ears until I've got out every speck.

An' if company is talkin' I'm as quiet as a mouse, An' I wipe my feet off careful when I'm comin' in the house.

It certainly is funny, but at Christmas time I find I never think of startin' off to school with shoes unshined.

Most all the time my mother has to help me gettin' dressed, Coz I notice with my stockings that she puts 'em on the best.

An' it's hard to reach the buttons of my pants behind my back, But at Christmas time I notice that my fingers get the knack.

Of reachin' round exactly where I'm An' my Pa says I'm a dandy, an' my Ma says I'm a joy.

When we're gittin' on to Christmas I am quite a different boy, 'Long 'bout Christmas I just hurry home from school each day to see if my mother has an errand or some work to do for me.

An' I go to bed at bedtime an' I think to say my prayers, An' never leave my coat an' hat upon the parlor chairs, wantin' 'em to go.

An' I dress myself each mornin' an' I'm not so awful slow.

Scientific Discovery Greatest Since Newton

There was a large attendance of scientists at a joint meeting of the Royal Society and the Royal Astronomical Society in London on Saturday, when the results of the British observations of the recent total solar eclipse were made known.

The discussion was opened by the Astronomer Royal, Sir Francis Dyson, who described the work of the expeditions sent respectively to Soural, in northern Brazil, and the island of Principe, off the west coast of Africa. The London "Times" says it was generally accepted that the observations were decisive in verifying the prediction of Dr. Einstein professor of physics in the University of Prague, that rays of light from stars passing close to the sun, on their way to the earth, would suffer twice the deflection for which the principles enunciated by Sir Isaac Newton accounted. But there was a divergence of opinion as to whether science had to face merely a new and unexplained factor to reckon with a theory that would completely revolutionize the accepted fundamentals of physics.

Sir Joseph Thompson, president of the Royal Society, in reply to a question whether the discoveries meant a reversal of the law of gravity as defined by Newton, said they held good for ordinary purposes, but in highly mathematical problems the new conceptions of Einstein, whereby space became warped or curved under certain circumstances would have to be taken into account.

Dr. W. S. Lover, a well-known astronomer, said: It has hitherto been understood that light travelled in a straight line. Now we find it travels in a curve. It therefore follows that any object, such as a star, is not necessarily in the direction which it appears to be astronomically. This is very important of course. For one thing, a star may be a considerable distance further away than we have hitherto counted it.

Dr. Cromwell, one of the observers at Soural, said the evidence in favor of the gravitational bending of light was overwhelming. The British practical astronomer, Dr. Commellin said, verification of Einstein's theory were not very great. It was Sir Joseph Thomson, summing up the discussion said:

"These are not isolated results that have been obtained. It is not the discovery of an isolated fact, but of a whole continent of new scientific ideas of the greatest importance to some of the most fundamental questions connected with physics. It is the greatest discovery in connection with gravitation since Newton enunciated that principle."

Albert Einstein is a Swiss citizen, about 50 years of age. After occupying a position as professor of mathematics and physics at the Zurich Polytechnic School, and afterward at Prague University, he was elected a member of Emperor William's scientific academy in Berlin at the outbreak of the war. Dr. Einstein protested against the German professors' manifesto approving of Germany's participation in the war, and at its conclusion he welcomed the revolution. He has been living in chiefly in the United States, but of a philosophical thought that the change would be felt. Space would no longer be looked on as extending indefinitely in all directions. Euclidian straight lines could not exist in Einstein's space. They would all be curved, and if they travelled far enough they would regain their starting point.

Vastly different conceptions which are involved in this discovery and the necessity of taking Einstein's theory more into account were voiced by a member of the expedition, who pointed out that it meant, among other things, that the lines normally known as parallel do meet eventually, that a circle is not really circular, that three angles of a triangle do not necessarily make the sum total of two right angles.

"Enough has been said to show the importance of Einstein's theory, even if it cannot be expressed clearly in words," laughed the astronomer. One of the speakers suggested that Euclid was knocked out. Euclid laid down the axiom that parallel straight lines, if produced ever so far, would not meet. He said nothing about light lines.

A Christmas Scene

(By Charles Dickens.)

I have been looking on this evening at a merry company of children assembled round that pretty French toy, a Christmas tree. The tree was planted on the middle of a great round table and towered high above their heads. It was brilliantly lighted by a multitude of little tapers and every where sparkled and glistened with bright objects. There were rosy-cheeked dolls hiding behind the green leaves, and there were real watches (with movable hands, at least, and an endless capacity for being wound up) dangling from innumerable twigs. There were French polished tables, chairs, bedsteads, wardrobes, eight-day clocks and various other articles of domestic furniture (wonderfully made in Din at Wolverhampton) perched among the branches, in preparation for some fairy housekeeping.

There were jolly, broad-faced little men, much more agreeable in appearance than many real men, and no wonder, for their heads look off and showed them to be full of sugar plums. There were fiddles and drums. There were tambourines, books, work-boxes, paint boxes, peep show boxes, sweetmeat boxes and all kinds of boxes.

There were trinkets for the older girls, far brighter than any grown-up gold and jewels. There were baskets and pincushions in all devices. There were guns, swords and banners, real fruit, made artificially dazzling with gold leaf; imitation apples, pears and walnuts, crammed with surprises. In short, as a pretty child before me delightedly whispered to another pretty child, her bosom friend, "There was everything, and more."

The Coming of Christmas

Milton

Say, Heavenly Muse shall not thy sacred vein Afford a present to the Infant God? Hast thou no verse, no hymn, or solemn strain, To welcome him to this his new abode?

Now while the heaven, by the sun's team untrod Hath took no print of the approaching light, And all the spangled host keep watch in squadrons bright?

See how from far upon the eastern road The star-led wizards haste with odors sweet! Oh! run; prevent them with thy humble ode, And lay it lowly at His blessed feet; Have thou the honor first thy Lord to greet.

And join thy voice unto the Angel Quire, From out his secret altar touched with hallowed fire. "My name is Crabbe; I, Raschible Crabbe. I think all kids a bore, I'm sick of all this Christmas gab; It keeps me feeling sore.

"As for St. Nicholas, he's a pest; I'll prove it by the book. Of course, you're just like all the rest, You don't know. Well, then look! "For here's the yarn. A poor, poor wretch When he was short of meats, Seized on such kids as could ketch And pickled 'em, for eats.

"I don't deny this was a sin; Perhaps a serious one, I grant. But I do say, he must have been At large expense for salt. "Well, some wise meddler gave the hunch To old St. Nich, and he (The busybody) went to lunch And also stayed to tea.

"His host was game! (or rather sh, I think;—poor, easy mark! He waved his knife above the dish And asked Nich, 'Light or dark?' "Do you know what that old dot did, When he was served that grub? He waved his cross, and every kid Came tumbling from the tub.

THE BIGGEST PLUM PUDDING KNOWN

On December 12, 1718, at the order of a certain James Austin, an immense plum-pudding, weighing 1,000 lbs, placed in a huge copper at the Red Lion, Southwark, and boiled for fourteen days. When done, it was placed on a wagon drawn by six asses, and accompanied by a band of singular musicians playing on equally singular instruments (one of which was a drum eighteen feet in length and four feet in diameter), a then popular air: "What bumps of, andding my mother gave me," was drawn to the Swan Tavern, on Fish Street Hill, whence it set out under escort for St. George's Fields, where it was advertised to be divided amongst Austin's customers. In vain, however, did they await the expected feast. Every minute the crowds, through which the gargantuan delicacy was obliged to force its way, grew more unruly. The delicious smell that titillated their nostrils overcoming all sense of decorum, they attacked the escort and having after a sharp skirmish, put it to flight, soon possessed themselves of the coveted dish, which, in an incredibly short time, was distributed among the ravenous host of uninvited guests. This Austin seems to have been a specialist in plum-puddings. If he weighed £100 that he would bake one under water. The ingredients, when they had been well mixed, were in a tin pan, which in its turn was placed in a sack of lime, and the whole was then sunk to a depth of ten feet in the Thames, at Rotherhithe. There it was allowed to remain to the surface, and in due course placed before a number of specially invited guests, all of whom pronounced it to be excellent.

O Bethlehem, Sweet Bethlehem

(By Mrs. Lisa A. Fletcher.)

O Bethlehem, sweet Bethlehem, where first the Christmas fell, O Bethlehem, sweet Bethlehem, all glory to thy name! The chorus of the angels forevermore shall swell, Far, far above the ages, unchanging still the same.

O beautiful the story, that sweetest one of old! O beautiful the story of that mid-night far away! When the holy One of heaven came in the wintry cold, To usher in the glory and joy of Christmas day!

O the beauty and the mystery of the calm and silent night! O the beauty and the mystery of the a wondrous birth! O the splendor of the shining, the dawning of the light! Which bathes for aye in glory the weary waiting earth!

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The Bootblacks Christmas

I'm rich! I've got a dollar all my own To spend for Christmas—been a savin' some Since Fourth July, a little at a time, Doin' odd jobs, swearin' off on gum An' now what shall I spend it fer? My stars!

The show case is full an' heapin' up With presents fer to give the folks you like. There's Mame, now—she'd like a shiny cap; I know she would—poor little sickly thing. She cried one day because she had to drink

Out o' that mug that's cracked like anything. Yes, I'll buy that for her. Now, lemme think— That's twenty cents, an' I'll have eighty left. An' Billy's crazy for a top to spin; I'll get him one—that's ten cents more—now what.

I wonder, shall I buy fer Jim? I guess he'd like a jackknife best of all— I'll get one, an' a good mouth organ too. Jim—he my part—he's got a crippled foot. An' a drunken dad that beats him black and blue. Now, I've got forty left, and mother wants—

I know she does—a thimble—her'n in old And full o' holes and bent all out of shape. I wish I could get one of solid gold! That wouldn't be half good enough for her—

Not if 't was edged with diamonds all around. Best mother ever lived—I tell you what. The ain't many kids go lucky's me I'm bound! Now, I've got twenty left—I'll buy some gum. An' candy n' popcorn and some apples too. An' I'll be Santa Claus and have some fun.

A fillin' stockin's Christmas eve— I'll tell you. Th' ain't no picnic in this livin' world That's half so jolly as the one there'll be When all the kids come schiverin' round the stove On Christmas mornin'. (When they come to see Them stuffed out stockin's hangin' on the wall, Oh, how I'll holler, "Merry Christmas!" Then How 's prised they'll be! Yes, Merry Christmas all! —Harriet Francense Crocker in Buffalo News.

Christmas Means Love

We cannot picture it without seeing the spangled Christmas tree girt with the faces of gleeful youngsters, glad parents, and happy bodies returned home from town or far metropolis. It sounds like bells and crackling logs and shouts of children. And even our old, round-shouldered, sorrow-widened planet, with his eye knocked out on his cheek, pauses to smile from sea to sea, and love is everywhere rejuvenated.

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