HOW TO KEEP CHRISTMAS.

Lessons From the English Poets on the Holiday's Observance.

To learn how to keep Christmas in its true spirit, one cannot do better than to turn to the English poets, old and new.

England was my England when
Old Christmas brought its sports again,

says Sir Walter Scott, and, instead of giving one little day to this festival, our motherland devoted 12 days to its commemoration.

So now has come our joyfulest feast;
Let every man be jolly;
Each room with ivy leaves be drest
And every post with holly.
Without the door let sorrow lie,
And if for cold it hap to die,
We'll bury it in a Christmas pie
And evermore be merry,

writes George Wither, a poet of the seventeenth century.

On every Christmas eve the bells of old Cambridge ring out this ancient carol:

God bless you, merry gentlemen;
Let nothing you dismay,
For Jesus Christ, our Saviour,
Was born this happy day.

As the song runs on, its burden is that the holy tide of Christmas must efface all evil memories and unite men in the bonds of love and brotherhood.

Thackeray thus conveys the lesson of Christmas:

Come wealth or want, come good or ill,
Let young and old accept their part,
And bow before the awful will,
And bear it with an honest heart.
Who misses or who wins the prize
Go, lose or conquer as you can,
But if you fall or if you rise
Be each, pray God, a gentleman.
* * * * * * *
My song save this is little worth,
I lay the weary pen aside
And wish you health and love and mirth
As fits the solemn Christmastide,
As fits the holy Christmas birth.
Be this, good friends, our carol still—
Be peace on earth, be peace on earth,
To men of gentle will.

Charles Mackay's "Under the Holly Bough" breathes the true Christmas spirit by saying to all who have scorned or injured one another:

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.

Tennyson sums up the teachings of scores of Christmas poets when in verses addressed to the bells he sings:

Ring out old shapes of foul disease,
Ring out the narrowing lust of gold,
Ring out the thousand wars of old,
Ring in the thousand years of peace.

Ring in the valiant man and free,
The larger heart, the kindlier hand,
Ring out the darkness of the land,
Ring in the Christ that is to be.

—Selected.

THE CHRISTMAS HOLLY.

An Appropriate Decoration For This Season of Rejoicing.

A picturesque shrub especially useful at this time of the year is the holly, with its tough and shining spinous leaves and its pretty little, full, round berries. It is the only plant appropriate to this happy period that relieves the dead green and monotonous white of the nonflowering plants and vines supposed to belong to Christmas and the days that follow Epiphany. Like the mistletoe, most of the holly exposed for sale in American marts comes from Great Britain, although some species of the plant grow in the southern states.

The commercial holly, however, is cut in Scotland and sent here in bags. It is most valuable to work up in combination with laurel, ivy and mistletoe into wreaths, anchors, stars, crowns and other ecclesiastical designs, while for running decorations—that is, long festoons and great sweeps of green—a few of the bright red berries wound in at regular intervals heighten the effect and relieve the eye.

The favorite manner of arranging holly for sale is to make it up into some one of the numerous designs appropriate to the day and the season, and thus most of the plant offered this year is fashioned. Holly is not so expensive as the mistletoe and is more hardy and lasting. It has no tradition connected with it, however, and thus loses its sentimental value. But to the decorator, the artist, the florist and the dealer it is one of the best, most ornate and suggestive plants for use at home or in public places that can be selected at this season.—Chicago Times.

Old Christmas Customs.

One custom that has come to us from across the sea is that of hanging up stockings on Christmas eve. Little children are taught that St. Nicholas brings in gifts to them through closed windows, and it is supposed this custom started from a tradition that St. Nicholas used to throw purses of money in through the windows of poor maidens, so that they might have marriage portions.

Howison, in his sketches of upper Canada, says that he met once at midnight on a beautiful moonlight Christmas eve an Indian, who was softly creeping along on the ground. Upon being questioned, the Indian motioned to him to be silent, and said: "We watch to see the deer kneel. This is Christmas night, and all the deer fall upon their knees to the Great Spirit and look up."—Selected.

Laurel and Ground Pine.

Next to the mistletoe and holly the laurel and ground pine are most favored, the former's glossy leaves and green berries suggestive of good cheer and always forming an effective background when gay berries or mosses are used in addition. The ground pine coils easily and gracefully into wreaths and is invaluable for twining about staircases or pillars or for using in decoration on a large scale when boughs of spruce, hemlock and cedar are also much in vogue.—St. Louis Republic.

Paris Christmas Confections.

Parisian confectioners and florists decorate their shops with some effort at symbolism on the fete days of the year. Last Christmas bonbonnieres of donkeys, with panels of infant dolls, were displayed. The favorite cake of this holiday is almond, thinly made and covered with figures. Plum cake is seen in the north of France during the holidays. Another cake, "l'enfant Jesus," cut out in the form of a child, is very popular with the children.—Exchange.

Christmas Song.

Why do bells for Christmas ring?
Why do little children sing?

Once a lovely shining star
Seen by shepherds from afar
Gently moved until its light
Made a manger's cradle bright.

There a darling baby lay
Pillowed soft upon the hay,
And its mother sang and smiled,
"This is Christ, the holy child."

Therefore bells for Christmas ring;
Therefore little children sing.
—Eugene Field in Chicago Herald.

NORMAN CHRISTMAS.

CUSTOMS AND FEASTS OF ENGLAND'S ANCIENT RULERS.

Celts and Saxons Were the Servants of Their Conquerors — Stewed Lampreys From the Severn—Drinks of the Early Britons—Peacocks and Boars' Heads.

Celtic superstitions and traditions prevail in England, the land of the mistletoe; the romance of Arthur and his knights lingers around Avalon; Roman luxury is with us in Bath and Cirencester; Somerset recalls the scenes of Athelney and Glastonbury, and in the magnificent piles of Worcester, Gloucester and Hereford we still gaze in admiration on these wonders of Norman generosity.

But what have these Normans bequeathed to us of Christmas customs? Nothing distinctive, for their ancestors, the sea kings, were but offshoots of the same Scandinavian forefathers of the Saxons, and thus we had already received through Dane and Saxon the observances of northern Yule. But a greater luxury and love of display in every form entered English life. Quality, no longer quantity, was the fashion of the board. The ox and calf flesh, sheep and swine flesh, appear as beef, veal, mutton and pork; huge horns of home brewed ale give place to wines; spiced and highly seasoned dishes first appear. But at heart the Norman is no more refined than the Saxon. Where the Saxon is simple minded, trustworthy and faithful, the Norman is crafty, cunning and deceitful. His fair words may sound sweeter, 'tis all.

Many and varied now are the dishes at feasts. Our terrapin and canvasback duck had their prototype in the crane, indispensable at all aristocratic feasts, and in Becket's days, for King Henry was a veritable gormand, we find such dishes as "dillegrout," "karumpie" and "maupigyrnun."

Dillegrout required great skill on the cook's part, for it was composed of almond milk, the brawn of capons, sugar and spices, chicken parboiled and chopped and is often known as "le messe de gyron." If fat were added to it, then it became "maupigyrnun."

The tenant of the manor of Addington in Surrey held his lands in return for a mess of dillegrout on the day of the king's coronation.

The Norman kings had learned to appreciate the stewed lampreys of the Severn, and the loyalty of Gloucester was tested every year by the preparation of a huge lamprey pie for the sovereign.

So fond was Henry II of this rich dish that his gluttony overcame his prudence, and his last illness and death resulted from the same. John, too, fined the citizens of Gloucester for not sending him their usual tribute. But when lampreys cost 50 cents apiece and a whole sheep's carcass could be bought for the same sum, need we wonder at the economical tendencies displayed toward the worthless king?

The Christmas lamprey pie, which Gloucester sends to the reigning king or queen, is well worth notice. Last year the custom, fallen into abeyance, was revived, and a pie weighing 31 pounds was dispatched to Windsor and gratefully acknowledged by her majesty. According to an ancient recipe, "take out ye backe bone, season ym with cloves, mace, nutmeg, pepper and allspice, stew ym in beef gravy, port wine and wine of Madeira, put ym in a pie, with chopped anchovies, flour and butter; eat yt with lemon juice, mustard and horse radish."

Accompanying this gift are silver skewers bearing the city arms, engraved or raised in relief. The English had long ere this time been celebrated for their drinking capabilities.

Iago says, "Your Dane, your German and your swag bellied Hollander are nothing to your English."

The mead, cider, ale, pigment and morat of the Celts and Saxons have Norman successors in claret or clarre, garhioflac and hippocras. The Saxon morat was made of honey and mulberries, and the Norman hippocras, indispensable at all high feasts, was sweetened wine mixed with spices. The garhioflac was a white wine spiced with girofle or cloves, and we can still read an order of Henry III directing the keeper of his wines to get ready for Christmas two tuns of white wine to make garhioflac and one tun of red wine for claret.

The same king gives orders for peacocks and boars' heads for the feast, showing how luxury was creeping in more and more. It was this king whose coronation at Gloucester is depicted in one of the cathedral windows. In a notable Christmas spent there in 1234 nearly all his nobles left him because he had given the best seats at table to foreigners.

But we must never forget that until Crecy was fought and won in 1346 there was no English Christmas. Previous to this Saxon and Norman dwelt apart as servant and master, the Saxon clinging to his simpler if coarser mode of life. The Norman sat scornful and aloof in his ceremonious feasts. But the leaven was none the less working, and each successive generation of the two races became more and more cognizant of the other's doings. The Saxon dwelling as servant in the Norman's halls must conform in part to the ways of the household, and the Norman child devoted to his faithful Saxon servant listened with eager ears to the tales of Arthur and his knights, for the Saxon and Celt had long ere this made common cause.

We have no tale of the reverence of the cross to tell in the observance of a Norman Christmas, and yet the wars of the cross drew Saxon and Norman closer and closer, until in the time of Edward III they made common cause and fought bravely side by side, the Saxon full of admiration for the skill which could conquer brute force in feats of arms, and the Norman no longer disdainful, for he finds the Saxon yeoman a trusty friend, a faithful subject and a worthy ally.

Written for the Kent News.

CHRISTMAS BELLS.

Hear the Christmas bells merrily ringing
Through the pure and frosty air!
Hear the happy children singing
Christmas songs and Christmas cheer!
O'er leaf-flown wood and sparkling river,
O'er rugged field and grassy glen,
E'er rebounding hear the echo—
Peace, good will toward men.

For again the fixed seasons of the year,
The time by holy prophets foretold,
Have brought to us again, and welcome 'tis,
And e'er will be as in days of old.
Let the world rejoice, both rich and poor,
Join the chorus clear as the music swells,
Bid your hearts keep time to the harmony sweet
Of the beautiful Christmas bells.

But do those bells bring to all naught save gladness and joy?
Do they ne'er recall sorrow and pain?
Ah yes, as they vibrate some pain-crushed hearts
Are throbbing to griefs sad strain.
Whilst the music resounds and a melody sweet
Profuses the silent air,
Like the much strained harp strings, many sad hearts
Are breaking in slow despair.

For as the year has flown so dear hopes have fled,
And some hearts that were joyous and glad
Have bidden farewell to a precious loved one,
And now are lonely and sad.
God's angels have flown to some bright, happy home,
And chosen a flower fair,
And borne it away to the heavenly mansion
To add to the treasures there.

O, Christmas bells, with your gleeful chiming,
And notes that bespeak of the Saviour's love,
Send forth your anthems on high ascending,
Beyond the clouds to the skies above.
And again descend to these earthly borders
From the Heavenly regions in glory fair,
And bring to our lonely hearts to cheer us
Some message of love from our dear ones there.

But the world grows older and hearts beat on,
As it were, like the great power-loom,
Giving life to the body and strength to the soul,
Awaiting its pending doom.
But its hidden workings, its secrets all,
Great God, are known only to Thee,
Thou knowest its weakness, knowest its powers,
Thou knowest its misery.

But thou lovest thy children, thou dost what is best,
When thou givest them crosses to bear,
And though the feet may stumble and the tears flow fast,
Thou bid'st them never despair.
And to-day whil'st the bells ring their praises to Thee,
Thou wilt give them courage again
To sing "Glory be to God on high,
Peace, good will toward men."

MAMIE A. STRONG.

Belle View, Md.

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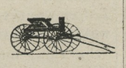

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