



JOLLY OLD ST. NICK



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Celebrating Christmas

By ANNA DEMING GRAU

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WE SHALL have to go farther back than the Christian era to find the source of Christmas celebration, for we borrowed it from the nations existing long before the coming of the Christ Child.

Christmas came from early Egyptian civilization, from the Teutonic barbarians, or the pagan Greek and Roman nations—or perhaps from all of them. But in the days of the early Christians Christmas ceased to be observed merely as a day of merrymaking and feasting. They celebrated it as a day of good will and kindness, the bestowing of gifts, and a time of peace, but they considered it a holy festival and too filled with solemnity and sacred joy to be made a time of hilarity and boisterous jollity.

That the very date is uncertain makes little real difference. In those early days of the Christians they thought it following the heathenish customs to observe birthdays. We cannot wonder at this when we remember that every god and goddess every noted man, and every animal considered sacred must each have a



special day of feasting and festivity. It is not strange that they should have come to a time when they put the whole custom aside, and celebrated none at all, not even the birthday of the Child of Bethlehem.

It was not until four hundred years later, not until Christianity had triumphed and become a recognized factor in the world that they even began

to question the real date of Christ's birth.

The Western empire had accepted December 25 as the date, and the Eastern churches celebrated January 6, while other dates from September 8, while other dates from September 29 to May 20 were observed, and each of these with some good reason for its selection. It was Pope Julius who finally settled the controversy by accepting the ruling of the Western church and established December 25, and by the middle of the Fourth century this date was generally recognized. In the pagan nations this had been the time when a festival of joy took place, because it was then that the sun was supposed to begin to recede from the equator.

They celebrated the 21st of December by all manner of licentious revels and heathen debauchery, and ever



after the coming of Christianity it was centuries before these pagan customs and practices were eliminated. And it was not until after the Middle Ages that the meaning and the significance of the season began to dawn upon the minds and hearts of men.

In old England Christmas became a time of feasting, drinking and hilarious merrymaking—not a very advanced conception, but a step beyond the pagan idea. Later the spirit of Puritanism began to influence English customs and public zeal ran so high that all gayety and all festivity came to be considered sinful.

All observances of special days were declared designed by the "devil," and the famous Roundhead parliament set aside the celebration of Christmas, Easter and Whitsuntide.

For twelve years no special days were observed in England, and when they were once more taken back into favor the result was what might have been expected, for the Christmas season became a time of feasting, drinking, dancing and wild revel, lasting for twelve days and nights. The lord of misrule came into existence—this was the chosen master of festivities, into whose hands the keys of the house were given and whose word was law while the revel lasted. The days and nights were full of "all manner of hilarity, and a most wild and merriest time was had," we are told.

The Song of Christmas

By JAMES WHITCOMB RILEY

CHANT me a rhyme of Christmas— And though it is filled with laughter, let it be pure and strong.

Sing of the hearts brimmed over with the story of the day— Of the echo of childish voices that will not die away.

Of the blare of the tasseled bugle, and of the timeless clatter and beat Of the drum that throbs to muster squadrons of scampering feet.

But, O, let your voice fall fainter, till, blent with a minor tone, You temper your song with the beauty of the pity Christ has shown.

And sing one verse for the voiceless; and yet ere the song be done, A verse for the ears that hear not, and a verse for the sightless one.

For though it be time for singing a merry Christmas glee, Let a low, sweet voice of pathos run through the melody.

At first only the royal households had these lords of misrule, but the custom spread until almost every household had its ruler of the season's revels. But gradually, as time passed, these wild celebrations gave place to festivals none the less joyous, but more befitting the season.

The ceremony of bringing in the Yule log was observed, of decorating the house with holly and mistletoe,



the lighted candle in the window, and the midnight singing of carols.

Still later Christmas became a day marked by bountiful dinners given to the poor by rich landowners, rather than merely a time of feasting and merrymaking.

And slowly the real Christmas spirit is coming more and more into the hearts of humanity, as we grow each year to better understand the song the angels sang that starlit night on the Judean hills. And "on earth peace, good will to men," means more with each recurring year as we open our hearts to the Child of Bethlehem.

THE CLOWN'S CHRISTMAS

By Mary Graham Bonner

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FOR YEARS he had been funny. For years he had painted his face, worn funny clothes and had made jokes. He had traveled first of all in this country with a road circus. Then, when the road circus was going out of business, more or less, he joined a road circus abroad. And now he was very old.

But every afternoon and every night for ten months of the year he made jokes. He was in a small circus, too, so sometimes he had to take other parts.

The performing fox terriers acted with him. They were his pets. And how he loved them. How could some people be unkind to their pets? Not the old clown.

There was the donkey, too. When he paid too much attention to the dogs the donkey came along and gave him a push to tell him that the donkey, too, wanted some attention.

And now he had planned to have a holiday. A long holiday. He would take a little place and with his donkey and his fox terriers they would rest after their work.

They would not join the circus another year. They were all old. How tired he had become after some of the performances that year. He had washed his face in the basin



of cold water outside his wagon and had not even bothered to get off all the makeup.

The water was cold. It was hard to heat water after the performance was over, and only a little of the paint came off—only a little cold-looking pink water was at the bottom of the basin.

But the dogs didn't mind. They slept on the end or by the side of his cot in his wagon. They jumped in after him each evening, and they each kissed him good night. They didn't mind paint. They were used to it.

Oh, yes, he would take a long, long holiday. He would rest on the little he had managed to save. It would be enough for him and his pets.

But as the days passed along he seemed to feel rested and the pets seemed to have new vigor and strength. It was splendid to feel rested again. A family had invited him to Christmas dinner—and he had accepted and he had asked, too, if he could come with his donkey and bring his dogs along. They, he said, would help put on a little show for the children.

It was all agreed. But when Christmas afternoon came and the Christmas dinner was over, and the old clown was beginning his show for the children, he knew then that he could never take more than a few months' holiday from being a clown.

The laughter and the delight and the shrieks and the cries of joy from the children were things the old clown could not get along without.

This Christmas had shown him that!

Naughty Papa



"Mother, does Santa Claus love my nursemaid, too?"
"I guess so, Thomas. Why?"
"Well last Christmas I saw Santa holding her on his lap."

Trying to Get Station S-A-N-T-A



A Christmas Prayer

By ANNA LOUISE STRONG in Life and Light

SWEET Child of Peace, across the ancient strife Bringing glad melody of angel psalm, Our hearts are restless with the care of life— O, bring to us Thy calm!

Dear Lord of Love, the world is waiting still The high achievement of Thy gracious plan; O, grant us Thine all-conquering good will, Thy loving faith in man!

Master of Death, Thy greatest gift is yet— To know Thy sacrifice, to share Thy loss, Let in the mirth of Christmas we forget the glory of the Cross.

Her Christmas Wedding

By Emily Burks Adams

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GRANDMOTHER, tell us a real Christmas story—one you really experienced. Tell us the very best Christmas you ever had—"

Julia and Juanita, grandmother's adored granddaughters, settled themselves, for, to them, no one could tell stories equal to grandma's.

"All right, girls, that won't be hard. The very best Christmas I ever had was my wedding day. I was married on Christmas day and the most precious gift I ever received was your grandfather."

"Well, it was like this: Our Christmases and weddings were very different from now. My wedding dress was a pretty calico, the first I ever had, and cost one dollar a yard. Up to this time I had worn woolsey, we called them, and I spun and wove it. My mother was afraid I'd take cold, so I had to wear my calico over the wool one. We didn't have hope boxes then—we had hopes, though. It was a disgrace for a girl to marry and not possess a feather bed and some quilts and a pair of home-made blankets. I had all these, to be sure.

"My worst worry was for fear Peg's cakes would be fat, for she had a habit of spilling cakes by making them too rich, when she wanted them especially good. I, too, wanted the plum pudding just so, and the turkeys properly cooked—in case we got any—for my father had to go to the woods and kill wild turkey."

"Oh! grandma, how thrilling! Did you get a turkey?"

"Yes, your grandfather came in with six. Peg cooked four, for we were expecting all the kinfolks from both sides of the house. This was the day before, and our kinfolks began coming that evening, for some lived ten miles and it was too far for the oxen to make the trip in time next morning. Oh, yes, we drove oxen—and I much prefer them to these human-killing automobiles of today.

Both Julia and Juanita laughed.

"Oh, do go on, grandma!"

"Well, we were to be married at high noon Christmas day, so by ten



o'clock Christmas Eve our feather beds were full. We didn't try to put more than six in one bed—three at the head and three at the foot—beds were made on the floor all over the house, and we slept as soundly as you on your fine box springs of today, and nothing disturbed us only an occasional snore, and that wasn't half as bothersome as the sputtering of these flying machines.

"Well, the next day dawned fair, and I think everybody said 'Happy is the bride the sun shines on.' Peg assured me the cakes were fine and turkeys tender. The great, long table was 'set' and we were married under a bough of mistletoe—and your grandfather kissed me for the first time. I'm sure no girl of today can say that. Everybody shook my hand and wished me much joy and we all went to dinner. Your grandfather and I ate at the first table; most of the women waited, for in those times the men always ate first. I suppose it was proper then; anyway, they did.

"The next day we drove over to your grandpa's home for the infare, and had another big dinner, and I had a cheaper calico. I called it my second-day dress. We visited my folks and his folks about a week and then took our belongings in an ox-cart to



our home, four miles away—a one-room log house built by grandpa. Your mother was born there.

"That was a great Christmas, and we were happier in one room than those in mansions today.

"Oh, that was a great day! Yes, it was truly Christ's day and Christ's way. The same Savior reigned then as now, and he has the same message—I go to prepare a place for you, that where I am there ye may be also."

"Good night, girls, grandma must retire. Tomorrow is Christmas day, but sixty-seven years ago I received a gift better than any I'll get tomorrow. I'll be with father before another Christmas rolls around—and there'll be another great Christmas and the same Christ will reign. Good night, dear."