

CURIOUS ORIGIN OF MANY OF OUR CHRISTMAS CUSTOMS

The Christmaside Festivities and Observations Date Back to Pagan Rites, but the Month Selected Was February

THE FIRST XMAS TREE AND THE USE OF CANDLES

Burned by Romans to Drive Away Evil Spirits--Scandinavians First Used the Toy-Covered Fir Tree in a Heathen Festival--The First Christmas Carol Was Almost Unfit for Publication, but a Change Soon Came

At this season, of the year when all the world is bent on merry-making it becomes a matter of interest to trace up the origin of some of the customs which make Christmas what it is.

and winter and were the evergreens most easily obtained. In Rome, palmetto leaves and the long, tapering plumes of the palm that all who know the Florida have so often admired on the shores of the Mediterranean, were used in the winter festivities, and from these the Christmas tree, or Christ tree, as it was originally called, is derived.



THE PARISH CHOIR

might also be in use, to the destruction of the religious character of the Christmas festival. Few mothers and fathers who will adorn a Christmas tree for their little ones with many colored candles on Christmas eve know that they will be doing precisely what the Romans of old did hundreds of years ago. It was a pagan feast which the Romans celebrated, however, the date being February 21.

rainy season in Judea was never chosen by the shepherds for open-air watching of their flocks by night--was selected, as many other feasts long before Christianity was founded, on account of winter solstice, when the year has completed a revolution, or as was then supposed, the fiery wheels of Phobus's chariot had once more rolled round the earth.

Here, then, is the origin of the candle-bearing Christmas greenery which becomes the elegant Christmas tree of today. With the exception of the Christmas tree, few of the old customs remain.



AN EARLY ITALIAN MISSAL

The toy-covered fir tree was first used by the heathen Scandinavians of long ago. Their religion was as fantastic as the mythology of ancient Greece and Rome and as crude in some respects as that of the most depraved savages. But the use of the fir tree was one of its few beautiful features, and the fact that it has survived and has given joy to millions of children for countless generations fully atones for their objectionable features.

These representations of the Christ oracle, as they were called in France and Germany, are still exhibited in churches, Catholic and Lutheran, all over Europe. From the early hymns sung by the peasants as well as by the monks at these mysteries came the Christmas carols, or noels, as they are called in French.

The correct German Christmas tree always has an angel or Christkind on the topmost branch, with a tinseled star at the end of a staff like any pantomime fairy, and if the tree belongs to a very orthodox family there is usually at its foot a small toy group representing the Saviour's birth in the stable at Bethlehem. The tree represented, though grown from a heathen root, is no doubt still the tanebaum which from Germany has become naturalized in America, France and England.

newed attraction and carols were sung by village choirs all over the continent of Europe. In some of the far-away countries of England, where the changing fashions of London have not yet penetrated to the rustics, the old-time custom is still continued of the parish choir making the rounds of the homes of the gentry and singing Christmas carols.

A well-known New York society man who was the guest of a titled Englishman at the latter's country house during the Christmas season, described the doings of the parish choir to the writer in this way:

"The carols still sung in the country in some parts of England by boys in smock-frocks, with ribbons tied to their hats and shoulders, are a curious mixture of religious and profane; and I recall a verse or two of these noels that are really comic.

"Looking out of my window one night--I was passing a Christmas week in the north country--to learn what was the cause of a subdued muttering and whispering in the carriage drive, in front of the old Elizabethan house, I saw some dozen chawbacons, most of whom carried lanterns, arranging themselves in a half-circle on the snow outside.

"One white-haired old man, with spectacles and a knitted woolen night-cap, held a clarinet and seemed to be the perceptor. He was probably the parish clerk. Another was presiding over an enormous bass viol, while a small boy, who was enveloped in a worsted comforter and gloves, which together nearly concealed him, held aloft a small fir tree on a pole, with a lantern hanging from beneath the boughs.

"The clerk was so impressed with the dignity of his position that he took some time to make his preparations, which period was employed by the choir in stamping their feet and clapping their arms across them to keep up their carols. There was a keen wintry wind which carried all sounds away, now and then, except the few notes that the double-bass grunted out; but I caught the most important stanzas and have never forgotten them.

"Langins the sung to the few notes of some monotonous old canticle, accompanied by the despatchy moans of the viol and the ear-piercing discords of the clarinet, with the hilarious cries of a north wind in the old park trees joining in, and you will have a faint idea of the beauty of the serenade.

Greet another Christmas morning! Pass the mug of good brown ale! Pumps and vanities be coming, Christians, pull the Devil's tail! Gentles all! Come, broach a barrel To the health of our squire! When you hear our Christmas carol Don't forget the Parish choir!

with in all north of England houses at Christmas time. It is a memory of the offerings made to Hulda, the Scandinavian Ceres, to obtain her promises for the harvests of the coming year, as the burning of the Yule-log was brought down from remote ages when fire-sacrifice was made to the Sun-God."

On the crest of Clinch mountain, at 3 o'clock in the afternoon, I came to a settler's cabin, and the settler sat on a log by the door with the dead body of a wildcat at his feet. He was a man more than 50 years of age, and his shirt hung in strings and tatters and his face was scratched and bleeding. On the doorpost, ten feet away, sat his wife, who was a woman about 20 years of age. Her hair was hanging down her back, her dress was torn in three or four places, and she was holding a rag to her bleeding nose. Both bowed to me as I came up, but nothing was said to me in salutation.

"So, when I killed a wildcat?" I queried after a bit. "Yes," replied the man, as he gave the body a push with his foot. "She's a pretty big one?" "Yes; purty hefty." "And she made a hard fight of it, I judge?" "No. She was up a tree and I brang her down at fust shot. No, she didn't make no fight 'all. Hadn't no time to make a fight."

"I thought from the looks of both of you that there had been an awful tussle." "So thar has, stranger--so thar has," replied the old man as he drew a long breath, "but the cat was dead afore the tussle took place. I killed her about a mile away and I brang her home to skin her and sell the pelt fur whisky and terbacker.

"And I wanted to sell it for snuff and lasses," said the woman. "I was sot," said the husband. "And I was sotter," added the wife. "And then the awful tussle took place and lasted an hour, and hain't been decided yit. We've jist stopped for break, and I got you a drink of water, thar's the gourd, and back of the house thar's a spring, and you'd better git along and leave us to settle this yere fuss by ourselves!"

I got a drink of water and returned the gourd to its peg and went on my way. When I had gone about forty rods I heard yells and whoops and realized that the conflict had been renewed, but it was not for me to return. It was clearly a family fight, and though it was none of my business which whelped I felt somewhat elated as I noticed that the wife yelled twice where he whooped once and was probably getting the best of it--Detroit Free Press.

THE GAGE OF LOVE A red rose at Lucinda's feet! Ho, gallants! stand and wait, Who'll race that royal rose so great And wear it on your breast! A red rose at Lucinda's feet! Who loves Lucinda best? A red rose at Lucinda's feet! Ho, gallants! speed amain! That rose hath known her kisses sweet-- Her lips its crimson stain. A red rose at Lucinda's feet! What knight that rose shall gain? A red rose at Lucinda's feet! See where her lips are fleet! Through light and storm, on pinions feet, Speed, Love, from east to west! A red rose at Lucinda's feet! Who loves Lucinda best? --Frank L. Stanton in Atlanta Constitution.

THE STORY OF CAPTAIN JACK

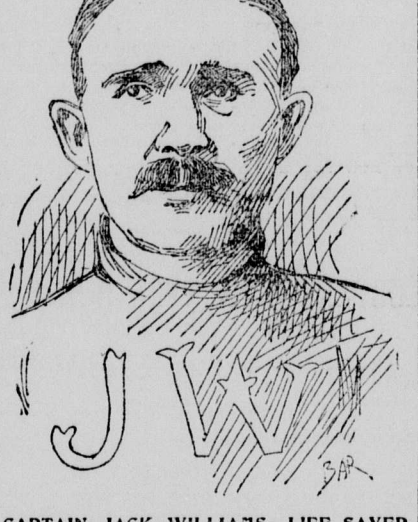
He Has Saved Many Lives but is Now Quite Destitute

HIS RECORD GIVEN IN FULL

Was a Great Swimmer in His Day and Loved the Water Better Than the Land--His Record as a Swimmer.

The world renowned and famous long distance swimmer, Capt. Jack Williams, so often reported in this country and Canada as dead, is alive and is now located in Los Angeles, Cal. He is known in Canada as the celebrated Malta Swimmer, in the east as the Portuguese Water King, and in California as Capt. Jack Williams. Reports have had this once famous man dead for more than four years.

He resigned his vocation as swimmer



CAPTAIN JACK WILLIAMS, LIFE SAVER and life saver on account of rheumatism contracted while in this business and entered the hospital at San Francisco, where he remained six months and twenty-two days.

In October, 1894, the Athletic club at Oakland gave him a benefit, raising enough funds to send him to Los Angeles, at which place he wished to spend the winter, and as his health did not improve any by spring the Los Angeles Athletic club gave him a benefit to raise the necessary funds to send him to the springs in San Bernardino county for a course of treatment, where under the care of a physician, with the hot mineral baths, he has been for the past six months and has derived considerable benefit from this treatment.

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CHRISTMAS CAROLS. By T. B. CRYSTAL.

Christmas bells, Oh! Christmas bells, chiming through white-mantled dells, Sweet the tale your music tells, Of that blessed birthday when came to earth the Infant King! Peal, oh, bells! with rapture ring, While the children sweetly sing, Peace on earth, good will to men! Old Santa comes, With dolls and drums, And everything that squeaks or hums, Hell make no noise When with his toys, He fills the hose of girls and boys. Open wide your purse plerotic, Give with nilling hand your gold! Make your charity historic, For the Christmas day grows old! Take a basket or a barrel To the needy, on your way Try to sing a Christmas carol, Celebrate earth's greatest day!

ton one mile at Lake Pontchartrain, \$30 a side. September 1883, defeated Moreau, champion of France, in one-mile race at Spanish Fort, Lake Pontchartrain, for \$10,000 a side. July, 1884, defeated George Phillips, three miles, New Orleans, for \$100 a side. August, 1884, defeated Charles Fitzgerald, one-mile race, at St. Louis, for \$300 a side. June, 1885, defeated George Easterly, two-mile race, at St. Louis, purse, \$300. From that time to the present Captain Jack Williams has held the championship of the world. In 1884 swam ten miles down the Mississippi river from Collington to New Orleans, nine miles, with hands and feet strapped. In 1885 crossed the harbor of Havana, Cuba, 1 1/2 miles, by walking in the water without the aid of his hands, in each of which he carried a flag. In 1885 swam 2 1/2 miles in still water in Cork lake, St. Louis, with hands and feet strapped. Time, six hours thirty minutes. July, 1888, gave an exhibition at Melanburg, Lake Pontchartrain, New Orleans. August, 1888, swam from Alton, Ill., to St. Louis, twenty-five miles, with hands and feet strapped. September, 1888, gave an exhibition at St. Louis for the benefit of Jacksonville, Fla., yellow fever sufferers. September 14, swam across the San Francisco bay. Time, two hours ten minutes. In the following month he swam around Seal rock, he being the only man who ever accomplished the feat now living. He has given exhibitions at Cedar Lake park, Kansas City; Council Bluffs, Second-street park, Los Angeles; Woodward's gardens, Cliff house, Alameda mole and various other points. As a life-saver this once famous man commenced when at the age of 8 years, by saving the life of a schoolmate from drowning. At the age of 11, together with his father, grandfather and eighteen others, in a fishing smack, they were caught in a storm and the boat was capsized, Jack saving his grandfather, and being unable to reach his father, he, with six others, was drowned; three lives in Rio Janeiro, Brazil, they being the mate's son and two ship-caulkers; ten in the River Praite, near Arson sound, in Paraguay Republic; one in San Benson, the cook of the English ship Regent; one in Mesebeck, Africa, a native; two in Calcutta river, outside of the bar; these were the two daughters of the captain of the ship King Arthur; one in Liverpool, England; two boys in Cardigan, Cuba, boat upset; twenty-three in Montreal, Canada; one in Toronto, Canada; two in Boston, Mass., one lady and her brother, the lady afterward became his wife; one in New York city at the foot of Thirty-fourth street; one at Stratham beach on Lake Michigan in South Chicago; one off the steamer Wyoming at Memphis, Tenn.; eight off the steamer J. W. White in the Mississippi river, while the boat was on fire; one at the foot of St. Julia street, New Orleans; twenty-two in a baptismal party at the same place, being thrown into the river on account of the wharf giving away; six in St. Louis, Mo.; three in Kansas City, Mo.; one in St. Joseph, Mo.; three in Lake Manantlan, St. Paul, Minn., sailing boat upset with two ladies and one gentleman; one at Belle Isle in the Detroit river at Detroit, Mich.; one at Santa Monica, Cal.; one in Terrace bath at Alameda,

Cal.; fourteen in Piedmont baths at Oakland, Cal.; one lady in Lake Merritt also at Oakland; four at Sacramento; one at Vallejo street wharf, San Francisco, one lady at Cliff house city. His reward for all the above deeds was very small. The gentleman he saved at Montreal, three miles, New Orleans, and amounted to one hundred dollars. Captain Jack Williams is now located in Los Angeles, Cal., for the winter and is in almost destitute circumstances, and should this article ever reach any one of the persons he has saved, and they feel so inclined any gift would be much appreciated by Captain Jack.

AN OLD-FASHIONED LOVER

One of the originals of Moliere's Les Precieuses Ridicules, that delicious satire on La Maison Rambouillet, was Mademoiselle Julie d'Angennes. She was considered altogether charming, and much incense was burned before her by the frequenters of the salon. One New Year's morning she received a unique and exquisite tribute of admiration. It was a dainty autograph volume entitled the Guirlande de Julie. A garland was painted on the outside; within, on one of the volum pages, would be a lovely flower from the garland, on the opposite an original poem. Nineteen poets and nineteen artists were represented. This book is still in existence, and was lately sold at a price representing 1000 francs for each page. This was devised by the Marquis de Montausier, whose long wooing of Julie was the passionately interesting romance of the salon. He was fourteen years her lover, and, during that time it is quite possible he never was permitted even to kiss her hand. He must woo her delicately with madrigal and sonnet. He was a soldier brave and true, and he won laurels again and again on the field of battle, returning from each campaign only to have his probation continued. At one time he was ten months a prisoner of war, and was ransomed by his mother for 10,000 crowns. Julie was three years his senior. At the age of 33 she wedded him, doubting even then if she had known him quite long enough. Julie d'Angennes, then Mme. de Montausier, presided over the salon in its later years.

Mixed Metaphors

During an exciting debate in the House of Representatives the members sometimes indulge in mixed metaphors. The National Tribune prints these specimens: A member, referring to one of his colleagues, said: "The gentleman, like a mousing owl, is always putting in his ear where it is not wanted." In another speech occurred this expression: "The iron heel of stern necessity darkens every heartstone." And another member, in a very forcible and dramatic manner, asked the House this startling question: "Would you stamp out the last flickering embers of a life that is fast ebbing away?" Scientists estimate that every year a layer equal to fourteen feet deep of the surface on all oceans and other bodies of water is taken up into the atmosphere as vapor.