



## CHRISTMAS IN HISTORY.

o judge by the slight references made to the subject in the magazines and newspapers of the last century, Christmas was not so very much thought of in England until, as husband of the present Queen, Prince Albert came over from Germany to revive its popularity. It would have been quite reasonable if a German family, on settling down in this insular home, had brought their national customs with them, and if this had been so Christmas-trees would have struck root in the English national affection more than a century earlier than is found to have been the case. We are probably still somewhat behind the Germans in our enthusiasm for observing this season, but in a degree which could hardly have been understood by our ancestors, we have learned to make Christmas pre-eminently the season for the enjoyment of children and young people. A century and a half ago, under the rule of the foreign King George II., London at the approach of Christmas would not have shown

any such enlivening spectacle as is the case to-day. The butchers and the grocers might have shown greater supplies than usual, but there were no Christmas numbers or annuals as we understand them; and only short and casual notices of the season occurred in the newspapers, if, indeed, anything at all was said about the subject. The keeping of Christmas seems even to have declined since the preceding century, for under the Stuarts before the Revolution the festival appears to have been observed with an enthusiasm and a splendour surpassing anything to be seen in any other of the nations of Europe.

As we try to realise what Christmas in the abbey or the baronial castle in pre-Reformation days was, we may recall a few of those old-time sayings which were once, as it were, current coin. Thus, "After Christmas comes Lent," reminded those who were disposed to be too roystering or convivial, that fasting might really be better for them than feasting. On the other hand, those who looked too lingeringly on the joys that were gone, that "Another year will bring another Christmas." The French had a proverb, "Christmas is talked of so long it comes at last." In the reign of Elizabeth, old Tusser gave forth his ringing couplet—

"At Christmas play, and make good cheer;  
For Christmas comes but once a year."

The saying, "A green Christmas a white Easter," was probably taken seriously in a day when those who had mastered the arts of reading and writing were naturally supposed also to possess the gifts of the seer. The supposition that mild weather in midwinter was unhealthy, was of course founded in mere prejudice. What we know is, that "A green Christmas" is more healthy than a frosty and foggy one, such as occasionally afflicts modern London.

In the year that William I. made the conquest of England, Christmas Day fell on Monday, and being the antipodes of Midsummer the Saxons called the festival Midwinter Day. That was the time that the Conqueror chose for his coronation. As the Saxon chronicle tells, Archbishop Aldred consecrated the king at Westminster, and at the same time gave him possession of "the books of Christ" as well as of the kingdom. It being Christmas Day, the churchman may have thought that, in a sense, he occupied vantage-ground. At all events, before he would consent to place the crown on the king's head, he made him swear that he would govern the land as well or better than



DISTRIBUTING THE MISTLETOE.



any ruler who had preceded him. It was a strange kind of ceremony altogether which took place in the Abbey on that winter day. In the first place Aldred of York was selected for the ceremony because Stigand of Canterbury was then engaged in quarrelling with the

Pope. Though the people and nobles had no choice in the matter when William had won his place by conquest, the archbishop was apparently as particular to have both sides agreed as to the new era, as if he had before him a coy bride hesitating to accept a rough husband who was eager to possess her. When he asked the native nobles if they would give their allegiance to their new king, the affirmative response was so hearty, that the Norman guards outside mistook the noise for a growl of discontent. Houses were set on fire and many lives were lost, so that it was a woful Christmas night for London.

The great abbey of St. Albans was one of the most magnificent buildings of mediæval England, and on Christmas Day, 1115, when the then new structure was consecrated, one of the most imposing spectacles which that age could afford was witnessed, the king, Henry I., and his wife, Matilda of Scotland, being among the guests. Abbot Richard, who held office during the building, must on that occasion have felt somewhat of the satisfaction of an ambitious ecclesiastic who had realised to the utmost his fondest day-dreams. The queen was there not only as a guest, but as a benefactress who had given two manors to the abbey, and to meet her and the king were the Archbishop of Rouen, a number of Anglican bishops, nobles, and other eminent persons. The festivities, which commenced on Christmas Day, were kept up for nearly a fortnight, or until January 6, our present Old Christmas Day. In *The Golden Book of*

*St. Albans* in the British Museum, and described as "a kind of conventual album," containing a list of benefactors and the amount of their donations, is to be seen the only portrait existing of Matilda.

Anybody rambling around St Albans, and visiting the church, will be thankful that this portion of the ancient abbey is so well preserved. In connection with Abbot Richard's great Christmas party in 1115, we should bear in mind that the older structure had become ruinous at the time of the Conquest, and despite the barbarous character of the times, the whole was now rebuilt with a magnificence which might well inspire our modern builders with despair.

Christmas appears to have been much thought of in those rough days when kings and nobles seemed to regard war as their natural occupation. Thus, two years later, when the king had to leave England to put down a revolt in Normandy, he and his son thought it worth their while to pay a hasty visit to England in order to keep Christmas with the queen. Father, mother and son then met for the last time. As regards Henry I., however, the Saxon annals make further reference to his Christmas merry-making in later life. Thus, in 1126, we find him observing the festive season at Windsor in accordance with his own tastes, his chief table-companion then being his second Queen, Adelia of Louvaine, otherwise the Fair Maid of Brabant.

"Boxing Day" as we understand it was probably unknown in the twelfth century; but December 26th being the feast of St. Stephen, the successor of Henry I. chose to be crowned on what he called his "Name-day." This was in 1135, and it is one of the most sunny memories of Stephen's inauspicious reign. Twelve years later, or in 1147, the season was observed by Stephen and his queen with a greater degree of splendour, however. The reason of this extra outlay was the fact that amid snow and wintry blast a few nights previously, the Empress Matilda, the claimant to the throne and therefore the troubler of Stephen's peace, had left Oxford Castle for the Continent. The king and queen happened to be at Lincoln, and among the superstitious prophecies current in that day—the midnight of the mediæval age—was one to the effect that some unknown evil would happen to any

king of England who should presume to appear in Lincoln Cathedral on Christmas Day dressed in royal robes and wearing the crown. Notwithstanding the seers, and "against the advice of his sagest counsellors, both temporal and spiritual," as Agnes Strickland tells us, the king attended service in state and returned home unscathed. With all his faults, Stephen may have been in advance of the follies of a time when the highest ecclesiastics and the greatest politicians were the slaves of superstitious fears.

In times of semi-barbarism and of abounding ignorance, extreme splendour in dress was so far removed from being any indication of moral worth, that low or even degraded natures might be seen as the chief slaves of such weakness. Probably few of us have any higher appreciation of the character of King John than his own nobles had when, with ominous threats in their scowling eyes, they compelled him to sign Magna Charta; but, however small the attractions

of this precious adventurer may have been in other respects, Miss Strickland declares he was "the greatest fop in Europe." If we ask how so, the answer is that, "At one of his Christmas festivals he appeared in a red satin mantle embroidered with sapphires and pearls, a tunic of white damask, a girdle set with garnets and sapphires, while the baldric that crossed from his left shoulder to sustain his sword was set with diamonds and emeralds, and his white gloves were adorned, one with a ruby and the other with a sapphire." This seems to present to us a curious side of John's degraded character. He liked to honour Christmas-tide; and we have to think of such an exquisite sitting-down to a feast, compared with which our modern elegant repasts would show but a meagre provision. Thus the kitchens of a royal castle would then have fireplaces and appliances for roasting oxen whole—an appetising royal dish, indeed, if the cook were only master of his art, and also knew how to prepare a seasonable piquant sauce. As regards the necessity for thus roasting oxen whole, it may have been found in the immense consumption of beef at a great feast in those days, when a multitude would need to be fed at once such as would never enter into our modern calculations. Take, by way of example, the feast given by the Archbishop of York at Christmas, 1251, when his guests included the royal families of England and Scotland. Alexander III. of the latter kingdom, aged twelve, was married to Margaret, daughter of Henry I. and Eleanor of Provence. There was a great Christmas party, at which, according to the old chronicler, 600 oxen were eaten at one repast. When we realise that 2000 persons would not dine amiss if they were now to consume an ox, this looks like exaggeration; but mediæval oxen were not such as ours, and the common people when they sat down to a feast probably attacked the viands with the appetites of cannibals.

The Scottish nation has never taken to Christmas so cordially as the English; and although in these times we might go to Scotland at Christmas-tide, we should hardly think of going thither to keep Christmas. In 1304 Edward I. and his wife, Marguerite of France, kept Christmas Day at Dunfermline, under very exceptional circumstances. The unhappy

northern kingdom was supposed to be completely subdued, and the king was desirous that the queen should undertake the journey from England, in order to judge of the thoroughness of his work. The war, indeed, had been so successful, that the great patriot, William Wallace, was a captive soon to be judicially murdered; but the roads through which Marguerite was obliged to pass were infested with armed desperadoes, which rendered them extremely dangerous. We do not envy Edward his merrymaking under such conditions, for we seem to think that there must have been mocking spectres at the feast.

Philippa of Hainault, queen of Edward III., was welcomed by the Londoners to her adopted country on December 23, 1327, and on Christmas Day, and for some days afterwards, there were feasts and rejoicings in the old city on the royal bride's account. We find that a great number of the clergy, in "solemn procession," went before when she entered the city; and then the Lord Mayor, on behalf of the guilds he represented, presented a service of plate of the value of £300—no mean offering when money was worth many times over what it is to-day. Some months previously a commercial treaty between England and the Low Countries, and which promised to be profitable to the Londoners, had been completed, the prospect of its advantages no doubt stimulating the loyalty of the merchants, the smaller traders, and their apprentices.

We pass from the fourteenth to the fifteenth century, and, while doing this, it may be interesting to remember that from one Christmas Day to another, from the beginning of a century to its end, the wax-lights at the tomb of Edward I.'s beloved Eleanor have been kept burning night and day, and that they will burn on until put out by the light of the Reformation in the sixteenth century. The scene we now look upon is at Eltham, and the time is the Christmas of 1413, where in the old suburban palace Henry IV. and Jane of Navarre are spending their last Christmas together. It was a sombre, or even a sorrowful, occasion; for, in addition to an accusing conscience, the king had become so afflicted in body that his days on earth were fast drawing to a close. Henry was an epileptic, and the eruptions on his face, which sorely disfigured his once comely countenance, were declared by some to be a judgment on him for many misdeeds. There was good reason for keeping the season in seclusion; and the crown, once so eagerly desired, was now found to press heavily on the brow, if it was not actually the symbol of cares almost too grievous to be borne.

The idea of spending Christmas in the Tower of London is to us sufficiently doleful, and the conditions under which Elizabeth of York, otherwise the Good, there passed the days preceding the Christmas of 1502 were such as might have frightened away a fair woman, whose family associations of that place were terrible in their tragic interest. Just before Christmas Day we find the queen adjourning to old Richmond Palace, where the presents bestowed on various people reveal to us how Christmas was observed in days close upon four hundred years ago. In those days great personages were especially fond of minstrels, and such of these as were not regularly employed would have a special gift made to them at Christmas. The minstrels included the reciters, whose performances would sometimes take the form of several acting their parts; and anyone who gave more than common satisfaction would receive an extra gift. Thus the sum of 13s. 4d., which Elizabeth of York gave to one William Cornish, "for setting the carol on Christmas Day," was not a small fee when money was so much more valuable than now. A dancer was supposed

to be well rewarded with 4s. 4d., and a fool with 6s. 8d. A few weeks after this merry Christmas, and on her birthday, the queen passed away at the age of thirty-seven.

The son of Elizabeth of York, Henry VIII., was even more partial than his mother to festive occasions and imposing pageants. He was proud of his knightly prowess, and in the early days of his married life, when he seems to have been happy with Catherine of Arragon, he had a craze for suddenly leaving the company and soon reappearing in some strange disguise. Thus it was at Christmas 1509 that the young king "stole from the side of the queen during the jousts, and returned in the disguise of a strange knight, astonishing all the company with the grace and vigour of his tilting." The court shows, as well as the street pageants, were then more costly or picturesque than now; but as was also in keeping with the times, they may also have been more childish. What is more surprising is, that the commonality from the City would crowd into one end of the great state-apartment, then called the White-hall, when anything more than ordinarily striking was to be witnessed. Occasionally there would be a scramble for mementoes of a court pageant, and persons of title have even lost jewels and ornaments in a *mêlée*, the distinguished company being literally despoiled of their valuables by the vulgar herd of sightseers from London.

Years pass on, and we are enabled to see some of the attendant circumstances of Christmas 1523, when the Reformation time of transition had hardly come on in England, though some far-sighted seer may have thought that he descried its dawn. The king and queen dined at old Eltham Palace on that Christmas Day, now exactly three hundred and seventy-one years ago; and one of the chief topics of conversation would be the foundation of the great college at Oxford, named after Christ. Wolsey was then at the height of his prestige, and Henry VIII. was so proud of the achievement of his favourite, that during the holidays of that Christmas he introduced Langland, Bishop of Lincoln, to the queen, with the memorable words: "Madame, my lord of Lincoln can show my lord cardinal's college at Oxford, and what learning there is and shall be." Langland's account of what further happened is in his own handwriting in the Cottonian MSS.:—"And so the king departed, and I showed the king's grace the effect of all, and what great good should come of the same, likewise in the exposition of the Bible; and expressed to her grace the number of the house, the divine service of your college, and of the great suffrages of prayer ye have made her participant of." That was perhaps as pretty a Christmas scene as can be found in history; but only seven Christmas Days onward how wofully the outlook had changed. The queen was then discarded by her husband, the English Bluebeard, and the great Wolsey had just died in disgrace.

Greenwich appears to have been a favourite place in the time of the Tudors at which to spend Christmas. Thus, in December 1536, we find the court removing from Richmond to the old palace in the nearer suburb, there to spend the holidays. Only just before, the Princess Mary was again received into the good graces of her father, King Bluebeard, after an estrangement, and Bluebeard gave his daughter some gold bordering for a dress, which cost the recipient nearly £5 to have altered into the fashion. What is especially noteworthy is, that the young royal lady lost a greater number of angels "at the cards" than appeared to be quite decorous, according to our modern notions, each angel being a coin of the value of 7s. 6d. On the other hand, her grace gave alms to the poor in a right royal manner, and, consequently, passed as a good Catholic in a credulous age, when

a good deed was superstitiously supposed to counterbalance a bad one. A year later Mary is found travelling by water from Windsor to Richmond to keep Christmas, giving the boatman 5s. for his trouble. Then as the Christmas diversions were aided by "Jane the fool," that young woman had to be suitably rewarded. There were many other calls to which a royal lady was expected to make a proper response; and to do this was not always convenient when the allowances of such dames were commonly quite out of keeping with their brilliant expectations. It was not the golden age, though the artistic work of ladies in the royal palace made it appear an industrious one, while the learning of courtly dames was considered to be in their case a commonplace characteristic. The presents they gave to other dames of rank oftentimes were evidences of their taste as well as their skill. Thus silken hose ornamented with gold, "a gown of carnation satin," sleeves for other gowns worked with silver or gold. In the early part of the sixteenth century oranges were served up with the Christmas dessert. The fruit was ten a penny—hardly so cheap as they are now, when due allowance is made for the difference in the value of money.

The marriage of Queen Mary with the worthless and fanatical Philip II. of Spain, in 1554, boded no good either to the bride or her country; but on account of the wedding festivities being postponed until the end of December, the Christmas of that year was particularly brilliant, and one that was long remembered as a red-letter day in our English annals. The season appears to have been observed at Whitehall, where hundreds of coloured lamps were made to produce a kind of magical effect on Christmas Eve. The Princess Elizabeth and a great gathering of English and foreign nobles were present. The only drawback was to those who had to provide the entertainment, the restriction which the queen put upon their enterprise from economic motives. Carden, the master of the ceremonies, insisted that he had already shown his novelties, and needed resources for new inventions. Master Carden's genius found plenty of scope for its exercise; and the mention of some of his devices shows that the inventions of the sixteenth century were just of the kind which would be appreciated by grown-up children in the nineteenth. Thus, by means of rabbits'-skins apes were well counterfeited, and, sitting in a row, they played various musical instruments, and thus were made to appear like minstrels of the most comical kind. Dozens of cats'-tails were also in request, "a masque of cats," with an accompanying recitation, causing great merriment. Plays representing the condition of Ireland, Venice, etc., were also produced at considerable cost. A great book, painted by Holbein, for the royal diversion at Christmas-tide would now be a relic of the Tudor era, which would command a high price.

In regard to the Reformation in England, Christmas Day ought to be held in some account, for it was on that day in the year of her accession, 1558, that Queen Elizabeth is supposed formally to have broken away from the Romish Mass. As the public opinion supported her in her action, the English service took the place of the Romish Latin in the Chapel Royal and all other churches. Perhaps it may not be generally known that silk stockings came in with the Reformation. Henry VIII. wore cloth hose, which were certainly too good for him; Edward VI. appears to have had a pair of Spanish silk ones "sent him as a great present;" but in 1559 Queen Elizabeth commenced the wear of silk stockings, which was afterwards continued. "I like silk stockings well, because they are

# DECEMBER



As a Royalist Evelyn has a somewhat doleful entry for Christmas Day, 1654, when the season was supposed to be "abolished" by the Puritans of the Commonwealth. As no churches were open or public assembly allowed, Evelyn says, "I was fain to pass the devotions of that blessed day with my family at home." As might have been expected, it was afterwards found that the love of Christmas was so engrafted on the public mind that it could not be put aside, notwithstanding the penalties to which those persons exposed themselves who kept the season after the old English manner. It was on Christmas Day, 1655, that Evelyn makes his most mournful entry in regard to what he regarded as the iron rule then prevailing:

"I went to London, where Dr. Wild preached the funeral sermon of preaching, this being the last day; after which Cromwell's proclamation was to take place, that none of the Church of England should dare either to preach or administer sacraments, teach schools, etc., on pain of imprisonment or exile. So this was the mournfullest day that in my life I have seen, or the Church of England herself, since the Reformation, to the great rejoicing of both Papist and Presbyter. So pathetic was his discourse, that it drew many tears from the auditory. Myself, wife, and some of our family received the communion; God make me thankful, who hath hitherto provided for us the food of our souls as well as bodies. The Lord Jesus Christ pity our distressed church, and bring back the captivity of Zion."

A year later, or in 1656, Evelyn attended "an assembly of devout and sober Christians" at Dr. Wild's lodgings.

We find that a man like Evelyn would have money given him to distribute in charity at the festive season. Christmas, 1683, was remarkable for its excessive cold, and also for a severe epidemic of small-pox. It was one of those phenomenal winters to which we may in any year be exposed in this high latitude, but of which a person may grow old and know nothing. The ice on the Thames became sufficiently strong for streets of booths to be set up upon it. The river was really frozen over before Christmas Day; and early in January Evelyn says: "I went across the Thames on the

pleasant, fine, and delicate," remarked the young Virgin Queen, "and henceforth I will wear no more cloth stockings."

Passing from the sixteenth to the seventeenth century, we find several references to the festive season in Evelyn's Diary and Correspondence. Being in Rome on Christmas Eve, 1644, he tells how he walked about all night, going from one church to another "in admiration at the multitude of scenes and pageantry which the friars had with much industry and craft set out to catch the devout women and superstitious sort of people." On Christmas Day the Pope sang Mass, while a representation of the cradle of Christ was exhibited.

ice, now become so thick as to bear not only streets of booths, in which they roasted meat and had divers shops of wares quite across, as in a town, but coaches, carts, and horses passed over." A little later we find Evelyn going to Sayes Court to look into the condition of his garden. "I found many of the greens and rare plants utterly destroyed," he says. "The oranges and myrtles very sick, the rosemary and laurels dead to all appearance, but the cypress likely to endure it." At the time that was supposed to have been the coldest winter which had ever occurred in the memory of man. Evelyn sent a report of the season to the

Royal Society, and it is to be found in their "Transactions."

Master Samuel Pepys was also an admirer of Christmas, as observed after the old English manner, and next to a good dinner he seems to have liked an able sermon. After morning church on Christmas Day, 1660, went "home to dinner, where my brother Tom, who this morning came to see my wife's new mantle put on, which do please me very well." The dinner consisted of "a good shoulder of mutton and a chicken," which being succeeded by a dull sermon at afternoon church "made me sleep." Each Christmas Day seems to have had its own particular characteristics. Thus, in 1664, Pepy's went "to Mr. Rawlinson's church, where I heard a good sermon." Nor was that all; for in the same place was found "very great store of fine women . . . more than I know anywhere else about us." On Christmas Day of the year following, or in 1665, Pepys witnessed "a wedding in the church," an unusual spectacle for the season. What also struck him was seeing "the young people so merry one with another!" It was also "strange to see what delight we married people have to see these poor fools decoyed into our condition,

every man and woman gazing and smiling at them." On Christmas Eve Mrs. Pepys would sit up until four in the morning, "seeing her maids make mince-pies," and these, with "good ribs of beef roasted," as well as "plenty of good wine of my own," Master Pepys considered to be good seasonable fare.

On Christmas Eve, 1667, Pepys is found going in a coach "to see the ceremony . . . at the Queen's Chapel;" but he was disappointed, and fearful that his pocket would be picked. The sight being "nothing but a high masse," he might well have stayed at home, and we find him exclaiming: "What an odde thing it was for me to be in a crowd of people, here a footman, there a beggar, here a fine lady, there a zealous poor Papist, and here a Protestant, two or three together, come to see the show." In the small hours of morning, the moon shining brightly, he returned home, not forgetting to drop money at several places about the City, "which I was the willinger to do," says Pepys, "it being Christmas Day, and so home, and there to find my wife in bed, and Janie and the maid making pyes." The last Christmas Day which Mrs. Pepys passed on earth appears to have been that of 1668, when, with her hus-

band at her side and a boy to read, she was employed all day in "altering and lacing a noble petticoat."

Probably it will be thought that Christmas in the *Spectator* would be Christmas in fiction rather than in history, otherwise reference might be made to the efforts which were made by Sir Roger de Coverley to make the Christmas season a gladsome time for the farmers and cottagers on his estate. Then, though it was not very much written about, some illustration of the way in which Christmas was observed in different parts of the country might be gathered from the periodicals of the last century. The customs greatly varied in country places in days when the provinces had far less intercommunication than now. Of course elderly persons thought that the times of their youth had been more favourable for the worthy keeping of Christmas than the then present times. That was a too common delusion which still survives however; Christmas is properly the festival of youth, and those who have grown older can never again look upon it with the eyes of early days, nor ever again enjoy its diversions with equal zest.

G. H. P.



## HOW TO MAKE AN ICE SLEDGE.

THE advent of ice is always a time of rejoicing to the young who can figure about on skates. But the pleasure would be half lost if dear mother could not come and view with pride the sporting of her young flock, and many a time have I seen her with praiseworthy patience beating the cold out of her feet on the borders of the pond. Now I think it is high time something should be done for her, and, coming home from the ice at 4 o'clock, I determined to have a sledge ready by the next morning. I will give you a short account of how I set about to accomplish it. I reckon it was six hours' work, and cost me 4s. The first thing of importance was to borrow from the house or garden an ordinary wicker-chair, then cut two lengths of ordinary flooring-boards six inches by two inches in lengths of five feet, curve them upwards towards the front, and round off the sharp corner at the back. Plane them along the base taking off a slight bevel towards the inner edge, now you have your "runners." Set them apart at a convenient distance, being guided by the width of your chair. Board over two-thirds with some of the flooring-boards, take an angle off the front of the runners and nail a



piece of the flooring across. You will now have a pretty firm platform for your chair, which you can fix down with one-and-a-half-inch iron staples, but, before fixing this, turn your runners over and strengthen them midway with a pair of iron brackets to keep them from splaying out at the base. These must be placed to get clear of the snow. The board across the front acts as a set off for snow, and can be ornamented at the two corners by carved wood trusses, 8d. each at any wood carver's or turner's; nail or screw them round side downwards. These give

quite an elegant finish. The sledge can now be painted any colour to suit the fancy, bright green or sealing-wax-red looks the best. At any time the staples can be drawn and the chair taken off and put back in its place, and the runners hung up in an out-house until the next frost. There is nothing cumbersome about it—always an objection to a sledge. "What shall we do with it all the summer?" Utilising the chair obviates this, and it is one of the most *chic* things one can have.

By twelve o'clock the next day we packed mother in a nest of rugs and furs, and we boys and girls flew over the ice with her, her cheeks all aglow, looking by far the most youthful of our party. Then in the evening decorated with Japanese lanterns— But there, I must leave something to my readers' imaginations.

	s.	d.
16 feet of floor boarding, 6 by 2 at 1½ d.	2	0
Pair of carved wood trusses . . . . .	1	4
Staples and nails . . . . .	0	4
Pair of iron brackets . . . . .	0	4
	<hr/>	
	4	0

