

Christmas Time Has Its Roots In The Ages of Old

No one but old Scrooge denies that Christmas is the season to be our jolliest! To help us in our merry-making we traditionally call on age-old Christmas symbols—the Christmas tree, yule log, mistletoe and holly. Christmas cards, presents under the tree, lights and tinsel, the wassail bowl, and, of course, the stockings hung by the chimney with care.

We've gathered this Christmas potpourri from centuries of folklore and legend around the world. For instance, the Christmas tree originally symbolized the Garden of Eden to Germans. The "Paradeisbaum" (tree of Paradise) was a central theme of their medieval mystery plays. When these plays were suppressed, the tree (usually a fir) was brought into the home and gradually it became the custom to decorate it with cookies and fruit at Christmas time.

Many believe that it was Martin Luther who first put candles on the Christmas tree. Supposedly, while walking through the countryside one Christmas Eve, Luther was awed by the sight of the snow-tipped evergreens sparkling in the moonlight. At home, he tried to recreate this effect for his family by placing candles on their Christmas tree.

Mistletoe is another symbol of Christmas from the annals of legend. The ancient Druids thought it was sacred. Forests in which this precious plant grew were dedicated to their gods. Legend has it that Druids cut mistletoe springs with a golden knife and hung them over their doors. They believed this pacified the woodland spirits and that only happiness could enter while the mistletoe was in place.

Mythology reveals that Scandinavians, too, hung mistletoe over their doorways on the first day of winter to ward off the evil spirits. To the Romans, mistletoe was a symbol of peace and when enemies met under the "supernatural" sprigs, they discarded arms and declared a truce. From all of these myths and customs, mistletoe became a symbol of love and gradually, perhaps inevitably, the custom evolved of kissing under the mistletoe.

Holly, which has always been a popular Christmas decoration, was also thought to be endowed with unusual powers in legend. Christ's crown of thorns was made of holly leaves. From this emerged the custom of Christmas wreaths of holly.

British Saxons were the first to gather "round the wassail bowl to toast a joyous season and a fruitful New Year. As early as the fifth century, they passed a golden cup of mead wine around the feast table with the salutation "Waes Hael!" or "Be Whole!" Wassail came to signify the special mixture of



THIS TINY TOT couldn't wait for Santa to stop. She raced out in front of the sled, climbed on Santa's lap and made her desires known as the parade halted in the downpour for a few minutes until she finished her little talk with her favorite bewhiskered person.

wine and other magic ingredients that every Christmas, village wassailers carried in an immense bowl around town, toasting the season with their neighbors. The idea, though not the same practice, spread and the Christmas punch bowl today embodies the wassail spirit.

There are many different versions of the story of the Christmas stocking. Research in the Esquire Socks Library of Footlore reveals that the only fact which can clearly be established is that the first Christmas stocking was fashioned of woolen shreds. In the 1600s, St. Nick put his gifts in hose of pure silk.

Looking into legend once more, we find that the first Christmas stocking was really hung by the chimney to dry—and St. Nick, making his round of chimneys on Christmas Eve, dropped a bag of gold into the stocking by accident!

Another tale uncovered in the Esquire Socks Library holds that the children of Amsterdam set their wooden shoes in the chimney corners because they believed St. Nicholas would drop goodies down the chimney only if he saw shoes there. Later, the children hung up stockings by the chimney reasoning that shoes couldn't stretch and that stockings could hold more gifts.

Burning the yule log is an ancient pre-Christian custom

originating with the Scandinavians. At their feast of Juhl from which we get our "yuletide"—on the first day of winter, they kindled huge bonfires in honor of the god Thor. This occasion was a rollicking and happy one for the people, and remained when Scandinavia became Christian. In feudal times, the bringing in of the great yule log to the wide hearth in the baronial hall was one of the most joyous ceremonies connected with the Christmas celebration. The men hewed down the greatest log they could find, singing merry yule songs while they dragged it to the waiting hearth. According to custom the yule log was lighted with a brand of the previous year's log, burning the yule log is still a beloved and picturesque custom in many rural districts around the world.

During early period of Christianity it was the custom in England for the poor to sing carols—joyful songs—in the streets at Christmas time. As they sang from house to house, they were given food, clothing and money. This is one way that today's Christmas caroling might have begun.

Another story of Christmas carols claims that St. Francis of Assisi introduced the custom of community carol singing. St. Francis signed a manger scene one Christmas

with real people and animals. The onlookers were so delighted with this pageant that they burst into joyous song. These first carolers became as important to St. Francis' Christmas celebrations as modern carolers are to ours.

However they began, many of our most cherished Christmas carols—"O Come All Ye Faithful," "God Rest You Merry Gentlemen," "Hark The Herald Angels Sing," "Away Go A Manger," "Joy to the World,"—have been sung for hundreds of Christmases.

Christmas presents, according to many authorities, took the place of the pagan custom of exchanging gifts at the New Year. Early priests suggested Christmas gifts, because good will, generosity, and kindness are part of the

Christmas spirit. The first such gifts were called "priests' boxes," since the priests collected money and jewelry in them to distribute among the poor at Christmas time. The gift-giving tradition grew and when the Christmas tree came along, it was only natural to put the presents under the tree.

The Christmas card is probably the most recent of our cherished and established customs. In 1846, Joseph Cundall, a London artist, claims to have sent the first Christmas card. It was printed in lithography, and colored by hand. Not until 1862, however, did the custom obtain a foothold. Cards then were inscribed only with a simple message. After that, robins, holly branches, embossed figures and landscapes were

added. During a typical Christmas season these days, about two billion greeting cards are sent in the U.S. alone.

The custom of saying "Merry Christmas" to one's friends and neighbors originated with the English long ago. They shouted this greeting from the window

on Christmas morning. In a way, every age-old symbol of Christmas we use during the holiday season—from trimming the tree to Christmas, and a Happy New Year to All!"

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FACTS and OPINIONS by Paul Chandler



Now that the campaign is over and the election has been held, what went wrong?

How did American citizens find themselves locked into a position where many (if not most) did not really want to vote for either Presidential candidate and only went to the polls out of duty, with a sense of heavy burden?

That's what really happened, loud partisan oratory notwithstanding. Many speeches we had, but they accomplished little more than to intensify the sense of melancholy within the populace.

Most of the campaign was purely theatrical... men moving about mechanically, discussing matters without depth, really hoping to inflame sufficient prejudices so as to drown the opponent in a flood of negative votes.

This mood was set in mid-summer at the time when the parties held their pit, rehearsed, dry, conventions. From that day to this, nothing happened to change the mechanical stage play.

The players were trained actors, striving to attain the spirit of the part, but never finding it.

And the error is extremely serious—our country and our people have been confused for many years and are becoming more so as the days roll along. The election, if it has a useful purpose, serves to warn how far wrong we have drifted.

As has been pointed out in many places (including Facts and Opinions) repeatedly, the great American problem today consists of three parts:

- With our geographical frontiers crossed and no great wars under way, we have not replaced these projects with a real national purpose;
- Despite the infallible rule that the only certain thing on earth is change itself, we sentimentally as a people constantly try to adapt the beliefs and policies of 50 years ago to the world of today;
- There is a basic, unending conflict in a society which holds in its highest esteem those individuals who accumulate great amounts of money and yet which insists that it is motivated solely by the ethics of the Sermon on the Mount.

Or to use the corollary of those axioms—(1) We need to find a National Purpose which is real and satisfying to our people, individually and collectively; (2) We must abandon the wistful dreams of the Monroe Doctrine age, where it was possible to regard the United States as a sort of walled city, protected by lumbering iron warships from the rest of the world; (3) We must either put the Sermon on the Mount ethic into our actual concept of individual success and into the way society is organized, or we must abandon it as being of consequence and settle down to hard materialism. To continue in the middle ground is to guarantee confusion, weakness and national destruction, ultimately.

It is well to talk of Freedom, and even to emotionally cry that we would prefer to die rather than to lose Freedom, but the accompanying essential is to determine, "Freedom for What, Toward What Plan or Purpose?"

Why be Free if it brings only sadness, misery and the scorn and contempt of the rest of the human race?

So we had one Presidential candidate, a successful man in the ordinary terms because he not only was rich financially, but he had risen to the White House at the same time.

And another, who insisted over-and-over that the theories of 50 years ago remained the best, would continue to work in today's jet world, and who said these ideas still provided sufficient incentive and allure to keep our people satisfied, smiling and content with life.

One candidate was living proof that he believed the end justifies the means.

The other preached that it was preferable to ignore the problems rather than to change systems to meet them.

Both were wrong, and the perceptive American people knew it.

Knowing it, they are worried. Bombs are big these days, communication and travel takes place in a twinkling, and it becomes imperative to find the truth and live it, both alone and collectively, as a nation.

The biggest single issue in this campaign could have (and should have) been the one of proper National Purpose... what should the United States do with its energy, wealth and talent?

With fewer and fewer people required to turn out the food and goods (because of automation and modern technology), it becomes more and more urgent that proper and fulfilling uses be found for the time Americans have upon their hands.

There are old people straining under the frustrations not only of loneliness and uselessness to society, but also of trying to forget the stigma they carry of not being as wealthy as the younger members of society. What kind of humanity is it that would permit this in its society?

There are American men and women in the prime of life, burning their idle hours in contrived, non-essential "activity," or in ever-increasing doses of alcohol; or in mental agony which enters, or borders upon, the world of actual mental sickness; the flight from the pain of reality. What kind of society is it that would permit this to happen, and never talk about it during a national election campaign?

There are swarms of unemployed youngsters, burning with fevers of ambition and great furnaces of physical strength, blunting it all against the indifference of a somehow, against great odds to "get out on their own and make lots of money."

Simple selfishness never again will suffice as the criteria of American success, nor as an all-inclusive national purpose.

Both of our candidates nonetheless ducked the issue almost completely, and it was the major one—this WAS the real thing which people "knew in their hearts."

Where are we going as a nation of great people, and when will this goal begin to show itself where it should... in the peace of mind of the individual citizens?

If the world will wait, there are four years in which to isolate leadership which will devote itself to the real issues, using modern vision, the accumulated experience of history, and the enlightenment of those who live by ideals.

America is fed up with the cynics, the angle-guys and chiselers, the hysterical "patriots" who look down upon the rest of the human race, the theatrical politicians with barren minds, and with the befuddled.

And so is Facts and Opinions.

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