

Did you know? candy canes were originally given to children during mass. The treat was rewarded to kids who behaved while in church.

### Glimpse of Christmas in the Olden Times

'Tis Christmas again! - "the time of happy thoughts and sweet remembrances". How fondly do we love to linger over the associations of the past? The old forms and faces that we knew so well seem to rise up before us once more and beckon us to join in the revels of the merry throng; or perhaps the old scenes and haunts of our childhood stretch out before us and in fancy are revisited again - for "Never a Christmas dawns, or never the old year ends; but somebody thinks of others - old days old times - old friends".

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But "times have changed", we hear on every hand. "Christmas is on the wane", "Christmas is dying out". It is true that many of the old customs have been swept before the onward march of civilization and modern modes of life and living. We no longer have the revels of the merry days of old, when the masques and mummers held high carnival and went from house to house dressed in fantastic costumes, singing Christmas ditties, or dancing on the well-scrubbed freshly sanded kitchen floors. We no longer catch the strains of carols on Christmas Eve in our streets a good old custom which was kept up until very recent years. Nor do we now hear the bells of even a still more recent period, which in many parts of the city "clanged" an invitation to those who passed by to "Come in" and try their luck on a wheel-of-fortune for "a turkey, a goose, or a pair of chicken".

No! All that has been changed. "Jack has ceased to pipe and Jill to dance", and we no longer witness the antics of the hobby-horse, the jannies or the mummers. We live in a time which regards as foolish, if not sinful,



The story of Rudolph the Red-Nosed Reindeer was originally written as a sales gimmick by the Montgomery Ward Company in 1939.

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many things that made Christmas "Merry" to the men - aye, and women, too, of today, who "made the welkin ring" with the Christmas festivities of thirty or forty years ago.

But "Christmas on the wane", "Christmas" - the Grand Jubilee of the children - "dying out", Perish the thought! What with Christmas cards and Santa Claus - ever on the increase, and ever taxing the inventive genius of our time - Christmas like "Tennyson's brook" to use a well-worn metaphor, will "go on forever". How these two Christmas ideas have expanded, to be sure. Of course, I am not forgetting the hospitality; organized ideas of dispensing cheer, and the bestowal of the "milk of human kindness" on so many, at Christmas, whom we hardly find room for in our thoughts at any other season. But time was when even "Santa" had to depend solely on reindeer to convey his bounty from place to place and house to house, so that it is not to be wondered at if he found it difficult at times after a long journey to ascend the chimney tops. Later on, however, considerable advantage was afforded to his craft by the introduction of the auto-car; but with the invention of the air-ship, the popular Santa may have to be restricted, else it is not a far-fetched notion to suppose that the next order may be bigger stockings and larger chimneys than those at present in vogue. There are many reasons therefore and many things to keep

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Christmas alive, and we do not have to go far to find them. So laugh and be merry, dear sirs; laugh and be merry, and Christmas shall be Christmas still.

But to proceed with our sketch. It is a long stride from England to Newfoundland - but only a step in the festivities of Christmas in the olden times; when as we are told: ...

*England was Merry England when  
Old Christmas brought his sports again...*

In olden times our forefathers had a play - goodness only knows where or when or how it originated. It must have been older than the Christmas of the immortal Dickens - the Apostle of Christmas! The Grand Knights of S1, George, S1, Patrick, Julius Caesar, Napoleon, King Priam, Hector, George Washington, heroes of the dim and misty past all figured conspicuously. But many a hardy fisher, representing his favorite Saint or hero, stepped upon the floor, sword in hand, and gave forth his part in stirring tones: "Step up King George to my right arm," or "Here come, Hector, the renowned Hector, King Priam's only son." Mr. William Whittle of Boston (deceased), a devoted son of old Terra Nova, once contributed the whole of the play above referred to, with the speeches of the

various characters represented, to one of our earliest local Christmas numbers.

Before me is a picture of a Mumming Scene and a haul of wood fifty years ago. No doubt thousands would flock to see a "moving picture" of this, if such could be obtained and exhibited at any of the Nickel Theatres. The scene is laid in front of Duder's on Water Street, the old stone building opposite the Post Office, with its quaint and picturesque front still to the fore. The hobby horse, the haul of wood (gaily decorated) and the masqueraders and mummers dressed in the most grotesque costumes make a picture of an old-time Christmas rarely to be seen. Very few people, I dare say, would be found to regret the departure of this form of merry-making in these enlightened days. And yet, if we could but know the truth, behind these masks might be concealed the faces of many good citizens who were simply letting themselves out at Christmas time.

Amid the many popular customs of the old times, on the other hand, I think many do regret the departure of the good old custom of singing the carols in the streets, so much in vogue a decade ago. The singing of the carols, which is still kept up in England, is of extreme antiquity, and said to be as old as Christmas itself. A writer of Christmas lore says:

"Milton, in *Paradise Lost*, makes this allusion to what may be regarded as the first Christmas Carol: ...

*They gladly thither haste, and by a quire  
Of squadroned angels hear his carol sung."*

A carol belonging to the 16th century will be sung, no doubt, in many churches in Newfoundland this Christmas, in the year of grace 1912. A verse is as follows:

*When Christ was born of Mary free  
In Bethlehem in that fair citie;  
Angels sang there with mirth and glee  
In Excelsis Gloria! ...*

One more reference to the old customs which have departed - viz: "the Arches" - must bring this random sketch to a close. The building of the arches created a spirit of rivalry and emulation that put the "Architects" or designers on their mettle, but the boys of "The Cross" and "The Mall" could always be relied upon to hold their own.

My crude pen must once more divert to record a story about one of these old arch builders which, I think, is worthy of note, and which perhaps may not have been told before. He was a great "politician" in his day - master of ceremonies, a leading banner-bearer, and director of the "torches" whenever there was to be a "procesh". In the old days, when some of our great politicians and patriots - now gone to their rest - speaking from the elevated and giddy height of the "hustings" or "attic window", would be painting glowing hopes and rosy pictures of a future prosperity for Newfoundland (as politicians of the past sometimes did) and promising money by the millions for this and for that - he would cry out, it may be, "Where's the money we were promised last elections for the education of our childer - money, money; begor! Ye'll sift it thro' a ladder and ye'll giv' us what'll stick to the rongs."

But to leave the hustings and return to the arches. For days great loads of boughs would be brought from the near countryside, and then the work would begin, and the

arches be in full swing on New Year's Day - to greet the several societies which held their annual parade on that occasion, and as these approached they were greeted with a volley of musketry and rounds of cheering that rent the air. In later years the arches were built solely for the benefit of the societies and an invitation courteously extended to the Presidents some days before to pass under the arches in their line of march.

What stirring scenes were enacted on the platforms or bridges of these arches - miniature castles in evergreen boughs! What fun and merriment were afforded, as to the strains of a tin whistle or Jews' harp, a masker stepped forward and gave a few steps and gestures that today would make the fortune of the Nickel men of St. John's. What revels! What memories these awaken - the men and the make-up - some with no book learning at all - yet they could hold hundreds for hours by their drolleries and fun.