

A BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF OLD ENGLISH CHRISTMAS GAMES, GIVE THE KIDDIES A HAND

On embarking on Christmas revels—when every man strives to do his duty by the children, and the oldest uncle delights to be their slave and dancing bear—"de ridin' hoes of de rabbit family"—we may not pause to think of the veneration due to Christmas gambols because of their antiquity. The moment of stealing the kiss under the mistletoe perhaps is not an appropriate time for recalling the story of the mistletoe, as the Druids' sacred plant. We are more likely to remember the North Country adage: "Pick a berry off the mistletoe for every kiss that is given: when all the berries are picked, there is an end to the kissing."

"Let every man be jolly," sings the pet. Wither in his Christmas song, a sentiment to which holly makes the convenient rhyme: "Each room with ivy leaves are dressed, and every post with holly" Stow, in his "Survey of London," published nearly four hundred years ago, says that in time every man's house, as well as streets and market crosses, were decorated with "holme." So our fathers perpetuated the Druid custom of bringing evergreens to towns and homes in winter in order that woodland spirits might take shelter therein, and preserve themselves from cold.

Almost every Christmas custom and gambol is venerable if not venerated. When the good uncle throws himself with a will into "blind man's buff" he is playing a game known to Grecian youth and played in Old English as "hoodman blind"—the players being blinded by the hoods they wore.

When the children force us into their game, the hero, or victim of the moment, was blindfolded and made to suffer from the players' united pinches.

The sport was known in the poet Gay's knees, and hides time as hot cockles. Each player in turn kneels, and hides his eyes in another's lap, all comers at darts. He must have

been an agile sportsman, as a favorite trick was to walk around a hot on the oars while the men were rowing.

On Christmas even in the country inn, Ned, the ploughman, challenges at darts like, whose profession is a mystery, though at this season he is often seen with a cart laden with holly and mistletoe, reputed to be destined for Convent Garden. Either can throw his dart on whatever pinpoint on the board you like to mark.

Ned winning, the picker-up of unconsidered trifles has his revenge at a game of shove-ha-penny. Now but an inn game, in the sixteenth century it was a right royal pastime, known as shovel-board, and few mansions of the Tudor nobility were without their tables, measuring some thirty feet in length, smooth and polished, so that the flat metal discs of the game would fly along at a touch of the hand as true to the mark as the coins flicked up the shove-ha-penny board by Ned and Ike.

Later, they have a match at some lowly form of the once honored game of skittles. The narrow little shove-ha-penny tables common to inns in Buckingham and sister counties lend themselves to many such games which are revived especially at Christmas. A heavy old coin, or token, is thrown across the room at a cork sent on a table, having a farthing on top, which must be dislodged as to fall beyond a circle. Or an old bench has a time-honored hole in which a token must be thrown from across the room.

One of the skittle-like games survives in Buckinghamshire under the name of "langerloo," in which the score must mount to thirty-two exactly before the match is won. On a Christmas evening as you pass along the lane through the beechwoods, you may hear from some old inn the singing chorus which goes with this game: "All along, all along, langerloo, Langerloo, merry-go-down, Twice fifteen, is half a crown, Half-a-crown, I lay it to you, The very next stroke is thirty-two."

(Merry-go-down is an old name for ale)

OLD SANTA CLAUS IS THE MAN OF THE HOUR THESE DAYS

"Daddy, who is Santa Claus?" What a simple question! But how difficult to answer!

It is a question that has been asked by children—and not a few grown-ups—for more than fifteen hundred years. Think of it! Fifteen hundred years old, and still a new question!

And why? Because Santa Clause is the most famous, the most widely known and the most beloved of all legendary characters the world over. We in Canada call him Santa Claus; others call him St. Nicholas or Pere Noel, or Kriss Kringle. They all mean the same.

Do you know who he is. Can you answer this childish question?

Suppose we try. In the first place, it must be made clear that Santa Clause, or St. Nicholas cannot be associated with Christianity just because he happens to pay us a visit on the day that we celebrate the birth of Christ. Strange as it may seem, Christmas and the Santa Clausian festival, now so inseparable, are nevertheless quite unrelated.

Christmas, as the very name implies, is distinctly a Christmas rite although a similar day, under a different name was celebrated long before the birth of Christ. The ancient Druids of England, long before the conquering hordes of Romans and Norse, held feasts and festivals at about the same time of year as we look for the appearance of Santa Claus.

In other countries too—in Greece, in Rome, in Egypt, as early as history records, the winter solstice was the occasion for revelry and festivity.

All of which doesn't tell us much about Santa Claus.

Suppose for a while we change his name to St. Nicholas.

Patron Saint of Russia

Some time in the fourth century (the actual date is not known), there lived in Lycia the Archbishop of Myra. So great-hearted a man was he that he became the patron Saint of Russia and Italy.

This man was of huge proportions. He was beloved because he protected the weak against the strong; the poor against the rich; the good against the evil.

All through the land he went leaving happiness in his wake, where Christmas day laden with gifts to distress and misery had been before.

But on December 6, 342, so history records, he died—in the flesh, but not in the spirit.

For many years after, great feasts were held in his honor on this date, and the spirit of Saint Nicholas was supposed to return and leave gifts on such occasions. But gradually the celebration faded in favor of the festival of Christmas. He is now known in this country, under his German "nom de plume," Santa Claus.

Many hundreds of years ago, before children wore stockings, they would place their "sabots" or wooden shoes by the fireplace for Saint Nicholas to fill. If they had been good boys and girls throughout the year, their shoes were filled with playthings and nuts and candy; if they were naughty children, a small rod was placed beside the shoe as a lesson to the child.

Strange, how we, a highly civilized people, still celebrate occasions as old as time itself. St. Valentine's Day, Hallowe'en, Thanksgiving Day and Christmas, all were holidays when men roamed the woods, clad in skins, in search of food.

Santa's Wife

But wait. We've forgotten something.

Who was Santa's wife? Now there is a poser?

In Italy, the children, while they believed Saint Nicholas was their patron saint, worshipped his wife instead. Rather a slap in the face for good old Saint Nick.

Unfortunately her story is considered more legendary than the story of Santa Claus. In her youth, when told

A fitting conclusion to Christmas merriments is the good old pastime, mentioned by Addison in the Spectator, yawning of a Cheshire cheese. He—or she—who yawns widest and most naturally, producing the most yawns from the spectators, wins the cheese. Whereafter the curtain falls on old Christmas sports: "Into the night go one and all."

in the supernatural as long as parents see fit to let them believe.

So every industry, whether it be the manufacture of railway engines or the preparation of dill pickles depends to a varying degree on the Christmas festival.

Therefore we cannot let it die. All hail Santa Claus! There really is one!

Locke Hunter is by Hunter (three), 2:04 3-4 son of Belwin and the former world's champion brood mare, Honey-moon H., 2:09 3-4, by John A. McKerron, 2:04 1-4. He has been trained and raced over both mile and half mile tracks and is regarded by the Grand Circuit contingent as having real ability. His record was made in the first heat of the Ohio Stake for 2:12 trotters at Cleveland, July 6, when he met Ankabar, 2:1 3-4, and a banner field of stake trotters.

"48 Hours Exposure Kills Woman,"—headline. Then how do these musical show girls survive?

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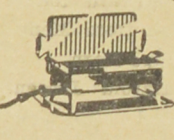
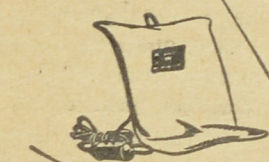
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