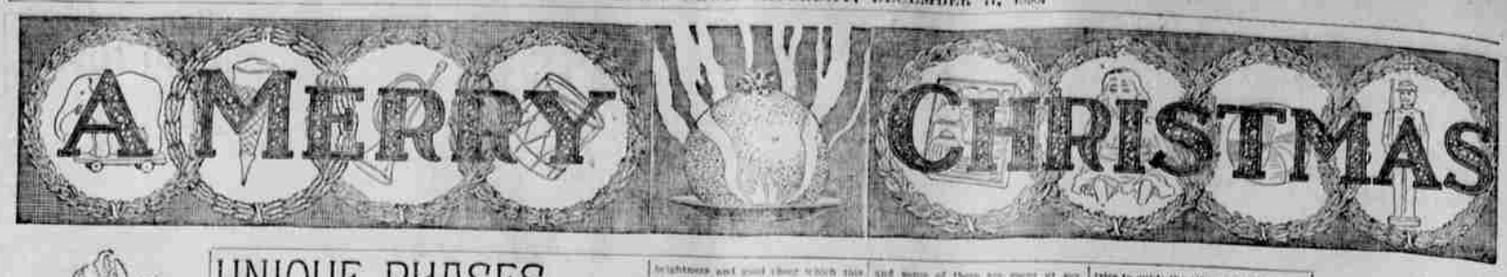

UNIQUE PHASES OF CHRISTMAS.

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THE Christmas tree is a pagan institution. That may sound shocking to the little innocents who have been taught to consider their plant for the annual Christmas grove but such is a fact. Yet for all its pagan origin, the Christmas tree continues in popular favor. The extent of this ever increasing popularity may be judged by the fact that last Christmas time through the combination houses of New York city alone passed 2,000,000 trees. Only a small proportion of these trees, of course, was for New York city itself, most of this large supply being distributed throughout the eastern states. Nor was all of this gigantic number of trees used for hanging presents on, many of them being cut up later for decorative purposes. The decoration of a church alone takes hundreds of these trees, and that is a very poverty stricken home which has not at least a bunch of two of everyone at Christmastide.

Nowadays the gathering and preparing of Christmas greens form a very lucrative occupation for many a worker all the way from Maine to Florida. It is not generally known that the Christmas green man begins operations as early in the season as September, but such is the fact. This class of work brings Christmas money to many households where the resources would otherwise be disparagingly limited. A few years ago it was possible for the merchant in evergreens to secure all the trees he desired within a radius of 100 miles of New York city, this city having always been the distributing point for the greenery trade. The New England farmer used to be happy enough to have the tree gatherers clear his scrub land for him, but now he usually charges these tree gatherers $2 per hundred for all the trees they take from his farm and insists on their cutting all standing brush, clean and clear, instead of selecting, as was once done, only the most perfect growths.

Today the finest Christmas trees come from Maine. They are brought to New York tied in bundles, 100 bundles going to a car and sometimes 100 carloads to a train.

A goodly supply of pine comes also from New Hampshire, and some still comes from up on the Hudson. One of the chief centers for dressed Christmas greens, however, is New Jersey. For many years that section of the state which lies between Keyport and Jamesburg, just south of the Raritan river, has been a territory devoted to this trade. Here the raw material that is gathered from all the states along the Atlantic coast is worked up into decorative designs, such as wreaths and evergreen ropes. This work begins in September at the time when the balsam is gathered and before it has time to get too dry. It is stacked around the sheds and outhouses in which the work of "making" Christmas greenery is carried on.

This work is a very congenial occupation. It is a sort of community industry, carried on chiefly by clusters of families, although some of the merchants employ outside "hands," gathering them up from the towns in the neighborhood. Most of the help consists of women and well grown children. The beginning of operations is always welcomed by the genial country people, not only because of the revenue it brings to the family coffers, but also on account of its social features. Their busy little workshops seem very much like a New England sewing circle, the workers sitting around in conversation, exchanging all the gossip of the countryside.

As a general rule these women are paid for the piece, getting 7 or 8 cents a dozen for wreaths and 25 cents a dozen for the larger pieces, such as anchors and crosses. Some of the women make as much as $1.50 a day at this work, once a week, when the work is at its height, an impromptu dance is held in one of the larger workshops, the young fellows and lasses of the neighborhood being invited to take part in the merrymaking.

It is for making the Christmas "supplies" that most of the greens are used, immense quantities being demanded for church decoration alone. One large New York departmental store last year placed an order for four miles of it, all of which was used in the decoration of the big store. This coping is made up of the refuse of balsam and hemlock.

But pine and hemlock and balsam are not the only things necessary for Christmas decorations. Holly and mistletoe and laurel are still essential in Christmastide, while the various conifers of Florida, evergreen, bitter sweet and Jersey cape flowers seem to be growing in popular favor.

Mistletoe, of course, is imported to some from merry old England, but the fact is that very little is imported from that country.

In the old days in England it was a fine honored custom for the housewife to ask for kale from the gardener and with this holly she would deck her master's hall. If the maidservant declined or in any way neglected to provide her with the holly, it was the master's privilege to complete a suit of his capital breeches and slit up the seam in some place where they would be displayed to the cold blast of the December wind, usually on the extreme leading to the highway. This, naturally, caused the poor maidservant much embarrassment and it often proved a tax on her resources to lay in the necessary scarlet of holly.

A great deal of our American mistletoe is grown in Tennessee and Virginia. Holly and laurel come chiefly from Maryland, the Carolinas, Delaware and Virginia. Holly is packed in large 10 foot cases, just as it is picked, but it requires much more care than other greens. It must be stored in a cool, dark place and sprinkled with water each day until it is shipped off to market. Our New York dealer sold over 1,000 of these large cases of holly last season.

However, the romantic old mistletoe spray remains the universal favorite as a Christmas decoration. In Virginia, in the old days, the cavalier planter made it a point to have the mistletoe spray hung where the kirtled and ruffed damsel would be sure to stand, and many a time were those stately colonial dames caught in the embrace of their knight beneath the fatal bough.

Just how much the committee American bachelors annually expends for Christmas greenery it is hard to compute, but there dealers who are in a position to judge the volume of business done each season have estimated that over $5,000,000 is spent each Christmastide in the United States for decorations, but when one remembers the brightness and good cheer which this annual expenditure is the means of bringing into dark and dreary abodes then no one will say that the money is unwisely spent.

JACKIES' CHRISTMAS.

When the jackies sell that means the sailors who man and fight the ships of Uncle Sam's navy, start out to do anything, they may be depended upon to do it well, as their good work both at Manila and Santiago has shown. They go at whatever they undertake with a will and determination that are surprising. As a rule they like the work assigned them, and in their spare hours are equally fond of enjoying themselves, so when a holiday comes around they are ready for all the pleasure they can get out of it.

Jackie does not have many holidays, and some of them are spent at sea, where every one on the ship, from the captain down to the smallest boy, has duties to perform, which society nearly all his time, but it does not take a wonderful lot of imagination to know that Jackie does enjoy it from the morning call until it is time to turn in. Every minute in the day finds some pleasure for the hardy tars of the sea, and the general rule seems to be as numerous as they are amusing. That is, of course, when the jackies are in port.

The Jackies have one holiday that they feel in duty bound to celebrate. They do not have to drink up in port and attend a number of exercises as they do on July 4 and other national holidays, and consequently they find much time for pleasure of their own selection. The day they celebrate with a run is Christmas, and they do it as they do everything—well.

Not late, while it is wholesome and there is an abundance of it, is not always to the sailors' liking, and when Christmas comes around the jackies want shore food with plenty of "lasses," as they interpretedly call both the eagle and the turkey. This time, however, it refers to Uncle Sam's "third of food 'ent." The jackies are never troubled with ailments which would prevent them from enjoying their Christmas dinner, and as they are blessed with splendid appetites the meal goes to make up a great portion of the day's pleasures.

When the ships are at a home station, great preparations are made for celebrating Christmas. Men from the different gun divisions are invited with the selection of edibles. They club together and have sumptuous dinners, tries to outdo the others, and the consequence is that every variety of food in the market is to be found on the tables, which are usually nicely decorated. After "Quarters!" in the morning the men who are not on duty select teams and join in athletic sports, on the result of which they bet pieces of tobacco, cigars, cigarettes and other luxuries. Sometimes they bet their pay allowances. The games consist of all kinds of sports, from chasing a greased pig to a tug of war, which usually completes the programme.

On Christmas the jackies are given extra liberties, and very often their relatives and friends sit down to tables which may be truthfully said to be groaning under the weight of the good things. The men at this time usually show their likes and dislikes (if they have any) for the officers. The popular officers come in for a great deal of attention. They are invited in to look at the tables and to have some of the delicacies the men have scoured the markets to procure. The unpopular officer is always invited to partake of Jackie's dinner.

Some of the men, if they are in a harbor near their homes, obtain liberty and spend the day with friends and relatives, but as a rule they remain with their shipmates.

Few of the men exchange presents, but it is not an uncommon custom for them to make up a purse and with the proceeds give the popular officer in their respective divisions some kind of a gift. These presentation ceremonies are often very interesting. A committee is appointed to go "off" and ask the popular officer into the messroom, which has been decorated with the ship's flags and sometimes when the men have formed an association, with its colors. The men stand in a group and the spokesman who has been selected from among their number. In his excited condition the spokesman often forgets what he wants to say, and quite often says what he does not intend. When the latter is the case, the spokesman is not dealt with very kindly by his fellow messmates. The officer accepts the gift with a little speech, which brings forth great applause from his admirers, and he returns to the wardroom to receive the jests his brother officers have in store for him.

SOLDIERS' CHRISTMAS.

Uncle Sam's guardians of the peace on the frontier when not on the hunt for some disgruntled band of Indians spend their Christmas in a quiet manner. After guard mount in the morning all routine work is dispensed with, and the men may do as they please. In most of the posts it is either too hot or too cold to indulge in outdoor sports. In the southwest many of the posts are situated in the dry lands, where the heat from the sun is so great that it would be dangerous for the trooper to participate in outdoor sports. Until the sun begins to disappear beyond the western hills the men keep to their quarters. Then they indulge in such sport as getting some newcomer and tossing him in a blanket or a race across country on horseback. Where the posts are situated near the larger towns and towns the men find more enjoyment. The Christmas dinner is the principal part of all the programme, and great preparations are made to make it a red letter one in the memory of the men. Parties are sent into the forests and hunting grounds, while others go to the markets, and when the time comes for the men to sit around the festive board they are in good cheer. Everything the market affords is placed on the table. The messrooms are decorated with the national and regimental colors. After dinner speeches are made, in which frequently some of the officers come in for good natured raillery. There are few posts throughout the country which are not supplied with a band. The men stationed there have to make up their own music. In the other posts a dance is always given by the soldiers. The big mess halls are used for this, and the people for miles around attend them. The dances are kept up until early morning and often are not broken up until the sharp sound of the bugle at reveille is heard.

In the posts near the large cities most of the men take advantage of the liberty given them on Christmas to visit friends and the mess halls and barrack quarters are practically deserted.

The men who are looking after Uncle Sam's interests in the new possessions are not likely to have a very pleasant Christmas. Those in Cuba and Porto Rico will witness some strange sights with the advent of the holiday. There will be very little festivity for them owing to the unsettled condition of the countries. The soldiers in Hawaii will fare better, and for the first time for most of the boys they will celebrate the day in a land of perpetual summer. They will, however, like the men in the Philippines, have to make their own pleasures, and instead of the fat turkey, with the many good things which go with it to make up the ideal Christmas dinner, they will dine on the strange dishes of those peculiar lands. What outdoor games they may indulge in will have to be played within the limits of their quarters. The arrival of the transports and supply ships will be one of the interesting things that many of the men will look forward to, as they will bring the gifts from relatives and sweethearts who are now so far away. The Filipinos, like most of the natives of Hawaii, know nothing of Christmas, and it will be a novelty to them to watch the troopers enjoy themselves. When the sun goes down here on the day we celebrate and our Christmas is coming to a close, the men who helped raise the stars and stripes in the far east will be making preparations to celebrate theirs.

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PEOPLE OF NOTE.

Cordus Dutton has been elected president of the Champs de Mars Balloon Association of Paris to take the place of the late Pierre de Chavannes.

Admiral Thomas O. Selfridge, who was almost the only man to escape from the Cumberland after the battle with the Merrimac, and who has passed, by reason of age, over to the navy's retired list, will live in Washington with his family. "I have served nearly every port in the world," he said recently, "and now I'm tired of traveling."

Hidson Watson (Hiawatha) of eastern Carolina is said to bear a striking resemblance to Lincoln as to be popularly known as the former president's double.

It would appear from all accounts that M. Cousin's enterprise of the manufacture of spiders' web silk is to be pursued on a large scale, a factory in Paris having been taken for the purpose. Here the spiders will be kept and worked at regular hours, and, when one of them is used up, he will be fed and helped back to condition again, while another will take his place on the bobbin.

Joel Elvins, now more than 75 years old, has taken out a patent on an improved device for reading soundings at sea. Although his life work has been astronomical rather than mechanical and he has related reality to the theories that underlie many phenomena, Joel knows is the author of a number of useful instruments, among them the electric recorder for registering cable messages and the quadrant electrometer.

Miss Mary Kingsley, the daughter of Charles Kingsley and the most famous modern woman explorer, is said to be contemplating another trip through central Africa.

Pedro Perea of Bernalillo, the newly elected congressional delegate from New Mexico, is of almost and pure Spanish descent, being able to trace his family back to the time of Cortez, when his forefather first set foot on the soil of the new world.

Ex-President Harrison denies the report that his health is poor and declares he has not felt so well for many years.