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Editorial.

Christmas Customs and Legends.

THERE IS NO time like Christmas time. Its yearly commemoration is the anniversary of a well authenticated historic event; yet because of its popular appeal to sentiment, and its childlike winsomeness, many pious legends and customs associated with it have been handed down through the centuries to the present day.

How we all love getting Christmas presents! Young and old alike fall under the spell of anticipation and joy of receiving and giving presents as Christmas draws near.

The gayer and brighter the ribbons and wrappings on the parcels, the more rapturously intrigued we feel. We all long for the visit of the postman with letters and parcels. Yet during the early years of the infant Church it was not the practice to give presents. The custom arose in the third century A.D., when St. Nicholas (Santa Claus), Bishop in Asia Minor, threw alms through the window of a house to save the honour of three young girls held to ransom. Children now thank Santa Claus for the presents they find on the hearth or in their stockings on Christmas morning. So to this day the habit of giving presents in honour of Christ's Birthday persists, and in order to enjoy a happy Christmas we should first give a present to God in honour of the Birth of His Son into this world.

It is easy for nurses to fulfil this obligation of giving God a present, for in giving loving service to the sick we are giving the best present of all. So too, our measure of happiness on Christmas Day will be greater, for service to others brings great contentment in its wake.

Then there is the beautiful custom of placing a Crib in the place of honour in our Churches, a custom which is happily increasing as time goes on. Recently we have been thrilled to see this custom spreading out of the churches, where lovely representations of the Crib in glowing colours have been placed in prominent places for all to see. Last year one of the biggest stores displayed a most beautiful Crib in its windows, which attracted crowds who gazed upon it in silent admiration.

This practice was commenced by St. Francis of Assisi, that dearest of Saints in the twelfth century who set up the first Crib in order to remind his flock of the significance of Christmas. He exhorted his followers first to bring the gift of themselves to the Holy Infant, and then to go home and celebrate the Feast in their own various ways.

There is also another pretty legend in connection with the presence of the ox, the ass, the lamb and all the other animals who surrounded the Holy Babe as He lay snugly in His cot of straw in the manger. As a reward for their

faithful vigil on that first Christmas Eve two thousand years ago, and for giving the warmth from their big bodies to keep the Infant warm and cosy, thus preserving His life for His important mission on earth, they have been given the gift of speech at midnight on Christmas Eve, for as long as time shall last. We have promised ourselves to go out into the fields on some future Christmas Eve to hear just what the animals have to say to one another.

People in many lands still place a lighted lamp in their windows from dark on Christmas Eve until dawn, as a promise to welcome the Holy Family on Christmas Day. In hospitals it behoves us to keep a sharp look out, for this Family may come in disguise! They may arrive in the guise of a dangerously sick man or woman or as sick and fretful children, we never can tell. Their arrival may also coincide with ward parties or plays, or just as tired nurses are ready to depart off duty after a busy day lavishly spent in the service of their patients. However or whenever they come, we must be prepared to meet them and give them hospitality and a warm welcome.

Do we all know of the Flowering Thorn of Glastonbury which flowers on Christmas night? Many, many years ago it was customary for a Royal messenger to be dispatched from the King's household to Glastonbury. There he would wait throughout Christmas Day for the first flower to appear on the thorn. He then cut off the branch bearing the flower and galloped back to London at full pace to present his treasure to the King. Now-a-days people still go to Glastonbury on Christmas Day and await the flowering in order to take home one blossom, in the belief that they will thereby be protected from sickness and disaster throughout the following year.

Many more legends surrounding the feast are left to be told, but at another time. Now I have the privilege and the honour to wish all our readers, at home or far away beyond the seas, a very Happy Christmas in the name of the BRITISH JOURNAL OF NURSING. We also wish them many blessings, both general and special at this very happy season.

Also to our dear Queen and Her Royal Consort, we also send our loyal Christmas greetings, coupled with an expression of deep appreciation for the shining example of devotion to duty which she has set. It can have been no light task for her to have left her family and two attractive children at this time of the year and for six whole months. She did this in order to travel to the far distant lands of the Commonwealth, to bind them closer to us in ties of brotherhood and friendship for our greater well-being and happiness. May God bless her abundantly in her long journeyings and bring her back safely long to reign over us.

G. M. H.

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