

Royal British Nurses' Association.



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THE PSYCHOLOGY OF CHRISTMAS SYMBOLISM.

"I'm sending you a tree for Christmas," came the announcement one evening, and passed round, subject to a diversity of comment: "Don't suppose I'll be in to see it," "I'm glad, it makes one feel Christmas-like, reminds one of old times," "Old times come again no more, therefore I'd rather be spared the remembrance." "Yes, Christmas is really *only* for the children," "Then," energetically, "Let's become as children." The topic closed, but the silence that followed the last remark seemed to indicate that it had revived some long forgotten mood of wonder, the mood of the children, the only right mood in which to approach the Christmas festival, for with it comes the realisation that here, in the darkness of the year, stands a great and holy mystery; and in this mood, half wonder and half reverence, which discounts historical retrospection, discounts the intellect, thought strays into an age-long symbolism, probably far more profound in its meanings, its depths of imagination, than the present-day consciousness is able to conceive of. Only in the intimate, sensing mood of a child will one feel the haunting charm of time-worn Christmastide custom and legend, with their deep, elusive significance. And when, by observing these customs, we span the centuries, we come oddly into touch with the childhood of mankind and realise what a heritage of folk knowledge, legend and myth, has been bequeathed to us. We touch on the mighty truths that lie behind those and find that men of old saw everywhere in the forces of nature the writings of their gods, read in every happening in nature the reflection of a reality and activity in the spiritual world.

But the study of their folk wisdom and customs leads one to another conviction—that man's whole consciousness was different to what it is at the present time, and to the assumption that he was endowed with a more or less dim clairvoyance and interpreted, what he felt clairvoyantly, in legend, myth and saga. The death of the old clairvoyance has, it is believed by some, its portrayal in that portion of Greek mythology known as the Rape of Persephone; this indicates how man's conscious connection with the super-sensible, his ancient clairvoyance, was withdrawn as he developed the powers of the intellect and thus won that individuality and that independence which are the fruit of a well-developed intellect. Such then was the price man paid for the growth of the intellect but, at the Christmas time, he turns longingly, instinctively, towards the old-time clairvoyance which brought him its gifts of knowledge, which, when the sun was at its lowest and when death was spread over the earth, pointed to the glorious promise that life must conquer always.

It has been said that the early Christian teachers were careful to allow something to remain of the religions which they sought to supplant, so that man might be brought gradually to Christianity were he not prepared to accept its

teachings in their entirety; but who shall say that, in what we term fable and myth, these great Christian teachers and saints did not themselves see the reflection of truths not incompatible with their own teaching although, alongside such truths, overshadowing them, at the great turning point of time, there had to arise the teaching of the Risen Christ. There is a certain fascination in tracing the inclusion of Pagan customs in our Christmas celebrations; whether such inclusion may have arisen from tolerance or approval matters little to us now. Even in the flaming spirit round our Christmas pudding we find the remnant of a custom of well-nigh pre-historic times when the sacrificial flames of the Druid Priests rose towards the sky symbolising the offering up, the "forgetting" of all that they had learnt during the year, signifying that they would turn again to glean the lessons of their religion, with the mind and heart of a child yet with faculties deepened and developed by the effort to attain what they were now sacrificing. Only the doctors kept what they had gained in their search into materialistic knowledge applicable to the physical needs of their fellow men, so that they were regarded as having remained behind, from a spiritual point of view, for the benefit of their race.

The story of Santa Claus has also its message of life. St. Nicholas performed miracles and brought dead children to life, and so he came to be adopted as the Patron Saint of Childhood. No doubt it was the wondering children who, in childish syllables, changed his name from Santa Nicholas to Santa Claus. Anyhow, he has remained for many centuries connected with their Christmas festival, their particular Patron Saint, mysterious, benevolent, the personification of goodwill towards them.

And what of the mistletoe, that strange plant, like no other we know, with its leaves set transversely to form a cross? We call to mind the Northern myth telling how Frigg, the mother of the God of Light, went through every country and made each animate and inanimate thing promise not to harm Baldur the well-beloved. But she forgot to pledge the mistletoe and so Loki, the god of lies, made a dart from the mistletoe bough and slew Baldur, the God of Light. And in Christmas mood we place the mistletoe, the plant that carried death, with the symbols of life and the kiss of at-one-ment, of goodwill, and with wonder and reverence try to sense what profound connections may lie hidden, between the Baldur myth and the life unconquerable which streams from the teaching of the Risen Christ.

CHRISTMAS CALENDARS.

At the request of some of the members we have had prepared some calendars (post free 1s. 2d.) showing views of the Club which can be used as Christmas cards. We have among others a photograph of the hall and staircases and, in addition, several pictures of the drawing-room and other parts of the headquarters. Members who wish to have those calendars for use as Christmas cards should apply to the Secretary.

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