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THE CONSTANT FESTIVAL

Skies Change but Christmas Remains

CHRISTMAS is indestructible. Wherever Christian men and women find themselves—whether they are what are called practising Christians or have simply been brought up in the Christmas tradition—they will keep the day in the manner of their fathers and forefathers. If they can't get the Christmas plum-pudding, or the climate makes it too ponderous, they will make do with the next best thing. If they can't get a sprig of holly, they will use a pohutukawa flower, or some other substitute. On land or sea, at home or abroad, in quiet English village with snow around; in the vivid warm summer of Australia and New Zealand; in the jungles or deserts of Asia or Africa; wherever they are, they will keep the feast (in their hearts, if not in church), and remember what Christmas means. They will call up Christmas Past, with all its associations of home and family and friends, and each in his fashion will realise the constancy of this one day among the changing fortunes of men and nations. Reading the literature of Christmas, and records of Christmases men have spent in unusual situations, one is conscious of this vitality, this permanence of the festival. The amount of material in fact and fiction is immeasurably large. Contrasts crowd the pages. Here are a few moments out of the years.

Sir Roger—and the Bishop

"I HAVE often thought," says Sir Roger, "it happens very well that Christmas should fall out in the middle of winter. It is the most dead and uncomfortable time of the year, when the poor people would suffer very much from their poverty and cold, if they had not good cheer, warm fires, and Christmas gambols to support them. I love to rejoice their poor hearts at this season, and to see the whole village merry in my great hall."

ADDISON
(*The Spectator*)

★ ★ ★

I CAN'T get used to the way Church festivals fall in New Zealand, Easter in autumn and Christmas in summer. I have come to the conclusion that Christianity was devised for the Northern Hemisphere!

AN ENGLISHMAN
(*appointed to a New Zealand Bishopric*).

Snow or Sunshine

COMFORT, especially this vision of Christmas comfort, is the reverse of a gross or material thing. It is far more poetical, properly speaking, than the Garden of Epicurus; it is far more artistic than the Palace of Art. It is far more artistic because it is based upon a contrast, a contrast between the fire and wine within the house, and the winter and roaring rains without. It is far more poetical, because there is in it a note of defence, almost of war; a note of being besieged by the snow and hail; of making merry in the belly of a fort.

G. K. CHESTERTON
(*"Charles Dickens"*)

★ ★ ★

CHRISTMAS DAY came in silently, serenely, and golden-footed. The dawn unfolded itself without a stirring of the trees. Moving a gentle hand across the cloudless sky it put out the stars and slowly filled the great spaces with warm light. Gradually the cloak of mystery was lifted from the high and

broken line of the coast, and rocky cliff and round headland, curve of sand and forested slope, became definite in the clear morning light. The tide of day touched the great gnarled sea-loving trees on the beaches and the cliff edges, awoke to fiery life the splendour of their blossoms, and sank till it unfolded their fantastic limbs. The swell of the ocean, rolling from a thousand miles of dominion, threw its faint white line lovingly on the beaches, or slipped in among the rocks in a quiet smother of foam. The tents in the glade were the only sign of life, and in the shade of the trees they lay for long in the cool twilight or dawn.

ALAN MULGAN,
(*"Spur of Morning"*).

At Sea or in Harbour

And well I knew the talk they had,
the talk that was of me,
Of the shadow on the household and
the son that went to sea;
And O the wicked fool I seemed, in
every kind of way,
To be here and hauling frozen ropes
on blessed Christmas Day.

ROBERT LOUIS STEVENSON
(*"Christmas at Sea"*).

★ ★ ★

THE First Lieutenant read prayers on the snow-powdered quarter-deck, and then, following the immemorial custom of the Service, the Wardroom made a tour of the garland-hung mess-deck, halting at each mess to exchange the compliments of the season and to sample the plum-duff. Properly observed this ritual would put the normal stomach out of action for the remainder of the day. But there are discreet methods of sampling. The Day-on flopped exhaustedly on to a Wardroom settee, and proceeded to empty his cap of lumps of "figgy-duff," cigarettes, and walnuts. "Bless their hearts," he murmured, "I love them and I love their figgy-duff, but there are limits—here,

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