

Yuletide Observances.

By RACHEL DEE BROWNLOWE.

“Christmas, says Blount, was called the Feast of Lights in the Western or Latin Church, because they used many lights or candles at the feast; or rather, because Christ, the Light of all lights, that true light, then came into the world. Hence the Christmas candle and what was perhaps only a succeedaneum, the Yule-block, or clog, before candles were in general use.”

(*Brand's Popular Antiquities, by Sir Henry Ellis.*)



WHATEVER may have been the original idea in instituting a Feast of Lights in celebration of Christmastide, it appears quite evident that the Yule-clog is a survival of some ancient practice associated with pagan worship. The origin of the name Yule is surrounded with much obscurity. Dr. Annandale gives us four languages in which it is found, in forms strongly resembling each other, namely, Anglo-Saxon, Icelandic, Danish and Swedish. Another authority assures us that all the Celtic peoples were addicted to the worship of the Sun. If we bear in mind the fact that it was not only the winter solstice which was celebrated by the lighting of great fires, but that the summer solstice also was celebrated by the lighting of fires in the open air, we shall see that there is strong reason to believe that the Yule-log has merely been withdrawn by the Christian Church from its heathen associations, and kept a-blazing on the bare merit of its hospitable warmth. The Yule-log, as we know it, or rather as we know of it, is all that properly concerns us. Yet, were we to investigate, the obscurity surrounding this institution is flashed upon at various points by

suggestions which lend a lurid contrast to the blissful associations which cling about our Christmastide. Dr. Watson tells us that the worship of Baal extended as far west as the British Isles; and it has been thought that the popular Christmas dish of Furmity is a survival of the ancient Saturnalia. It seems abundantly likely that many of the quaint, and even grotesque practices which obtained in the British Isles in connection with the Christmas festivities were incorporated into the Christian festival from pagan heathenism. The size of the Yule-log was considerable. We are told of an incident which occurred during the Civil War, when one of the combatants burnt the house of an opponent by firing the Yule-log. A rather ironical joke!

Poets have loved to sing of the Yule-log; thus Tennyson:

“Again at Christmas did we weave
The holly round the Christmas hearth:
The silent snow possessed the earth,
And calmly fell our Christmas Eve.”

“The Yule-log sparkled keen with frost.”

Herrick, most descriptive of poets, sings:

“Come, bring with a noise,
My merry, merry boys,
The Christmas log to the firing,
While my good dame, she
Bids ye all be free,
And drink to your heart's desiring.”