

TELL TALES

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Christmas a legal holiday. Alabama, which like all southern states celebrated Dec. 25 with fireworks a la Fourth of July, was the first, in 1836, and the rest followed suit: California, 1851, Nevada, 1861, Utah, 1882, etc., with Oklahoma being last in 1890.

As late as 1855, all religions were still not in accord in their tolerance of the holiday. The Dec. 26 edition of the year's New York Times stated: Churches of Presbyterians, Baptists and Methodists were not open yesterday. They do not accept the day as a Holy one, but Episcopalian, Catholic and German churches were open. Inside they were decked with evergreens. However, by 1880, all evangelical churches were accepting Christmas.

Passing of Christmas gifts in those days was not emphasized, except the wealthy were expected to be generous to the poor. In the middle of the 19th Century, due to the influence of Charles Dickens' writings, singing of Christmas carols became prevalent, and the sending of cards began in 1875.

The classic editorial which began, "Yes,

Virginia, there is a Santa Claus," in response to a child's query, was written by Francis Church for the New York Sun of Dec. 21st, 1897.

In recent years Santa Claus has become to be known as a communal folk figure. A Pennsylvania judge ruled in 1936, that any doubters of Santa Claus who appeared before him would be held in contempt of court. The court citation read: Santa is not a figment of the imagination but an actuality. He is the symbol of kindness, a token smiling charity and a badge of all that is cheerfully benevolent.

Commercial exploitation of Christmas has become systematic and thorough, impelling Roman Catholics, Lutherans, Episcopalians and Jews, to band together in Milwaukee in 1949 and decree to put Christ back into Christmas.

Meanwhile millions of non-Christian homes in scores of non-Christian countries, including Japan and India, have taken unto their own the kindness and charity and cheer of Christmas and proudly display decorated and lit trees on December 25th.

All this proves the true sense of Christmas has not waned -- its just that the Spirit of Christmas has overwhelmed and is about to inundate all humans in the four corners of the earth.

THANKSGIVING IMAGES

The images of Thanksgiving are historic and heartwarming. Pilgrim founders, turkey and stuffing, the festive board. For the Pilgrims themselves, the origins of Thanksgiving traced back to the Bible on which their entire life was built, their covenanted community, their very Exodus to the New Zion in America.

As Bible-believers, the Pilgrims knew that the rituals of Thanksgiving began with the ancient Israelites who regarded the offering of thanks to God for their daily blessings of life and good health as the supreme expression of their humanness. In the Messianic age, the Pharisaic Rabbis taught, all sacrifices in the Jerusalem Temple will come to an end, except for that which trains the entire people in the duty of gratitude. That obligation is to continue forever.

The Prophets ranked ingratitude -- that is, taking for granted the Divine daily gifts of food, clothing, shelter, and taking other people for granted -- as the supreme sin, one that reduces people below the level of animals.

We need only to look about us to see how pervasive and humanly destructive that decline of elemental gratitude, taking everything for granted, has become -- between husbands, and wives, parents and children, employers and employees, and between people and public servants. Thanksgiving has become too frequently a matter of heartburn over gorging oneself, rather than heartfelt thanks for the things that really count in our lives.

In an age darkened by expanding tyrannies and widespread hunger and poverty, that condition can be relieved only by a rebirth of plain, old-fashioned thanksgiving for everyday gifts of life, democratic freedom, and nurturing love for one another.

EXPLOSION ROCKS EMBASSY IN ECUADOR

QUITO, Ecuador -- (WNS) -- The Israeli Ambassador here, Elicer Armon, has denounced as a "criminal act which has caused innocent victims" the powerful explosion that rocked the Israeli Embassy in late November, leaving two persons dead and a third seriously wounded. Extra security measures have been taken to ensure the continued welfare of the Israeli diplomatic staff.

According to eyewitness reports, a young man entered the four story structure, in which the Israeli Embassy occupies the top floor, carrying a suitcase. On the third floor, he opened the suitcase and to the astonishment of the people who were in the corridor, he lit several sticks of dynamite and started to climb the staircase toward the Embassy offices. Raising the alarm, they scared the terrorist who abandoned the

suitcase and fled into the street. In the ensuing panic, Ambassador Armon and the rest of the Israeli diplomatic staff escaped from the building.

Two Ecuadorian national civil policemen who were posted in guard stations at the building entrance ran back into the building in search of the dy-

namite when the first workers reached the street. The policemen retrieved the smoking suitcase on the third floor and descended to the lobby in an attempt to throw it out into the street. The high power charge, smelling strongly of sulfur, exploded when they were 15 feet from the door. The impact killed one of

the policemen instantly and seriously wounded the other, who died later on the operating table at the Military Hospital. An unidentified woman passerby was seriously wounded.

After the bombing, Ambassador Armon stated to the press that he did not want to speculate as to those who were responsible for placing the bomb.

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