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The English Festivals

Annie Haynes

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Shortly after the end of World War II, Laurence Whistler set out to write ‘a guide to the festivals of England as they are and as they might be’: the result is a captivatingly readable and enchanting narrative, the ancient holidays revealed as a microcosm of the wheel of life in England. Christmas, New Year, Twelfth night, Easter, May Day, Whitsun, Midsummer, Harvest (and sixteen others) – these are the most ancient of our traditions, more ancient than any present-day beliefs, and strong enough to have survived even the attacks of Puritans in the seventeenth century.

Here, for example, is the radiant Kissing Bough, whose candles we lit before we had ever heard of a Christmas Tree. Here is the way to colour and engrave Easter Eggs. Here are fireworks in all their extravagant variety. Or here is the history of the Valentine and the Christmas Card.

Laurence Whistler has written this scholarly book with the imaginative delight of a poet. This new edition features an introduction by art historian James Russell.

“His book has been written in delight and passes on delight to the reader… it has a lovely benevolence; the author’s knowledge, his sense of values, his breadth of outlook are in evidence on every page.” *John O’London’s Weekly*

“There is scholarship here about the past, and delight in the festivals of today… a book that will be delightful to pick up again at any time of the year.” *Sunday Times*

“Possessing enchantment of matter, it has also enchantment of manner.” *Time and Tide*

“Its younger readers will find themselves educated, perhaps unconsciously, by publisher as well as author.” *Observer*

“A charming book.” *Country Life*

“A most charming and decorative volume.” *Sunday Chronicle*

“Learning and common sense have gone to the making of this attractive, well-illustrated book.” *Birmingham News*

“A delightful gift book for all the year round… altogether charming.” *Edinburgh Evening News*

“A book very much out of the ordinary.” *Sphere*

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