

**AN ACCOUNT OF THE
CHRISTMAS PRINCE: AS IT WAS
EXHIBITED IN THE UNIVERSITY
OF OXFORD, IN THE YEAR 1607**

Published @ 2017 Trieste Publishing Pty Ltd

ISBN 9780649419371

An Account of the Christmas Prince: As it was Exhibited in the University of Oxford, in the Year 1607 by Various

Except for use in any review, the reproduction or utilisation of this work in whole or in part in any form by any electronic, mechanical or other means, now known or hereafter invented, including xerography, photocopying and recording, or in any information storage or retrieval system, is forbidden without the permission of the publisher, Trieste Publishing Pty Ltd, PO Box 1576 Collingwood, Victoria 3066 Australia.

All rights reserved.

Edited by Trieste Publishing Pty Ltd.
Cover @ 2017

This book is sold subject to the condition that it shall not, by way of trade or otherwise, be lent, re-sold, hired out, or otherwise circulated without the publisher's prior consent in any form or binding or cover other than that in which it is published and without a similar condition including this condition being imposed on the subsequent purchaser.

www.triestepublishing.com

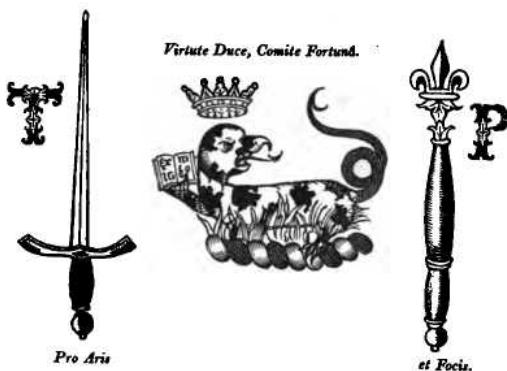
VARIOUS

**AN ACCOUNT OF THE
CHRISTMAS PRINCE: AS IT WAS
EXHIBITED IN THE UNIVERSITY
OF OXFORD, IN THE YEAR 1607**

AN ACCOUNT
OF
The Christmas Prince,

AS IT WAS EXHIBITED IN
THE UNIVERSITY OF OXFORD,
IN THE YEAR 1607.

NOW FIRST PUBLISHED FROM THE ORIGINAL MANUSCRIPT.



LONDON:
PRINTED BY T. BENSLEY AND SON,
Bolt Court, Fleet Street;
FOR ROBERT TRIPHOOK, 23, OLD BOND STREET.

MDCCXVI.

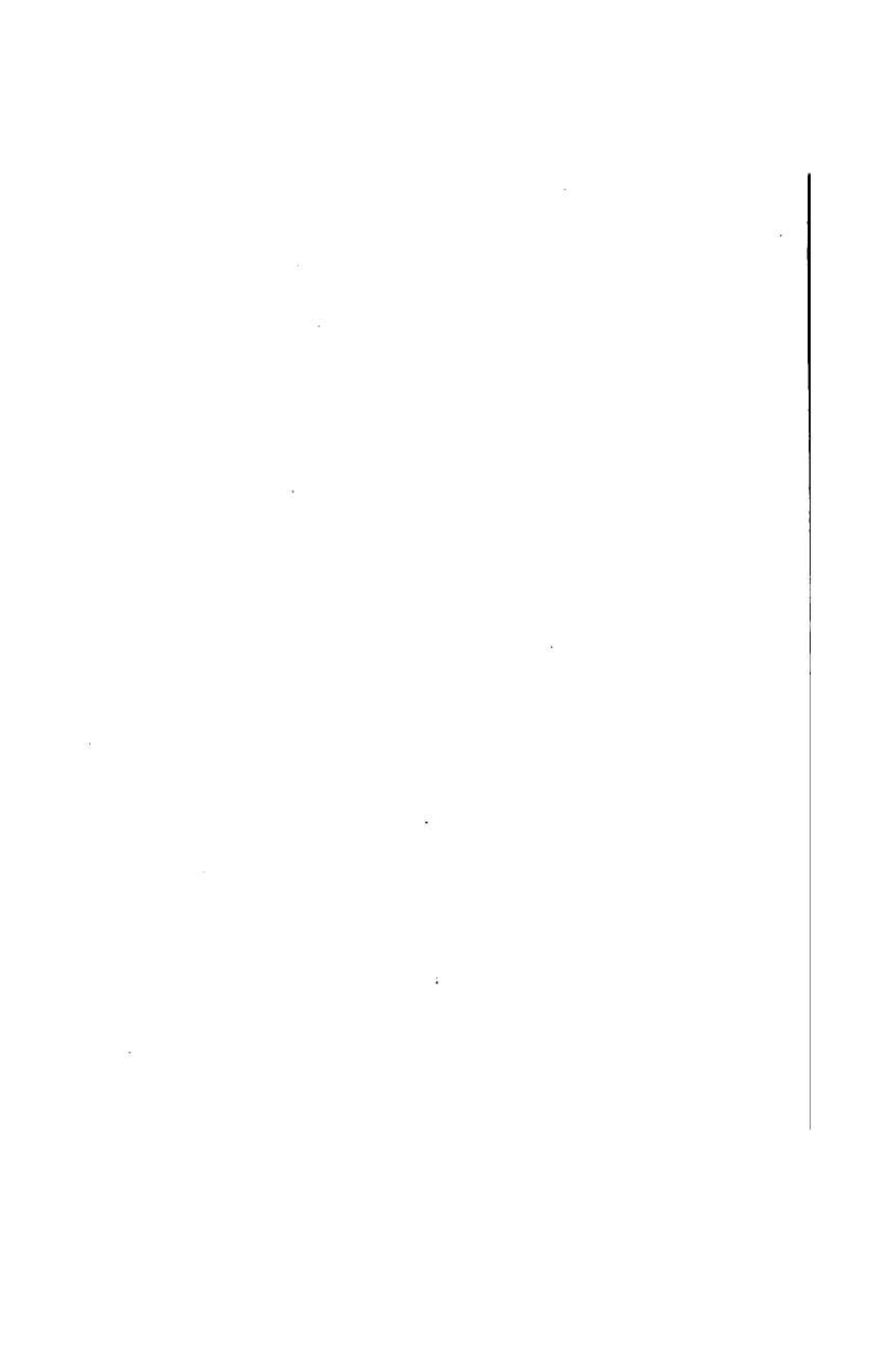


TO
THE PRESIDENT, FELLOWS,
AND
SCHOLARS
OF
ST. JOHN BAPTIST COLLEGE,
IN THE
UNIVERSITY OF OXFORD,

This Curious Record

OF
AN ANCIENT CUSTOM IN THEIR SOCIETY,
IS RESPECTFULLY INSCRIBED,

BY
THE PUBLISHER.



ADVERTISEMENT.

THE history and antiquities of a country are never better illustrated than by a view of its early manners and customs, and in this investigation the sports of the populace, and the recreations of those in a higher situation in life, afford, perhaps, the best and most certain means of information. Thus, from the religious spectacles of our earlier ancestors, and from the dramatic representations of such as have more immediately preceded us, we obtain a pretty accurate idea of their general feelings and accustomed behaviour.

From a consideration that any document which might assist in this illustration would not be looked on as useless or uninteresting, the publisher has been induced to offer to his readers the following account of a Christmas Prince, as it was performed in Saint John's College, in the University of Oxford, in 1607. Of its authenticity no doubt can possibly exist; it was written by an eyewitness of, and performer in, the sports; and is now printed, for the first time, from the original manuscript preserved in the College Library.

There can be little difficulty in assigning the origin of The Christmas Prince to a custom of high antiquity and general usage—This was the feast of the Boy Bishop, as it was called, a ceremony which was celebrated with great splendor on the feast of St. Nicholas, or the Holy Innocents. On this occasion it was customary, in all cathedral churches, (and probably in most large and opulent parishes,) for some one of the children of the choir to bear the title and state of a bishop, to wear the episcopal robes, and to exact obedience from his companions, who were habited like priests:—nay, singular as it may appear, they took possession of the church; and, except mass, performed all the ceremo-

nies and offices of religion. In Brand's "Observations on Popular Antiquities," as well as in the "Posthuma" of the learned John Gregory, printed in 1650, various authorities are quoted, and many extracts given, which prove the antiquity of this custom; and Warton, in the "History of English Poetry," conceives that traces of this religious mockery may be discovered as far back as the Constantinopolitan Synod in the year 867. Be this as it may, it is certain that the ceremony prevailed in England in the reign of Edward the First, as that Prince, on his way to Scotland, in the year 1299, permitted one of these boy-bishops to say vespers before him in his chapel at Heton, near Newcastle-upon-Tyne, and made a present to the performers of forty shillings, no inconsiderable sum in those days. (Wardrobe Account, 28 Ed. I. in the "Archaeologia.")

The ceremonial of the Boy-bishop was put down by Henry the Eighth in 1542, by a proclamation setting forth, that—"whereas heretofore dyvers and many superstitious and chyldysh observauncis have be used, and yet to this day are observed and kept, in many and sundry partes of this realm, as upon Saint Nicholas, the Holie Innocents, and such like; children be stranglie decked and apparayled to counterfeit priests, bishops and women, and to be leddé with songes and dances from house to house, blessing the people and gathering of money; and boyes do singe masse and preache in the pulpitt, with such other unfittinge and inconvenient usages, rather to the derysyon than anie true glory of God, or honour of his Sayntes: the Kynges Majestie wylleth and commaundeth that henceforth all such superstitious observations be left and clerely extinguished throwout all this realme and dominions," &c. Although the custom was revived by queen Mary at the restoration of the Catholick religion, it was, of course, again put aside when Elizabeth succeeded to the crown, and from that time is no longer heard of.

From the Boy Bishop the Christmas Prince may then be supposed to derive his origin. Whilst the former was bearing sway in the ecclesiastical foundations, the latter was elected to celebrate the festivities of Christmas in the King's palace, at the

seats of the nobility, at the universities, and in the Inns of court. "In the Feast of Christmas, (says Stow in his "Survey of London,") there was in the King's house, wheresoever he lodged, a lord of misrule, or master of merry disports, and the like had ye in the house of every nobleman of honour or good worship, were he spiritual or temporal." The custom prevailed till the ascendancy of the puritans during the civil war; and some idea of the expense, and general support it received, may be formed from the account of the Gray's Inn Prince (which will be noticed presently), and an extract from one of the Strafford Papers. The latter is from a letter written by the Rev. G. Garrard to the Earl of Strafford, dated Jan. 8, 1635.

"The Middle Temple House have set up a prince, who carries himself in great state; one Mr. Vivian a Cornish gentleman, whose father Sir Francis Vivian was fined in the star-chamber about a castle he held in Cornwall, about three years since. He hath all his great officers attending him, lord keeper, lord treasurer, eight white staves at the least, captain of his pensioners, captain of his guard, two chaplains, who on Sunday last preached before him, and in the pulpit made three low legs to his excellency before they began, which is much laughed at. My lord chamberlain lent him two fair cloths of state, one hung up in the hall under which he dines, the other in his privy chamber; he is served on the knee, and all that come to see him kiss his hand on their knee. My lord of Salisbury hath sent him pole-axes for his pensioners. He sent to my lord of Holland, his justice in Eyre, for venison, which he willingly sends him; to the lord mayor and sheriffs of London for wine, all obey. Twelfth-Day was a great day, going to the chapel many petitions were delivered him, which he gave to his masters of the requests. He hath a favourite, whom with some others, gentlemen of great quality, he knighted at his return from church, and dined in great state; at the going out of the chambers into the garden, when he drank the King's health, the glass being at his mouth he let it fall, which much defaced his purple satten suit, for so he was clothed that day, having a cloke of the same down to his foot, for he mourns for his father