

Christmas Everywhere

WHEN Christmas bells are ringing merrily on Christmas eve it is pleasant to think that the whole world is celebrating, and that as long as the human family has been on earth it has made merry at a midwinter feast. The little children in your house or mine, and the little children across the street, are just like other little children in Russia, in Norway, in France and in Italy, or the German Fatherland who have made ready for their Christmas trees when the winter's sun has set and the Christmas stars are shining over head.

At the time that the Holy Babe lay in the manger in Bethlehem to be the Christmas Babe for the Christian world the Romans were celebrating their Saturnalia and trimming willow wands, as we trim Christmas trees, of course with a difference. But just the same they were celebrating the midwinter festival. They danced and sang, gave gifts, and hung wreaths while across the Alps to the north the Wild Huntsman was chasing through the woods to be the terror of all naughty children.

The Christmas tree honored because it was evergreen gained fresh honors when adorned with tapers. The evergreen was eternal, and the lights shed glory around. How jolly is the raising of the Christmas tree! How the children love to talk about it before hand and to trim it, or to get the gifts from its overlaid boughs.

In Germany the whole household goes to church. In many villages the church is left in darkness, and the worshippers carry lighted candles, coming in one by one, until it is a brilliant sight. When the season is over the old hymns are sung. "Es ist der Tag des Herrn," and Christmas greetings are heard on every side.

The Julafred, or peace of Christmas, is publicly proclaimed in Sweden and Norway. The churches are decorated, and the children are the first to enter in the gray of the early morning. No one is forgotten. The poor are remembered with food and clothing, and best of all the little brothers of the str, the birds, have a tree hung with a sheaf of wheat for Christmas cheer.

In Holland feasting prevails as it does everywhere. But the children set out their wooden shoes for gifts, and not one is forgotten. The practice of feeding pets and birds is general.

In Servia and in Bulgaria no one crosses a strange threshold if it can

be avoided. Friends rejoice together, the little children dance and sing and gifts are exchanged. An ancient ceremony has to be performed by the head of every household. Before a mouthful of food is eaten early in the morning, corn is placed in a stocking and the chief of the family sprinkles a little before the householder, saying "Christ is born;" to which one of the family replies: "He is born indeed." Then the house-father has to "wish" and, advancing to the burning logs on the hearth, he strikes them, until the sparks fly upward, with a good wish for the horses, another for the cattle, the calves, and the goats, and so on through the entire band of stock on the farm, concluding with a special prayer and an extra blow upon the embers of the logs for a plentiful harvest. In this manner the gods of nature are appeased. Then the ashes containing "the wish" are collected and buried secretly. As for the Yule logs, they are not permitted to burn entirely away, but the fire being extinguished the burnt ends are placed in the clefts of fruit trees so as to ensure a bountiful crop.

In out of the way corners of the world, the traveler has met processions going about on Christmas eve giving gifts to the earth, to the stream, to fruit trees, and the priest with a censor of incense invoking blessings on the harvests which are to come when the winter is over.

The receiving of gifts seems to be the passing of a later day. At Lyons in France the Foundlings Home has a beautiful custom. A handsome cradle is placed at the door and the forsaken infant laid therein is afterwards treated with great consideration as the gift of the Christ child at the blessed season.

The more playful customs of putting hats about for presents as French children do, of baskets which Italian children make, of gift boxes and the tour of St. Nick prevail everywhere. Even in the tropics Christmas is observed, as if the cold snow lay round about. Mexico has many beautiful customs, and Catholic countries never forget the feast of the Babe in the Manger in church.

L. M. McCauley.

THE SOCIETY KID.

With tears in her eyes little Polly sat under a big wreath of holly. When they asked why she cried, "Santy brought," she replied, "Not a bow-wow, but only a dolly."



Christmas Eve

Christmas eve! And a blustery night—
Snow-flurries almost blinding the sight;
Eddying winds shift to and fro
And toss from the chimneys smoke-clouds low.

On the street is heard a noisy throng
Of pleasure-bent shoppers, hurrying along,
Laden with bundles and baskets and toys
To gladden the hearts of girls and boys.

Let the wintry winds moan on, and sigh
Through the forests, and sing their lullaby;
'Neath holly-wreathed boughs and mistletoe
I rest and sleep while 'tempests blow.

Christmas eve! And the sound of bell,
Yuletide harmonies, break and swell,
And sing of a Babe in Bethlehem,
Born in a manger—Saviour of men!
—E. A. FERGUSON.



Christmas in Odd Corners

Yuletide Recollections of a Traveler

It has been my lot to spend many of my Christmases in foreign lands. I recall one dismal holiday spent in a filthy post-house on the Great Post Road at Nijal Udinsk, now, in these days of the trans-Siberian railway, a place of some importance.

I was alone, on my way from Petersburg to Irkutsk. On the previous day I had overtaken a convoy of prisoners in chains, and as on the morning of the Russian Christmas day I was sitting by the high brick stove, I saw the Cossacks and their despairing charges arrive.

I remember walking and talking with several of them in that wilderness of newly fallen snow. Most of them were, or said they were, victims of the unscrupulous agents provocateurs of the government, and all seemed bitter against the czar and his advisers—as indeed they well might be.

Another Christmas of the Greek calendar I spent in Servia—in Belgrade, the capital of that gallant little state, the powder-magazine of the Balkans. It was a cold, bright, sunny day, and an air of festivity was everywhere. The service in the cathedral, attended by the king and his cabinet, was a brilliant affair, and after a stroll in the delightful Kalemegdan garden, overlooking the Danube, I lunched with my friend the minister of justice and his charming American wife. The streets were hung with flags, exchanges of presents and flowers were universal, and many were the quaint Serb customs.

The twenty-fifth of December three years ago I spent wearily in the stuffy restaurant car of the Nord express between Paris and Petersburg. Again, I was alone and I remember, as we steamed out of Vilna station to the great plain towards Dunaburg, the chef of that celebrated express produced his triumph—an English pudding, with a small piece of holly stuck in the top. My fellow passengers, being all foreigners, failed to appreciate it. But I did.

Another memorable holiday was that I passed in the reindeer-skin hut of a Laplander half-way between Alexandrovsk and Kandalaksha. I was traveling by sled. I had left Kirkenaes, on an arm of the Arctic ocean, a month before and was now working my way south toward Archangel.

I produced a bottle of much-shaken port wine, in honor of the occasion, and poured out a glass for my host. He was very suspicious of it, and compelled me to swallow mine first. Then he sipped his, and pulled a wry face. His wife tasted it, and sniffed suspiciously, and afterward the servants, but all declared it was some horrid English decoction—some medicine, it must be, they said. They had never before tasted wine. They had never seen a bunch of grapes, never a rose, and never even a tree.

One Yuletide dinner I ate at Ciro's, at Monte Carlo, where the fooling was fast and furious, and with my friends I watched "the tables" afterward, supping across at the Hotel de Paris, and receiving a present from the monster tree.—WILLIAM LE QUEUX.

CHRISTMAS PROVERES

A prudent quotation on the bill of fare: "They are sick that surfeit with too much, as they that starve with nothing."

"The gadding vine" must be of the Christmas variety, for that splendid tendril is creeping through the whole earth.

"The mirror of all courtesy" should be polished on Christmas day.

"A royal train, believe me," is the reindeer equipage of good old St. Nick.

How December 25 Was Chosen

How many people know why Christmas came to fall on December 25?

Everybody knows that it is the day celebrated alike by the Catholic, Protestant and Greek churches as the nativity of Christ, yet nobody knows if it is the actual date.

The uncertainty is due to the prejudice of early Christians against the celebrations of birthdays. They regarded such a custom as heathenish, and made no exception, even to the Saviour's birthday.

It was not until Christianity had triumphed, three centuries later, that the prejudice against the observance of birthdays died out, and an investigation as to the date of Christ's birthday was begun.

Julius, pope or bishop of Rome, asked St. Cyril in 386 to ascertain the real anniversary of the nativity. St. Cyril reported the date to be December 25, to the best of his knowledge, after extensive research, and the date was accepted by Julius and promulgated as the anniversary of Christ's birth. Before the end of the fifth century the date was accepted by all Christendom.

January 6, April 20, March 20 and March 29 are some of the dates that were serious contenders for the distinction before December 25 received the seal of Julius' approval.

Even after the date was generally accepted by all Christian nations the holiday had its struggles. The English roundhead parliament of 1643 abolished Christmas and for 12 years it was not observed in England. Royalty gained the ascendancy, however, and Christmas was re-established as a national holiday.

Governor Bradford of Plymouth, in 1621, history says, had occasion to rebuke some young men who had come over in the ship Fortune, following in the trail of the "Mayflower," because their consciences would not allow them to work on Christmas, with their sterner Puritan brothers.

In 1659 the general court of Massachusetts passed a law fixing a fine of five shillings against anyone who should by abstinence from labor, feasting or any other method, observe Christmas.

CHRISTMAS JIBES

All Paid For.

"Your wife was telling my wife that you've got all your Christmas presents paid for," remarked the man in the corner of the city train to the lean individual sitting by his side.

"Yes; paid for the last of them yesterday," was the reply.

"Lucky dog! I haven't even begun to think of the presents I've got to buy."

"Oh, neither have we for this year. My wife was speaking of last year's presents."

Santa Is Easy.

Bobby (on Christmas morning)—"Where does Santa Claus get all his things, mamma?"

Mamma—"Oh, he buys them."

Bobby—"Well, he must be a jay to let anyone palm off a tin watch on him!"

Seasonable Thoughts.



At this season thoughts of boys lightly run to Santa Claus.

Where They Come From.

Guest (dining at merry Christmas party)—"Tommy, where do turkeys come from?"

Tommy (pointing to that on the table)—"Dunno; but ma got this one from a tramp for a shilling, 'cause he said he stole it. Didn't he, ma?"

HOLLY SUPERSTITIONS

It is unlucky to bring holly or ivy into the house before Christmas eve and unlucky to take it out before Candlemas, or to put any Christmas decorations into the fire. Herrick, however, says that they should be burnt, but not until Candlemas eve, and the Christmas brand should be quenched and laid by till next year. This same brand Devonshire folk of today prefer to burn out, in spite of Herrick; but instead of an oak log it is an ash faggot—a sheaf of ash-twigs bound round with five or ten strands of straw. As each strand burns through the guests who sit around the hearth must call for cider and drink a "Merry Christmas and many to follow."



DOCTOR Fordney came out of the big department store, deposited an armful of packages in his runabout, and then started to pay the last visit on his daily round. It was the afternoon before Christmas, but the young physician's heart was not filled with the proverbial holiday cheer. Good will he had toward all men—but not toward all women. One little spot of resentment lurked in his thoughts of June Leigh.

She had accepted his tender devotion with downcast eyes and an entrancing air of demureness and timidity combined. Then, suddenly, she had been transformed into the most bewildering of coquettes, openly flirting with a man the doctor detested.

At speed-limit rate, he drove his machine into the poorest of the poor precincts of the city and stopped before a forlorn-looking little house. He knocked and then opened the door. A pale, anxious-eyed woman came forward. He held up a cautioning finger and smiled as he deposited his load of toys in a corner.

"I see you have the wherewith for a Christmas dinner tomorrow," he said, glancing at a chicken on the table.

"A young lady brought us a basket of good things from the Aid society," she replied, smiling happily as she preceded him into the adjoining room.

A delicate little face with wan eyes looked up from the pillow.

"You are better, little Lou," he asserted, taking the tiny hand in his. "It's the thought of Christmas?"

"Yes, and a lovely young lady brought us a Christmas dinner, and there's jelly and pie. She is coming again tomorrow to see if Santa Claus came. I don't think he will, though."

"You must have faith in him and believe that he will come," assured the doctor. "You see he makes a mistake once in a while, but he wouldn't miss you twice. I feel sure that he will come."

"Oh, do you? If I could only see him? Do you think he would care if I remained awake?" asked the quaint little invalid.

"Well, you know he generally comes when everyone is asleep, but maybe, since you are sick and because he forgot you last year, he may come here first, early in the evening, and let you see him."

"Oh!" cried the child ecstatically. "Maybe he'll have a Christmas tree here for you," said the doctor, his imagination taking lofty flights.

The child's eyes gleamed. "No," she sighed. "That would be too beautiful."

The doctor asked a few questions, left some more medicine, and then beckoned the mother to follow him into the outer room.

"I will send a little tree and all the trappings as soon as I get back to the city. You have it all trimmed up and lighted at six o'clock. Then I'll come in and be Santa Claus."

"Oh, you mustn't do so much," she protested, looking at the many parcels.

"I have no one in the world to do anything for," he said earnestly, "so you will be giving me all the Christmas cheer I shall get by letting me do this. And, more than that, it will do little Lou more good than a load of medicine."

He returned to the city for another shopping expedition and promptly at six o'clock he was back at the little home. On the door-step he slipped in-

to a big fur coat, adjusted a beard and the usual Santa Claus make-up. Then he softly opened the door and slipped in. He gave an approving glance at the gaily-decorated, brilliantly-lighted little tree to which Mrs. Ellis was putting the last touches.

"That is fine!" he exclaimed. "The young lady came back with a doll for Lou, and when I told her what you had done, she stayed and fixed it for me. She was here all the afternoon, stringing cranberries and popcorn, and making candy bags."

"I'll slip behind the tree, now, and you bring the little girl out. She won't be afraid of me, will she?"

"Oh, no; she loves Santa Claus!"

The doctor was more than repaid for his efforts by the cry of delight that issued from Lou when her mother brought her from the bed-room and propped her up in pillows in an old rocking chair.

"I couldn't find you last year," said Santa Claus in a gruff but tender voice, "but I have brought you enough this year to make up."

The tree was nearly stripped before Doctor Fordney discovered a tiny blue envelope addressed to Santa Claus in a handwriting that made his heart-beats quicken. He opened it and by the light of a tiny candle read that which made his Christmas eve an eve of beauty.

"And this is the last, little Lou," he said, carrying her a picture-book.

"Santa Claus, you won't forget Miss Leigh, the young lady who brought us the Christmas dinner?" she pleaded.

"Little Lou, I am going there fight



"I Couldn't Find You Last Year," Said Santa Claus.

from here. She shall have everything she wants."

"And you won't forget Doctor Fordney?"

"No; I'll give him the best Christmas he ever had."

"But, Santa Claus, won't some one give you a present?"

"A beautiful lady is going to give me the loveliest gift in the whole world tonight," he said.

"Oh, I am so glad! I wish I could do something for you for all the things you have brought me."

"You can, little Lou. In half an hour will you go to bed and shut your eyes tight and try not to think of your presents, or the tree or of me until morning?"

He stooped to receive the imprint of baby lips and to feel the lingering pressure of soft arms about his neck. (Copyright, 1910.)

The kingdom of God has already come in nature, in the worlds beyond, in everything save the hearts of men.—Rev. D. H. Ogden, Presbyterian, Atlanta, Ga.

BETWEEN TWO FIRES



By Wilbur D. Nesbit

"And thou Bethlehem, in the land of Juda, art not least among the princes of Juda."—Matthew II, 6.

"O, little town of Bethlehem, how still we see thee lie—
The song brings back the silent peace of Christmases gone by;
Brings back the olden mystery, and sets the heart a-thrill
With fancies of the snow-draped firs that nodded on the hill,
With memories of ruddy lights that night would find aglow
Which from the cottage windows flung their banners on the snow.

"Above thy deep and dreamless sleep the silent stars go by—
The stars above the little town were very far and high,
They marched triumphantly from lands wherof a boy might dream
To other lands that beckoned him with dawn's enchanting gleam
But under all the silent stars that marched from east to west
The little town the little town—contented, was at rest.

"Yet in thy dark streets shineth the everlasting light"
The mellow blaze of memory still leaps serenely bright
And through its wondrous necromance the bare trees it illumines
All pink and white are radiant with snowy apple blooms
Whose petals, when the winter winds the branches sway and lift,
Float dreamily away, away, to pile in drift on drift.

"The hopes and fears of all the years are met in thee tonight"—
Are met in every little town seen in the Christmas light,
For none of us but muses now, when this old song is sung,
Of all the blessings that were his when head and heart were young,
And, miser-like, he counts his store of treasures, for of them
He builds anew at Christmas time his "town of Bethlehem."