FESTIVAL OF CHRISTMAS.

THE ORIGIN, LEGENDS, PLEASURES, AND OBSERVANCE.

HOW THE JOYOUS ANNIVERSARY IS OBSERVED AMONG THE CHRISTIAN NATIONS—THE GROTESQUE AND THE BEAUTIFUL—THE PROFANE AND THE HALLOWED—ITS SPORTS AND MERRY-MAKINGS.

O, then joyfullest,
Of the joyous season,
O, these good-night Christmas Days!
Sweet Birth, unbosoming
The joy world's prime,
Ring out, ring bells, your Christmas chime!
—*Old German Carol for Christmas.*

It is curious what a variety of customs the beautiful festival of festivals has given rise to in all lands. What a strange commingling of absurdate superstitions with the sweetest impulses of faith a volume of Christmas lore would show! The grotesque and the exquisite, the profane and the hallowed, the hideous and the charming, the animal and the spiritual, all inextricably woven together, in the sports and merry-makings that distinguish the day, deserve of all the year, in every clime on which the Star of Bethlehem has cast, even a transient ray. Nothing shows more vividly the elevating influence of Christianity.

One of the indispensable adjuncts of Christmas in northern countries in olden times was

THE YULE LOG.

This relic of heathenism, says an ancient chronicler, was a huge piece of wood, brought in hither with great ceremony, and placed on the capacious fireplace of the house. As it was brought in, a chorus was sung after the fashion:

My merry, merry boys,
Come hither to the fire,
The Christmas log to the crying
While we good, good cheer, the
Which all be pleased
And drink to your health lustily.

The log being properly placed, the bringers-in sat on it in turn, to sing a stave of the yule song, and with the master and family a merry Christmas and a happy New Year. The yule log was then lighted with the last year's brand, for every year a fragment of the log was carefully put by to serve for lighting the log of the following Christmas. Another chorus was lustily sung while the lighting was going on:

With the last year's brand
Light the new block, and
For Christmas comes in by singing,
In spite of all sorrow,
And trouble to-day.
Come while the log is burning,
The merry, merry boys,
Then every one
Cast care away.

The ceremony closed with the following rude stanza, in which the figure of the holy child was introduced. Sometimes they were sung in far more plentiful measure:

Christmas comes but once a year,
When it comes it brings good cheer,
Pipe, and pudding, and pie,
And plum broth for the boy.
Good luck to the barrel of beer.

The Wassail Bowl had a number of rude ditties, of which the following is not a bad sample, with its odd mingling of compliments, hope and wishes, good and bad:

Wassail, Wassail, all over the town,
Our toast it is white, our ale is brown;
Our bowl is made of the maple tree,
We be all good fellows I drink to thee.

Here's to Barack, the horse, and to his right ear!
Lack send our master a happy New Year—
A happy New Year as e'er he did see,
With my wassailing bowl I drink to thee.

Here's to Broad, the pony, and to his right ear!
Lack send our mistress a good Christmas pie—
A good Christmas pie as e'er I did see,
With my wassailing bowl I drink to thee.

Here's to Fillpail, the cow, and to her long tail!
Lack send our master to never may fail
Of a good cock of beer! I pray you draw near,
And fill each you shall clear our jolly wassail.

So here we go! Maybe! suppose there be some—
Since they it not let young men stand on the cold stone!

Sing hoy, to the fields, come trole back the pie,
And the barrel of nuts in the house let be.

Come, butler, bring us a bowl of the best,
I hope your soul in heaven will rest;
But if you do bring us a bowl of the small,
Then down humble butler, bowl and all.

The evergreen decorations of the festive season were not slighted by the song-makers:

Holly and Ivy make a great party,
Who should favor the ladies?
Ladies favor the holly,
Then praise Holly, Ivy, fine and jolly,
I will have the ladies
Let the holly where he go.

The doggerel sung by children mostly included a petition for Christmas boxes or goodies. In some places it was customary for the little band to ray loudly at the front door, begins at the same time in a gruff tone:

Knock, knock, knock! Who's there in this house-
Rather wish? Christ! Christmas!
On being admitted, they rang in pleasant style:

Knock, hammer, knock!
Of wealth there's good stock,
Put your purse in your pocket
Or to better homes I go.
The rocks, the rocks, they grow on one tree,
My master and mistress, God bless you be.

Another of these ditties ran:

An angel sits behind the door,
He has silver in his store;
Three pears upon one stem,
Come, good man, give us them;
Give us apples a dozen and pears a score,
And then shall have good luck, I vow.

In Ireland the children's songs were confined to wishing good wishes, leaving those who were honored with a visit to give the present according to their own impulses. The following was popular, perhaps it is yet, in the south of Ireland:

The wren, the wren, the king of all birds,
On St. Stephen's day was caught in the furze;
Though he is small, his mother bore all,
And wish you all a happy New year.
Merry Christmas and happy New year.

CHRISTMAS IN THE UNITED STATES.

Christmas in the United States has not given rise to much legendary lore, but it is not less dear by all ages and conditions, harmonizing the most opposite shades of political *beliefs* and religious opinions. On one day in the year we are all one in each city or another the great Christian feast mixes merrily with everybody, and their affairs. Very quietly, in her own wondrous style, Religion has infused something of the spirit of her loveliest mirth into both our business and our national holiday. Into the solemn homesteads, where the idea of religion is associated only with gloom, she sends a Christmas ray that melts the sternest heart, makes children right and left the superstitious goodness and set godliness, and teaches both old and young that "GOD IS CHARITY."

Our sense of giddy mirth and boisterous revelry also casts a glamour on Saint Nicholas's star, so that even the most thoughtless reveler takes thought of the poor and needy, and decorates the Christmas hearing incomplete if some one has not been made happy with the wants of others know the meaning of "merry Christmas." Ah, it is beautiful trace how the Babe of Bethlehem has made Himself welcome through the whole length and breadth of our country! We may reverently apply the words of the Psalmist, "He has not done so to any nation." Our new world is to be brought to God in a new way through family ties and carol and song, and "a little child" is leading the families joyfully to the Saviour's feet. If we have not wassils and anthems, legend and pageant, there is no dearth of what suits as better. Our home memories and household traditions are bright with the radiance of Christmas, the choicest joys of our hearts echo its glad musical chimes, our most precious souvenirs are embalmed in its fragrance.

RELIGIOUS OBSERVANCES.

To-day, in most of the churches of the District, the festival of Christmas will be commemorated in an unusually impressive and interesting manner. In the Catholic and Episcopal churches especially the ceremonies will be very brilliant and attractive, and the music, both vocal and instrumental, of more than ordinary excellence.

IN ST. ALOYSIUS' CHURCH,

at 5 o'clock a. m. the choir will sing Deschamps's grand March. At the Offertory a beautiful Christmas anthem, arranged from Haydn, will be sung. At 11 o'clock a new Italian mass, by G. Parola, will be sung for the first time in this city. At the Offertory a Christmas anthem, by Dudley Buck, will be sung. Singers: Miss Eva Mills, soprano; Mrs. Sherman, contralto; Mr. J. Pugh, tenor; Mr. W. A. Widdoes, bass; Mr. H. C. Sherman, organist and director.

Mercadante's three-voice Mass will be sung

IN ST. MATTHEW'S

at 5 o'clock, a. m., by male voices only. At the 11 o'clock mass Von Weber's Mass in E flat will be sung. Singers: Misses Barnett and Wilkerson, first tenors; Messrs. Ewer, Patterson and D. L. Barnett, second tenors; Messrs. A. E. Clemons and Henry Bradley, basses. Dr. Paradisi, organist.

AT ST. PATRICK'S,

Von Weber's Mass in E flat will be sung at 8 o'clock, a. m., and at 11 o'clock, Haydn's Mass No. 3 will be rendered. Singers: Sopranos, Miss Berry, Miss Spalding, Mrs. Mary Hayes, Miss Taylor, altos, Miss Elliott and Mrs. Chartemen, Mr. Ryan and Mr. Richmond; tenor, Mr. Koechlin and Mr. Maas. Prof. Carl Bohner, organist and conductor.

Rossini's 12th Mass will be sung at 5 o'clock

AT ST. PAUL'S,

Capitol Hill. The same Mass will be sung at 11 o'clock, Christmas. Mrs. King and Miss Florence; Mrs. Koehler and Mrs. Newton, altos; Messrs. King and Bellett, tenors; and Messrs. Miller and Toohey, basses; Mr. Newton organist.

AT ST. STEPHEN'S

there will be Grand High Mass at 5 o'clock, and at 11 o'clock Mozart's Mass in C will be sung. Singers—Sopranos, Miss Challinor, Mrs. Mary Kahler; tenor, Mr. John Boulter; bass, Mr. F. Roeker; leader, Mr. F. Roeker; organist, Mr. J. J. Fortsch.

IN ST. DOMINIC'S,

the Immaculate Conception, and St. Mary's churches, as also in Trinity church, Georgetown, there will be services, commencing at 5 o'clock, and closing with the 11 o'clock mass as usual on Christmas Day.

EPISCOPAL CHURCH.

The Rev. John Vaughn Lewis, rector, will officiate

AT ST. JOHN'S CHURCH,

at 11 o'clock, and at this service the choir will render the following: Anthem, Espenlaub, "Glory to God in the Highest; Mercadante; Venite, anthem, Troyt; Te Deum, anthem, Kelsenaer; Jubilate, anthem, Wood; anthem, Introit, "O Lord, our Governor," Lotz; Kyrie Eleison, Tallis; Gloria Tibi, Pleyel; hymn, "About the Old Tidings," Davenport; Offertory, anthem, Greene; Sanctus, Dr. Camidge; Hymn to the Holy Gloria in Excelsis, (Sound, (Merce de Orphenistes.) The choir is made up of solo quartette, consisting of Messrs. Bradley, (leader,) Noyes, Sherrill, Whitaker, Patterson, Yeatman, Hancock and Dawson; Mr. King organist. They will be assisted on this occasion by Messrs. Barnes, Lloyd, Everhart and Brown.

AT GRACE CHURCH

Services will be held at 11 o'clock, and a sermon will be preached by the rector, Rev. Dr. Bolton, of Trinity church, from Hebrews 10:7: "Lo, I come (in the volume it is written of me) to do thy will, O God." The musical programme selected for the occasion is as follows: Anthem, by Hunt; "Hark, what mean those holy voices?" "Christmas Chant," from the Catholic chant book; "Gloria Patria," by Hopkins and Mozart, Te Deum, No. 2, by Le Hunter; "Jubilate, No. 2," by Greene; Psalm, No. 98; "Gloria Tibi, No. 3;" Hymn, No. 45; closing anthem, by L. Marshall.

AT THE ASCENSION CHURCH,

Rev. John H. Elliott, acting rector, will officiate at the 11 o'clock m. m. During the services the following musical programme will be rendered: Processional, "Hark! the herald angels sing," Haydn; Venite, Gregorian tone; Te Deum in F, Stillman; Jubilate, ——; hymn, "Adeste Fideles" Gloria Tibi Domini, Pleyel; hymn; Gloria Patri, (after sermon,) O. W. Walker; Offertory, O. W. Walker; Sanctus, Dr. Camidge; Communion hymn 95, Prayer Book; Gloria in Excelsis, old chant; closing voluntary, "For unto us," Handel's "Messiah." The following members have kindly consented to form a special choir for the day: Soprano, Mrs. Josephine Darling; alto, A. H. Morse; tenor, W. H. Hill; bass, Mr. W. M. Shuster, jr. Music under the direction of Geo. W. Walker, organist of the church.

AT TRINITY CHURCH,

Rev. Mr. Addison, rector, services will be held at 11 o'clock. The following musical programme has been arranged for the occasion: Opening anthem, "There were Shepherds," in C, Buck; Venite, Lomb; Gloria Patri, Lloyd; Te Deum, in B minor, Buck; Jubilate, Lloyd; hymn, "Hark! what mean those Holy Voices." Buck; Offertory, Songs of Praise, Lloyd; Gloria Tibi, Mozart; Glad Tidings, Arion. Solos will be sung by each of the choirs, which consists of Mrs. Merrell, soprano; Miss Millard, alto; Mr. Harry Parsons, tenor; W. W. Middleton, jr., bass; Miss Moxon, organist.

AT THE CHAPEL OF THE HOLY COMMUNION,

northwest corner of Nineteenth street and Pennsylvania avenue, there will be a general celebration of the Blessed Sacrament at 11 a. m. Father Hubble has given the entire charge of the choir to Mr. Joseph Particle, under whose management it is rapidly improving.

AT ST. JOHN'S CHURCH,

Georgetown, the usual Christmas services will be held. The church is very beautifully decorated for the occasion, and the choir, led by Prof. Kehr, will render some unusually fine music, selected for the occasion.

AT THE CHURCH OF THE INCARNATION,

the choir, under the direction of Mr. Robert Ball, will execute the following programme during the morning service: Christmas anthem, "Glorious Praise," Whiter; Venite, Fairbanks; Gloria in Excelsis, Beethoven; Te Deum, T. S. Lloyd; Jubilate, Lorenz; Offertory, Mendelssohn. The following are the members of the choir: Robert Ball, leader; first soprano, Misses Sallie Fitzu and Clara Ball; second soprano, Misses Jennie Bryant and Florence Ball; tenors, Messrs. M. M. Parker and Mr. Jas. Ball; bass, Mr. C. A. Ball and Robert Ball; organist, C. W. Chapman.

There will be a service at 11 o'clock

AT CHRIST CHURCH, GEORGETOWN,

the rector, Rev. W. W. Williams, officiating. The music will be as follows: Opening Christmas anthem, "Lift up your heads, O ye gates," solo by Mrs. D. Barrett; Christmas Canticle, "Gloria in Excelsis, with solos for tenor and soprano, Farmer; solos by M. A. Seligson and Mrs. Barrett; Te Deum, sharps, Retribution; Jubilate, with two soprano solos, Millard; solos by Mrs. Barrett and Miss Jennie Abbott; Offertory, Anthem, with bass and solo voice, Dunker; solos, Mr. Wm. H. Graves and Miss Jennie Dodson; Hymns, Christmas Carols, Warren and Mozart. The choir consists of an octette, of which Mrs. Barrett and Dodson and Messrs. Seligson and Graves are the principal soloists. The organist is Miss Nimmo, the choir master, and the musical director, Col. H. A. Seligson.

ROCK CREEK CHURCH,

near the Soldiers' Home, has been beautifully decorated, and the services commenced yesterday afternoon, at 3:30 o'clock, when the Sunday-school, numbering eighty scholars, assembled, and a Christmas tree was lighted up. Religious services were conducted by the rector, Rev. J. A. Buck, who delivered a Christmas address, appropriate piece, followed by an address by the superintendent, Mr. John Sherman. The distribution of presents then took place. The church is very handsomely decorated. The tree lighted by eight chandeliers and brackets, presented a fine appearance. At 11 o'clock a. m. to-day the usual Christmas service will take place, after which Night Rev. Wm. Pinkney, assistant bishop of the diocese, will ordain a number of young gentlemen. At 4 o'clock p. m. the rector, Rev. Mr. Buck, will conduct services at the Soldiers' Home, and deliver an appropriate sermon.

OTHER CHURCHES.

In most of the Methodist Episcopal churches the usual early morning prayer or prayer meetings will be held at 5 o'clock.

At Mt. Vernon (M. E.) church South the Sabbath school will have a Christmas festival this evening.

At Grace (M. E.) church, corner of Ninth and S streets, there will be a Christmas festival at night for the school children.

The Foundry (M. E.) church, Presbyterian church have made great preparations for a fine Christmas tree, loaded with good things, as a surprise to the Sunday school children to-night, at the church on Ninth street.

At Bylerel (M. E.) chapel a festival will be given to the children to-night. Great preparations have been made to make the occasion an enjoyable one.

At the Metropolitan (M. E.) church Professor Hayden will give a lecture on the Yellowstone, with stereopticon views, this evening, after which refreshments will be served.

At Wesley Chapel, M. E., there will be early prayer meeting, 5 o'clock to-morrow morning, and the regular Tuesday evening service. There will be a reunion of the teachers and scholars of the Sunday school on Friday evening, 6 to 7 o'clock. Entertainment from 7 to 8, consisting of singing by the school, with solos by Miss Nellie Williams and Rosa Rosenbaum; quartette by choir, under leadership of Mr. L. Rosenbaum; recitations by Mr Clarence Sewall and Ed. Linville; distribution of presents to scholars. The room will be adorned with evergreen and mottoes. In addition to the entertainment for the school are and members of the congregation have been invited to send in donations of food, fuel, clothing, toys, candies and other articles as would be good to give to the poor. The distribution of presents of older scholars, in bands of twos and threes, will be sent out to give these articles judicious distribution.

At the Presbyterian Mission Chapel, on Market street, Georgetown, there will be a Christmas festival this evening for the children, with a handsome tree, also singing and speaking.

CHILDREN'S FESTIVAL.

When the congregation of the Fourth Presbyterian church determined to accomplish a good work, a stone is never left unturned that is in any material aid to success, and their beautiful Christmas tree last night was certainly a specimen of one of their best efforts. Santa Claus has evidently been courted by old and young until there seemed to be no measure to his pleasing generosity. The lecture room was elegantly decorated, and the tree was a model of taste and beauty, built by the busy fingers of those who love to gladden the human heart.

The little men and women were happy at the New York avenue church in the visit of Santa Claus, which was quite unexpected. If any doubted the actual existence of this personage they must have dispelled their doubts when Santa Claus appeared, dressed in his grotesque dress and with his pack of good things for every one, and more too for his bonnie little favorites. The exercises were opened by singing a beautiful Christmas carol, after which, a poem written by Mr. A. C. Bradley, superintendent of the school, was admirably recited by Miss Hattie Foster. Each scholar received lots of sweetmeats from the jolly old man, and nothing could have been more appropriate to the children than the visit of their ever-welcomed Christmas friend.

ANNIE AND WILLIE'S PRAYER.

The following poem, written by Mrs. Sophia P. Snow, is one of the most exquisitely touching and beautiful that we have ever read. It cannot fail to reach the hearts of all who peruse it, besides being peculiarly appropriate to the holidays:

"Twas the eve before Christmas; "Good night"
Had been said;
And Annie and Willie had crept into bed;
Their sweet voices in their pillows, and tears in their eyes,
And each little bosom was heavy with sighs—
For Santa Claus, that night (their father's command had been given,
That they should retire precisely at seven,
Packed off right! Their mother had promised long since
Without positive unkindness, that ever in force;
He had told them he thought this delusion a sin,
Unfitting for children in Christian life;
They spoke lightly of Santa Claus ever but low,
And he hoped after this he should never more hear
How he scrambled down chimneys with presents
To deal out.
And this was the reason that two little heads
So restlessly tossed on their soft, downy beds,
Eight, nine, and the clock in the steeple tolled ten;
Not a word had been spoken by either till then.
When Willie's sad face from the blanket did peep,
He's not sleeping, thought Annie, he's not asleep—
"Why, sir, brother Willie," a sweet voice replied,
"I've tried it in vain, but I can't shut my eyes;
For, somehow, I feel as if I'm sorry to pray
Dear papa has said there is no Santa Claus!
Now we know there is, and it can't be decided,
Like everything else, before mamma decides
But then, I've been thinking that she used to pray
And God would hear everything mamma would ask;
And perhaps she asked him to send Santa Claus here.
With the sack full of presents he brought every year."
"Well, why can't we pray that he mamma did then,
And ask him to send him with presents when?"
"I've been thinking so, too." And without a word
More
Four little bare feet bounded out on the floor,
Four little digits sank the soft carpet beneath,
And two tiny hands were clasped close in each breast—
"Now, Willie, you know, we must firmly believe
That the presents we ask for we've sure to receive;
You must wait just as still till I say the Amen,
And by the time you will know that your turn has come then."
"Dear Jesus, look down on my brother and me,
And grant as the dawn we are waking at Thee;
I want a wax doll, a tea-set and ring,
And an ebony work-box, that state with a spring;
Dear Jesus, I've been a good boy, and I pray
That Santa Claus may get for brother then by;
Don't let him get frosted and angry again
At dear sister Willie and brother Jim. Amen!"
Lifting Jesus, let Santa Claus do no to-night,
And bring no some presents before it is light
I pray to-night I'll be well when I rise,
With bright shiny trousers, and painted pen;
A box full of tassels, a book and a top,
Jim, and three Jews, I'll be a good boy."
Their prayers being ended, they raised up their heads
And with hearts light and cheerful again essays
They were soon lost in slumber, both peaceful and
Deep
And visions of sugar in dreamland were rousing in
Sleep.
Eight, nine, and the little French clock has struck
Ere the father had thought of his children again;
He went now to kiss Annie's half-suppressed sigh,
And to see the big tears stand on Willie's blue eyes.
"Was harsh to my darling," he mentally said,
"And should not have sent them so early to bed;
But then I was sure—so I was for a long time—
That my child should be the happiest child of the
Year;
To-morrow I'll make it full payment for the
Tears
I've caused my pets to shed."
So softly he stole
Into the room where the children were fast asleep,
Softly kissed each pillow on which a head
Had been kept
And softly crept out, as he softly had crept in;
Softly he closed the door, softly he
Stole
Down the stairs, softly he
Entered the
Parlor, softly he
Lighted the
Gas, softly he
Opened the
Door, softly he
Closed the door
Softly he
Stood
Upon the door-step, softly he
Looked
Up and down the street, softly he
Hummed
A tune as he softly
Rang
The bell softly he
Stood
Upon the door-step, softly he
Waited
Till Bridget came down softly to
Let him in; softly he
Hung
Up his hat, softly he
Ascended
The stairs, softly he
Softly
Softly
Softly