

CHRISTMAS IS CELEBRATED ALL OVER THE WORLD

HOWEVER, GREATEST FESTIVITIES ARE IN UNITED STATES

THIS IS A BUSY WEEK

All Over Country Parents are Busy Buying Gifts, While Little Tots are Living in Anticipation of Greatest Event of the Year—Saviour's Birthday, While a Day for Rejoicing, Nevertheless has a Pathetic Side.

(Cincinnati Enquirer.)

With Christmas but a few days off the whole nation is concerning itself most deeply with Christmas trees, presents and the merriest ways of celebrating the greatest day on the Christian calendar. Children are writing their notes to Santa Claus and fairly burying the jolly old elf in a deluge of appeals for hobbyhorses, wax dolls and the vast array of toys dear to the heart of childhood. Mothers are busy in the stores buying and buying and buying for Willie and Mary and their cousins and their aunts—and even the black Tabby cat of the household. Fathers are raking and scraping their bank accounts to provide the necessary, wherewithal. The whole land, in fact, seems possessed with but one idea—how to make this Christmas the very jolliest of all it has ever experienced.

In the pleasure and bustle of our own celebration of the birth of the Christ Child we are apt to overlook the fact that another portion of the world is doing precisely the same thing—in a different manner. Scarcely one-fifth of the territory of the globe is Christian, and but a proportionate number of its inhabitants celebrate Christmas. Yet even in this comparatively small number of people there are surprisingly diverse methods of celebrating the great day. Of course, all countries that have a Christmas have a similar spiritual celebration—prayers and praise and worship to God for the birth of His Holy Son in the manger at Bethlehem. But the diversity of celebration along material lines and the great variety of Christmas customs in other lands are surprising, indeed. From between countries so closely allied as the United States and England, the difference is marked.

Of all places on Christmas surely the Holy Land, the birthplace of the Christ Child, is paramount in interest. And, naturally, the celebration of the people of that land centers in Bethlehem, the humble little village where the shepherds found "the Bible wrapped in swaddling clothes and lying in a manger." On Christmas Eve the Christians of Jerusalem and from all over Palestine and visitors from other lands flock to Bethlehem to witness the gorgeous ceremonial in the Roman Catholic Chapel in the Church of the Nativity.

One by one and in groups they come, with their caravans of camels or on foot, down the road from Jerusalem to Bethlehem leading through stony, rolling plains, with here and there, an olive grove or an orchard. Under the wonderful radiance of an Eastern night they wind their ways through the crooked streets of the quaint little town to the market place, opposite the church.

The scene is, indeed, a festive one, Christians from all the countries of the East are congregated here in gala attire. Vendors of sacred relics are selling their crosses and pictures in

olive wood, and small boys, dressed in many-colored garments, red faces and bright red shoes, are darting hither and thither in the crowd in wild exuberance of boyish spirits. Sheep are being killed by family groups for their evening meal after the ceremonies in the church. The mothers of Bethlehem, with their large, lustrous eyes and brilliant complexion, are making merry with their children. There is a babel of many voices and a great running to and fro.

The door of the church opens and the crowd presses in. The Church of the Nativity belongs to the Latins, the Greeks and the Armenians, each sect having its own convent adjoining. The Latins are holding their services now, the Armenians later and the Greeks 10 days afterward. The entrance is through a small door in a high stone wall, and one has to stoop as he enters—thus insuring bowing to the crucifix opposite.

The building is believed to be the oldest monument of Christian architecture extant, the basilica erected by St. Helena in 327 A. D. The services are held in an adjoining building, and the worshippers are all seated on the marble floor. The priests and monks enter in solemn procession to the chant of the grand Te Deum. The bishop and archbishops follow in gorgeous robes richly embroidered in gold and silver. Paens of worship peal forth from the grand old organ.

At midnight the music grows softer and then there comes a pause. The silence is complete, except for the peal of the Christmas chimes outside in the village. Suddenly, as though by an unseen hand, the curtain above the chancel arch is drawn aside, revealing a miniature cradle holding an image of the Babe. From the organ and the choir bursts forth, in glad, triumphant cadence, the ringing strains of the "Gloria in Excelsis." The little cradle is lowered and the "Bambino" reverently raised. The worshippers prostrate themselves upon the ground.

The sacred images are then borne at the head of the procession to the chapel of the manger. Priests, monks and congregation all carry lighted wax tapers and move in solemn cadence with the chant. The Grotto of the Nativity is reached. Once a subterranean vault, it has been converted into a chapel, lined and floored with marble. Directly over the manger is an altar, profusely decorated in gold and silver and with golden tapestries. Incense is burning, fragrant, and lamps that are never allowed to go out, cast their dim radiance over the crowd. A large star of brass marks the spot where Christ was born and bears the inscription in Latin: "Here Jesus Christ was born of the Virgin Mary."

The little manger, with its wax figure of the Christ Child, is devoutly laid upon the altar. It rests there for the remainder of the week, a symbol of adoration for the multitude. From chapel to chapel, the long procession slowly winds its way, with its chants and lighted tapers. The services are continued nearly all night long on this spot where first came to the faithful shepherds the message of "Glory to God in the Highest, and on Earth Peace, Good Will Toward Men."

From Palestine to France of the present day is a far cry in point of time, distance and customs of celebration. Aside from the church services there is much of interest in the land of "Monsieur" at Christmas. The day is chiefly for children, though, of course, the grown-ups lose sight of the real meaning of it no more than do the fathers and mothers of our own land. In France the great symbol of Christmas is the mistletoe. All over northern France it is cut in carloads, carried to the quaint quays of

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CHAS. ROSENTHAL

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Support towns and shops in England—see John Bull's... for mistletoe in his own land.

Just before Christmas, the French boys and lasses go out into the leafy old forests, and search for mistletoe. The boy who sees the first tuft gives a shout of joy, climbs the tree, cuts it and carries it back to a triumph with his prize. The King of the forest, the mistletoe, is hung above the entrance to a door and the young girls pass beneath it, one by one, to be kissed by the first lad who catches them. On all Paris streets at Christmas time mistletoe is for sale, and it is a real Christmas necessity.

A queer superstition clings to this winter blossom in the minds of the ignorant French peasants—the burning of the mistletoe. Ugly practices and crazy exaltation have been known to take hold of an entire village, with the superstitious excitement attending the burning of the mistletoe. The custom is, apparently, an ancient one from the Celts. A part of the blossom is broken up into little bits, placed in a pan and held over the blazing fire. The ashes are carefully collected, placed in little bags and distributed, to be worn around the neck as talismans. Frequently these little bags are buried in the middle of a field to bring good crops.

Some wives of the French peasants hold that these little bags are marvelous in preventing their husbands from coming home drunk and ferocious. All that is necessary is to sprinkle a little of the ashes of the mistletoe in his drink, when he isn't looking, and his appetite for drink will decrease. The ashes will, at least, keep him soberer than he would be without them. That is the reason why a mistletoe bough hangs outside most of the taverns in Breton; it is calculated to prevent the tippers from seeing pink snakes, purple rabbits and the like flying through the air while making their unsteady way homeward.

In many sections of Germany Christmas is celebrated in many diverse ways. Yet all the festivities cling together by tradition and have many parts quite similar. Santa Claus is the main feature, and he differs a great deal from the Santa Claus of America.

The German Kris Kringle never distributes any toys, but he carries a large bag of nuts. These nuts are distributed among the German children on Christmas Day. Santa is peculiar in that he also carries a bundle of switches. They are for the children who have been disobedient during the past year. When the nuts are distributed the bad children receive a switching, instead of their portion of the nuts. In distributing the nuts they are usually placed in the center of the table and Santa Claus hands them to the youngsters. Frequently the lads are too anxious for their portion of the goodies, and the switches of Santa Claus come down across their shoulders with a whack. Then they keep a safe distance from the table.

The German children believe in Santa Claus until they become about ten years of age. In Germany, only one day is celebrated, Christmas Eve being left unnoticed. This is more so among the laboring people as the shops and factories never give a half holiday on the day before Christmas. On Christmas day almost all of the churches have a Christmas tree for

the little folks and the gifts are distributed from it. In nearly all of the homes Christmas trees are to be found. The gifts are very rarely given out on the night before Christmas.

German children have many of the same Christmas amusements that the American children have and some of them are very similar to the American Halloween. Candles always cover the Christmas tree yet this is never in full blaze until the night of Christmas day in Germany. There is no week or festivities lasting until the first of the year as in this country.

Christmas festivities in England are probably more fully enjoyed than in any other country. Many of the old English customs have been transplanted to America, but many of them are still known only in the country across the sea. In no other country are the festivities more joyfully welcomed than in England, where the "old honor," as it is called, has not fled. In that country it is the custom on Christmas Eve, after the usual devotions are over, to light large candles and throw on the hearth a huge log, called the Yule log, of Christmas block.

At court and in the homes of the wealthy an officer, named the Lord of Misrule, is appointed to superintend the Christmas revels. In Scotland a similar officer is appointed and is called the Abbot of Unreason. This is merely one mode of creating an abundance of fun, but long years ago this officer was really appointed to superintend the festivities. In the year 1515 the office was abolished by an act of Parliament. The reign of the original Lord of Misrule started at Halloween and continued until Candlemas Day. The favorite pastimes which he now presides over are gambling, music, conjuring, dipping of nuts and apples, dancing and "fool ploughing," hot cockles, blind man's buff, etc. In England the favorite dish for dinner at this season of the year is the boar's head with an apple or orange in his mouth and set off with rosemary, plum pudding and mince pie. The houses and churches are decked with evergreens, especially with mistletoe, to which the English have attached a singular superstition since the days of the Druids.

The English children look forward every year eagerly to the Christmas season, and the American children, it is their Thanksgiving and Christmas combined. They have all the good things to eat that grace the homes of the American children at Thanksgiving, and besides receive their presents at the same time. Many of the American games for the Christmas season were originated in England hundreds of years ago, such as blind man's buff and dipping for apples in a tub of water. These games at first were only for the Christmas festivities.

The English Christmas season lasts from the night before Christmas day, December 26th, until the first day of the New Year, and everything is very merry during that time. The season, long years ago, was celebrated to a greater extent in England than it is today on account of the fact that the heads of many of the churches complained that the season should be more sacred and not so much given over to the joyous programs. This called a halt on the festivities, as the churches were then the ruling powers of the country. Since that time the change has been felt right along. The Santa Claus of the English children is an all-powerful being and they are stern believers in the mythological gift giver until quite up to years. Many of the English Christmas customs date back hundreds of years.

There is another side of Christmas in England that is by no means as cheerful, though it speaks well for the Christmas spirit of its principal city, London. Annually, many, many thousands of dollars are spent in providing Christmas cheer for the poor. Any number of public dinners are given by various charitable societies

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