

city, these trees stand thickly grouped, making the scene quite Arcadian and sylvan. There are pretty blossoms in this kind of forest, sweeter than any other woodland known; those of the glowing, happy, childish faces, flushing rosy red with pleasure as the owners thereof turn towards home with their trees, which are to burst forth in such brilliancy on the "Heiliga Abend" on Christmas eve.

Am Hof, that is to say, in the courtyard of what was once the royal palace, a great fair is held at this season, called the Christ Kindermarkt, or Fair of the Christ Child. From all parts of Austria and the suburbs of Vienna the market people come, and the booths are spread with all the dainties most popular in this part of the world at this time of the year. Edelweiss from the Salzburg is among the most attractive of the wares—to a stranger at least—so large and pure are its velvety blossoms, and especially characteristic and pretty does it look when combined with some of the brightly tinted "ever-lasting," also products of the Austrian Alps. In this form it fills a pair of tiny sabots, or surrounds a "crucifix" in admirable imitation of the wayside shrines, which are so conspicuous a feature of the country places in Austria. There are other booths devoted to waxen figures of the Christ-child, sometimes lying in the manger, sometimes in sitting posture with the baby arms outstretched, and in the same substance are the little figures of Mary and Joseph, the Angel Choir, and the Shepherds, all very well done, and very brilliantly coloured. Christmas trees, with gaudy festoons and rosettes of tissue paper, are everywhere, and some of the booths shimmer and sparkle with golden and silver pom-poms and streamers—the orthodox adornment of the orthodox tree. "Pfeffer Kuchen," a kind of gingerbread, made glorious by coloured sugar and gilded walnuts, are also highly popular. Piles of apples and oranges add their quota of colour, many brilliant shades of yellow and red, to the general gorgeousness of the scene; but the part of the fair which seems to attract the most attention is that devoted to wearing apparel and toys, such as are fast becoming legendary in these days, so old-fashioned are they in their uncouthness, though there are dolls amongst them that might challenge those of Paris. At night, when the scene is lit up by torch- or candle-light, it is something that might make a painter grasp feverishly for his brush. But he would have to be a painter upon whom the spirit of the old Dutch masters or Hogarth had descended. Here are the dramatic contrasts between light and shadow, the touch of warm colour, the grotesquely wrinkled faces of the old, or the coarse, healthy beauty of the young, such as they delighted in. Even the "Philistines" must feel the beauty of it all.

The holiday season in Vienna is in reality what it is in theory—a time of light-hearted merriment. Beginning with the Heiliga Abend, the festivities are initiated by a supper, consisting principally of fish. Why this particular edible should be so much in favour on this occasion is a mystery, the solution of which is evidently beyond human ability. Fish is the most expensive food known here, and yet the poorest family will manage to get some even if it takes the last kreutzer, or feel doomed to misfortune for the whole of the ensuing year. After the supper comes the lighting up of the tree, the distribution of presents, and the consequent vociferous joy of the children, aided and abetted, hardly less vociferously, by their elders.

There is a sound of music in the streets on Christmas morning, solemn, impressive music, that makes one long to stop and listen, and to join with the worshippers who kneel even out to the pavement before the churches, from which the sound comes. Passing by, one can see inside very plainly, for the kneeling people hold the doors wide open, and one goes on with an impression of softly-burning altar lights, looking poetically suggestive, glowing thus high above the heads of the people, and lighting up the dimness of the Gothic interiors with their significant brightness. In gorgeous vestments, the priests move about, and add the finishing touch to the scene. Verily, this town is a picturesque one indeed!

The days between Christmas and New Year's are filled up much as they are at home, with much gaiety and party giving, and the theatre plays a very important part. Annually, as a matter of course, the German and Austrian children are taken to see "Die Puppenfee," a ballet, so exquisitely lovely that one longs to transport it across the water for the benefit of our own wee country people, aye, and of the big ones, too.

It is all the story of a toy shop. An English family comes

to it to witness the dancing of some mechanical figures, and enters it just as a peasant, with his wife and child, are at the height of their enjoyment over the wonders they have found there. The peasant family, of course, furnishes the buffoonery, and makes mirth by the way they tumble over things and quarrel with each other. But the English family is too delightful for any adequate description. The average Briton, travelling abroad, should study it, and so see himself as others see him; the likeness is photographic. Papa, stout, stiff, and pompous, leads the way, followed closely by mamma, also stiff and very angular, and directly behind her, in the well-known "steps of stairs" proportion, come the four children, all of whom have inherited a due share of the paternal pomposity and maternal stiffness. Each is furnished with long-handled eyeglasses, through which they gaze at the audience with a solemn lack of expression that is intensely funny. Of course the mechanical figures dance charmingly, their stiff grace—there is no other way to describe it—was simply wonderful, and of course the English family gaze upon them all without betraying the faintest interest or pleasure. Papa reads the "Times"—all the stage Englishmen on the continent do that—and it is kicked out of his hands by a dancing "Punch," and a very charming young lady doll falls into his arms and sticks there—not having been sufficiently oiled—and those are the only occasions upon which they display any emotion whatever. After they have disappeared and the shop is left to darkness, the "Puppenfee," or doll fairy, enters. She waves her hand, and the place is filled with light; she waves it again, and out of every box, down from every shelf, come the dolls, in costumes of all nations, the little Dresden figures and all the various toys, and one wonderful ballet after another ensues until such time as the "Puppenfee" sends them back to their corners and boxes again. The whole thing is one of the most enchanting entertainments that the imagination can conjure up. The music by Josef Bayes is quite as bewitching.

Not quite so original, but equally charming, was another ballet entitled "Wiener Walzer," in which Bayes and Gaul also had a hand in the arrangement. Of course there was a great deal of Strauss in this; who could write of the Viennese waltzes without bringing in his compositions? We saw in the first act how they danced to *trois temps* in the latter days of the last century; the second act showed us a wedding, with everybody attired in 1830 costumes, and by way of variety an old German cushion dance was introduced. For a wind-up we had the Prates of to-day; not the Nobel or aristocratic Prates, where patrician Vienna takes the air in its coronetted carriages, but the Wurstel Prates, where the maid-servant dances with the young man in the conspicuously checked clothes, and where the wandering Jew of real life tries to do a little "bish-ness" in the midst of the giddy revelry. It was very interesting to the sojourner within the city gates.

The merry week comes to an end with Sylvester Abend, or New Year's Eve. That is a time for mirth, second only to the Heiliga Abend. The guest who has been faithful to the one restaurant for a year receives his "Bowla"—a mixture of wine and fruit—free of charge. In public houses and restaurants the lights are put out for the moment the old year passes away, and are relit with the advent of the new year amidst the clinking of glasses and cries of "Prosit, Newjahr!"

In private houses the custom is much the same, and something friendly and kindly is said to each one as the New Year enters upon his own. But it is a hard moment for us strangers in a far-off land; the thoughts, and the heart with them, have such a trick of flying miles off to where the home friends are. We wonder if they will remember us as the New Year dawns, and we forget to respond to the gay things that are said to us in a foreign language. There are just a few words passing inaudibly, but frequently, over our lips in the sweet old mother tongue, "God bless the dear old friends, and the dear homeland, and send to them a happy and prosperous New Year!"

Vienna, March 1st, 1896.

N. L. JONES.

Concerning Tongs.

NO confectioner of repute, even in a provincial town, packs his fancy box of chocolates, creams, and caramels, without including a neat pair of candy-tongs, carefully wrapped in tissue paper. The reason for this addition is evident. Were ordinary children to be the beneficiaries of the