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HOLIDAYS OF THE FRENCH CANADIANS

country, with charming refrain, in which every one joins. And some of those songs are indeed delightful, such as: "*Derrière chez nous ya t'un étang*," and "*Lui ya longtemps que je t'aime*," etc.

Above all occasions of pleasure, for both young and old, are the great religious and national festivals—Christmas, New Year's Day, Twelfth Day, and Saint John the Baptist's Day—into the celebration and enjoyment of which the race enters with all its enthusiasm and fervor.

Christmas (*le jour de Noël*) is looked forward to with peculiar delight, and no pains spared to honor it. It is observed as a holiday apart from sacred character as a *fête d'obligation*. No matter how cold or stormy the night preceding, the custom is to close the houses and repair to the churches and take part in the imposing service, known as midnight mass (*la messe de minuit*). At this time the people are moved to great fervor in their anxiety to fittingly commemorate the birth of Christ. Among the scenes pertaining to this night were formerly the little gleams of light, to be seen at intervals for miles in the lonely country districts, or throughout towns and cities, at a time when gas-lighting was unknown, indicating the progress of pious worshipers through deep snowy roads towards that grand centre of desire, the church, at whose portals the lanterns were extinguished, to be relighted after mass. If the distance were very great, they traveled in *carrioles* or *berlines*, also bearing lanterns.

The church itself presents on such nights an attractive and imposing appearance. Lighted candles and lamps arranged in a manner not only to illuminate the building, but to enhance the effect of its decorations and to arouse feelings appropriate to the hour, shine everywhere throughout the edifice. The principal object of interest is the wax figure of the infant Jesus, beside the altar, upon which all the religious art available is expended to produce the highest effect; and upon the radiant countenance brilliant lights are concentrated, to kindle the devotional sentiment of the worshipers. Artificial bouquets of varied colors, the handiwork of the daughters of the most prominent citizens, occupy conspicuous places on the altar; and the altar-cloth, which is a piece of elaborate workmanship, is also, usually, from the hands of some fair parishioner. When the service is ended the worshipers return home to partake of a collation (*réveillon*), which is generally of bountiful character. The interest of the children is aroused long before the celebration, by the promise of attending the midnight mass as a reward for good behavior, and, as an after consideration of no small moment, a share in *le réveillon*.

Of late years this service is less in vogue than formerly, many parishes dispensing with it altogether, owing to the advantage taken of the absence

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