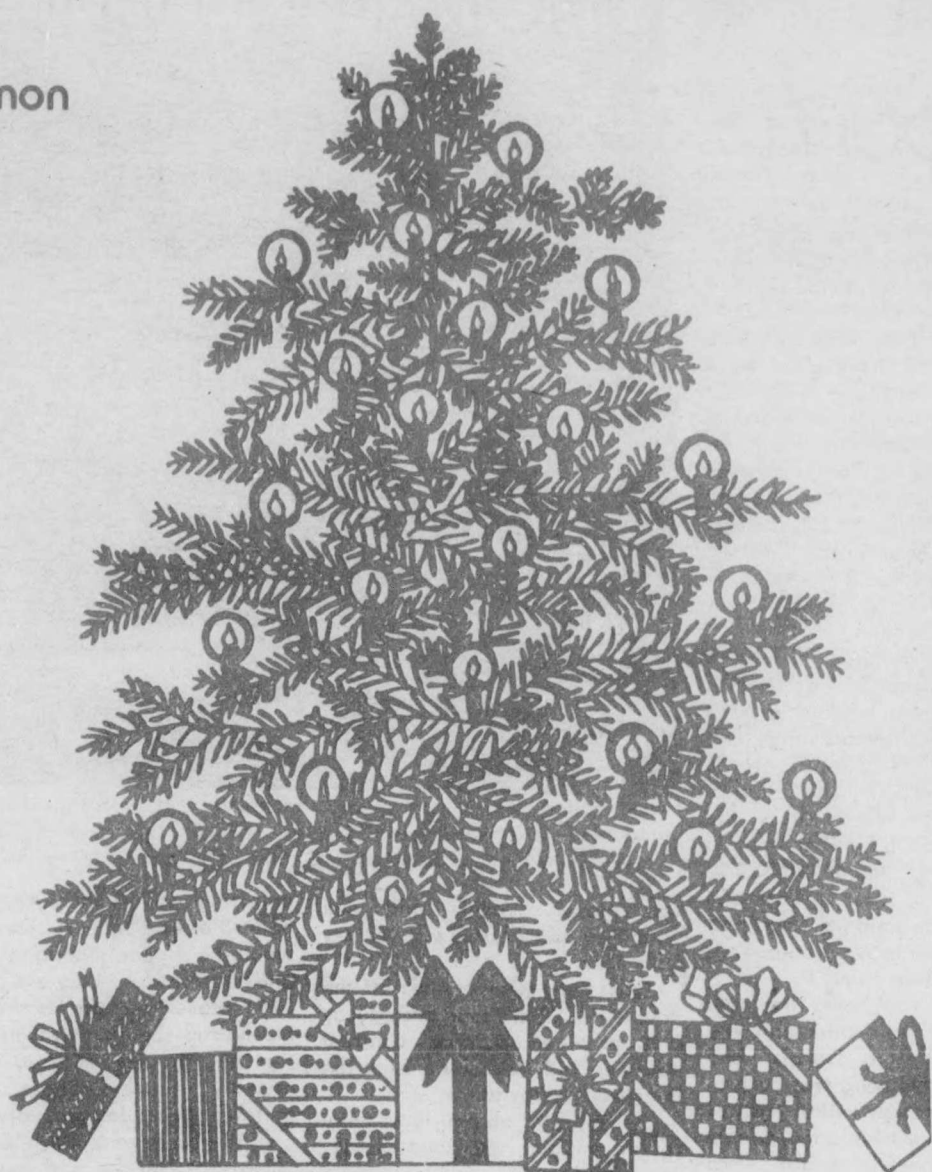


around the world

by Mike Mackinnon



ons Greeting



n the Bruns

MEXICO:

One of the more well known customs of this country is the pinata. This is an earthenware bowl that is colorfully decorated and filled with fruits, peanuts, candy and charms. The children gather in a circle and one after the other are blindfolded. The blindfolded child tries to break the pinata. When the pinata is broken all the children scramble for the goodies and keep whatever they manage to get a hold of.

NORWAY: (For Lone) At five o'clock the church bells can be heard throughout Norway calling the people to the mass, December 24th, as it is the first day of the Christmas celebrations.

For weeks before, the family has been busy making gifts and preparing food that is stored for the long winter. Some of the things made are: cheese and sausages; breads and animal shaped cookies are baked; and colored candies for the tree are finished.

On Christmas the Norwegians remember the animals and birds because they were the only ones present at the birth of the Christ Child. All the farm animals are tended and the cows are given extra food. A sheaf of wheat that was saved from the Fall harvest is placed in a pile in the middle of the yard (a tradition also found in Denmark).

PALESTINE:

Everybody gathers in the Church of the Nativity in Bethlem, which is directly above the place where Christ was born, according to tradition, to sing carols and worship.

The church is filled with flags and decorations and everyone gathers in the square and on house tops to watch for the procession led by a horseman carrying aloft a banner. Following him is a group of native police who lead a lone rider standing on a black horse carrying the cross high atop a staff.

This procession goes into the church and because the people cannot see the placing of the effigy of the Holy Child everyone goes behind the high altars. Down a flight of winding steps is a spot marked with a silver star, the spot where the manger holding the Christ Child was located.

RUSSIA:

Many of the Russian traditions have been either lost or forgotten. The people still gather for family reunions and parties for the children are held during the Christmas season. Here the old custom of The Five Piles of Grain is enacted. Five piles of grain are placed on the floor and a sleeping hen is brought into the kitchen. These five piles of grain represent wealth, poverty, death, marriage and a life of single blessedness. The confusion of the hen causes

much laughter but once she gains her senses she chooses one of the piles and eats the grain.

SERBIA:

Christmas is let in by people calling on their friends. The caller sprinkles grain in the corners of the house to ensure a good harvest in the coming year. He (the caller) hits the burning yule log with a poker and while the sparks are still flying wishes the family good fortune in the next year. Next he kisses the end of the log and places a coin on it as a gift to his neighbor.

SWEDEN:

On December 13th, St. Lucia, a young girl dressed in a white dress with a colorful red sash, wearing a crown of pinesboughs with a halo of seven candles, wakes the family with a tray of cakes and coffee.

Because of a belief that the ancestors go to their homes the people prepare meals and turn down beds for them. The celebrations end on Christmas Eve with the trimming of the tree, dancing and singing, and the opening of Christmas presents which are sealed in Red wax.

SWITZERLAND:

In Switzerland the children anxiously wait for December 5th when "Samichlaus" comes bearing gifts. He comes with a procession of cross-bearers and banner boys. He is usually a young bishop followed by attendants who are masked bishops and carry the triple purse of St. Nicholas. While the young bishops hand out rewards the attendants collect alms.

YUGOSLAVIA:

On the day before Christmas the young men of the family get up early and look for a suitable oak for their yule log. This tree must fall towards the east at sunrise, if the branches touch another tree then the family will have bad luck for the next year. A vigil is kept on the log during the night because to allow the log to die out also means bad luck will follow.

The next morning a village lad must be the first one to enter the house and he throws grain into the corners of the room. He asks for blessing from each member of the family and strikes the log, the sparks symbolizing sheep, cattle and pigs.

The boy pours some wine and leaves a coin on the log, meaning a good year for the family. In return the boy is given food and entertained in the home throughout the day.

*I heard the bells on Christmas day
Their old familiar carols play;
And mild and sweet the words repeat
Of peace on earth, good will to men.*

— Henry Wadsworth Longfellow