

a chilly exterior, Jennie knew her sister's heart to be as warm as her own. The elder sister had been, as old Squire Denuus put it, "born dignified," but Jennie, he said, was just "comfortable like." So it was always "Miss Hester" and "Jennie" to the people at The Corners, among whom the sisters were still known as the "Butler girls," though both had long since left girlhood behind.

Jennie's consternation may be imagined when eight o'clock saw the two children arriving, and not alone!

"This is my mother, Miss Butler," said Margaret, in her pretty old-fashioned way; and Mrs. Lynch hastened to supplement the introduction by saying brightly: "I could not resist coming along, Miss Butler, and I hope you won't mind. I thought I might be of some use; and I'm like the children. I have never seen apple-butter made." She smiled engagingly at Jennie, whose dominant thought was, "What on earth will Hester think of this?" The while she shook hands cordially with Mrs. Lynch and bade her welcome.

"Indeed, I'm glad to see you," she said with extra heartiness. "I have been making friends with your children—they are lovely," relieving Margaret of her hat and smoothing Jennie's fair hair. He manifested a desire to begin operations immediately.

"Have you started yet?" he asked eagerly. "I brought mother along to peel in my place." The laugh over this set them all at ease.

"You must come in and meet my sister," said Jennie, leading the way into the sitting room with inward apprehension. Miss Hester was seated at the window, her favorite work-box in her lap. Jennie's flustered presentation of Mrs. Lynch and the children she acknowledged with stately and frigid politeness, and returned to her work with a most forbidding cast of countenance. "She even asked the mother too, and wouldn't tell me!" She thought angrily. And to Mrs. Lynch's timid remark about the beauty of the day she vouchsafed no answer whatsoever.

Poor Mrs. Lynch felt strangely rebuffed. Never in all her heretofore sheltered life had she encountered actual discourtesy or been made to feel unwelcome. It was a new and bitter experience. Most heartily she wished herself out of the house and at home. Bitterly she told herself that she deserved the reception she got from the older sister, for coming to a strange house uninvited. "But I won't tell Jack," she thought, while an unbidden quiver crossed her lips.

Jennie, who had been as much hurt by the rebuff as Mrs. Lynch, had tried to ignore it by keeping up a lively chatter in a laudable attempt to put her guests at ease.

"Now, Mrs. Lynch," she said, gaily, "you just come with me. We'll begin the apples, and I'll give the little ones something to do outside."

She was anxious to minimize her sister's lack of cordiality, for well she knew that Miss Hester herself would shortly be seized with remorse and would be eager to make up to Mrs. Lynch for the indignity.

"Come, Margaret," said Mrs. Lynch seeing that she would have to be sufficient to disturb that deep, serene peace of mind and heart that springs directly from the conviction and assurance that God is with him. It is for this reason that the saints have all been joyous in their own way—some, even, like St. Philip Neri, having been so merry as to be chiefly remembered on that account by their contemporaries. They felt themselves the friends of God, and as such basked in the sunshine of His face. The Church has never stood in the way of any legitimate form of amusement; on the contrary, because she teaches that mortal sin is the only real evil that can befall man she is the true house of joy in this dark, sorrowing world. She is the one institution that can make men brave against the whips of fortune and can bear their hearts up when they are heavy with discouragement and despair.

This note of gladness manifests itself especially in the Church's official prayers—the liturgy. In order that her children may become thoroughly imbued with her spirit, the Church makes use of a whole cycle of feasts, each of which recalls in its own way some phase of our Blessed Saviour's life. And just because these feasts sprang into popular favor at a time when men were embracing the faith of Christ in great numbers, she took over those national customs or celebrations which had entwined themselves around some special feast day of the people. Thus we know that some of the old pagan Roman customs were in the past instances tolerated, and then gradually christianized by the Church. The saturnalia of the Romans, for instance, synchronized in time with the Christmas festivities. Some modern atheistic writers who are bent at all odds on making out a case against the Church, are trying to prove that she copied, and took over bodily on some occasions, pagan celebrations. And having proved it to their own satisfaction, they go a step further and say that some of the fundamental teachings of the Church were also borrowed from pagan antiquity. But any student of history knows well that the Christmas time has become very innocent and indifferent, allowed popular customs connected with certain feasts to continue in the hope that as the Faith deepened in the hearts of the people their pagan significance would be lost in the Christian meaning of the day. It is but a repetition of the old Gospel

story of the husbandman who allowed cockle to grow in his field lest in uprooting it the tiny shoots of good grain be also destroyed. In tolerating, and eventually christianizing, these customs the Church has shown that she is not a heartless tyrant but a tender mother, stooping to our weakness, and by doing so lifting us up to the high plane on which she moves.

There are many customs for the different feast days of the Church in various lands of the world. Around the Eastern celebration of the Mass—the whole series of celebrations, especially in Italy, which are touching in the extreme. But just because the Christmas season is one of the greatest rejoicing, following as it does after Advent's four weeks of expectant waiting—signifying the four thousand years during which the Jews cried out for the Messiah—it is accompanied everywhere by many customs, which cling close to the heart.

Every country has its own manner of celebrating the Christmas festival. The one, however, which has gained almost universal popularity—the Christmas Crib—we owe to that troubadour of the Lord, St. Francis of Assisi, who first set the example as it was simple. Up to that time the Crib was popular enough in painting, specimens of it being found as far back as the days of the Catacombs. After all, the condescension of Christ's love in coming to us was so great that it must have struck powerful imaginations. Yes, the imaginations of artists. But it was the poet of the Lord, "the Poor Little Man of Assisi," who tried to make the masses realize what the artist alone had so far felt keenly—namely, the tender love which prompted the Master to come to us in human form. One Christmas night he assembled the simple folk of the Tuscan hills in his well beloved church of the Portiuncula on the plain down below the hill on which Assisi, girded about in her strong walls, sat like a queen. He preached to them of the goodness and loving kindness of the Master. He showed them by his earnest, direct words how Christ had been all in all to each and every one present. He narrated with Gospel simplicity the tender story of Christ's birth, showing how Mary and Joseph, having gone down to Bethlehem, the city of her fathers, to be inscribed in the census of the Empire then being taken, participated in the greatest event that had ever happened in the world. He drew a touching picture of the poverty of the Son of God, born between an ox and an ass, with nothing but a handful of straw to rest upon. And when he had made known to them the joy that Christ's coming had made possible, he bade them follow the way of the infant San Damiano, sonar who was in the manger where he showed them a Crib filled with straw, upon which lay the Infant Saviour, with Mary and Joseph adoring and the proverbial ox and ass beside the manger breathing upon the Christ. It was the first crib ever shown in Christendom, and so powerful and magical was its effect upon the people, so surely did it strike home to their hearts, that the custom was immediately established throughout Italy. And from Italy, through the preaching of the Friars Minor, it soon spread over the Christian world.

Even to this day we find, as a rule, that the Christmas Crib in Franciscan churches is generally most realistic and appealing. In Rome, on the Capitoline Hill, where stands the Church of Ara Coeli, is the famous Bambino, carved out of wood gathered in the Garden of Olives in Palestine. On Christmas Eve one side of the church is reserved for the Crib, in the background of which is represented the whole city of Bethlehem. After Communion, at the midnight Mass the Bambino is carried in procession from behind the altar and placed in position, amidst the prayerful cheering of those demonstrative children of the South. Up to Epiphany Day, lights are burning by the thousands around the shrine, and every afternoon, from two till four, the children of the parish seek to amuse the Bambino by reciting little nursery rhymes from a platform erected on the other side of the church. Their proud parents are there by the hundreds to listen to the little ones repeating their verses, and an especially good one is frequently greeted by shouts of "Bravo! Bravo!"

The Christmas festivities in Rome, however, are not confined to the church of the Franciscans, but are carried on in most of the other churches of the city. Notable among these celebrations is that which takes place in the Church of Santa Maria Maggiore, in which the boards out of which the Crib of the Infant Saviour was made are preserved in a brilliant reliquary. On Christmas afternoon at four o'clock, a long procession of priests, bishops and cardinals winds its way to the crypt of the church where the precious relic is kept during the year, and from thence it is carried through dense throngs of people to the Chapel of the Blessed Sacrament, where it is exposed on the altar during the entire holiday season, at the close of which it is once more borne in state to its resting place in the crypt below the main altar.

In Italy the domestic festivities owe much to the cold, which by Christmas time has become very intense. Never do Italians gather more freely around their own firesides than during the fortnight following Christmas. The poet saying in Italy is: "Natale coi tuoi; Pasqua dove puoi," which means, "Christmas must be kept with your

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