

further back. And while there are still exceptions, as there ever will be, yet as a rule the public sentiment is wholesome.

As to how the day was spent largely depended on the weather. When this was favourable, various outdoor sports were resorted to; but we considered it a special delight when a "black" frost gave smooth ice. Then on neighbouring loch or dam New Year's Day was celebrated in grandest style. From far and near friends met on the ice, and souter and blacksmith, dominie and farmer, laird and minister joined in the "Roaring Game,"—a republic in which all minor distinctions disappeared, and the best man was the man who could plant his stone on the T and guard it with his next!

#### CHRISTMAS IN WALES

Readers may have heard of the "Welsh Plygain." It was a religious service held in all the churches in Wales, at three o'clock on Christmas morning, to watch the dawn commemorative of the coming of Christ, and the daybreak of Christianity. This beautiful service of song, prayer, praise, and thanksgiving was generally held throughout the Principality at that early hour fifty years ago. The Plygain is still kept up in some of the remote parts of Wales, but the hour has been changed from three to six, seven, or eight o'clock, and the present Plygain bears but few of the characteristics of the old Plygain of the Cymry. The older folks who remember the service, when in its full swing about half a century since, say that sometimes they started at one or two in the morning—the time depending upon the distance to be traversed to the place of meeting. Sometimes the distance was two, three, or more miles and in that case a large party met at a certain point and picked up others on the way, so that by the time they reached the church or chapel a good number was congregated together. It was a rule that those families living nearest the place of meeting should receive the friends from a distance to breakfast immediately after this early service. This repast was substantial and exceptionally welcome after the long and cold walk, followed as a rule, by a lengthy service of from two to three hours.

On Christmas Day, and during Christmas week every year, in various districts in Wales, it is customary to hold local Eisteddfodan (my readers will understand that only one National Eisteddfod is held annually, and that in one of the three summer months). At these Welsh gatherings, prizes are given to the best competitors in music, literature, including poetry and prose, and art. Prizes are also given for the best specimens of knitting of hand-spun, and hand-woven goods. Special preaching services are also held, and large congregations assemble to hear some of the leading preachers of the Principality.

#### CHRISTMAS IN GERMANY.

There is a charm about Christmas-tide in Germany which one does not experience anywhere else.

To the visitor, the novel mode of its celebration affords unexpected pleasure, while to the native-born its associations are more lasting than any other childhood memories, and remain fresh and green in spite of age or foreign clime. There is no experience more painful to a German than the first Christmas spent away from the Fatherland. I have a vivid recollection of the utter loneliness and God-forsaken feeling which possessed me the first Christmas I spent in the Australian bush, some fifteen years ago.

The observance of Christmas is nationalised in Germany, and its manifold peculiar delights are heartily enjoyed alike by old and young, rich and poor.

There, as among the Jews, festive days are reckoned from sundown to sundown. The days being very short, the celebrations usually begin about four o'clock on what we term "Christmas Eve." Before that time the finishing touches have been given to the household decorations, and everyone appears in their best at the first family feast. This feast takes place from four to ten o'clock, according to rank. On the farms, as in other homes of humble society, this meal forms a bond of union between master and men, when, in fact, no wine is too good to wash away past grievance, and all eat and drink once more as the best of friends. At this time, too, it is customary for master and mistress to distribute presents to their workmen and servants.

Every home has its own Christmas-tree laden with gifts, and decorated with artistic confectionary such as only Germans can make.

The unveiling of this tree constitutes the children's chief joy, in which every member of the household participates.

Christmas day proper is observed with unusual sacredness and solemnity. Everybody goes to Church—some for the first and only time during the year. Churches, therefore, are crowded, and for that reason, if for no other, everyone enjoys being there.

So far as my recollection goes, no visitors are expected on

Christmas day, but the following day—"Second Christmas day"—as it is termed—is alive with parties and pleasures of all kinds.

The English, we are told, "take their pleasures seriously;" the Germans certainly do not. German custom seems to say, "Pleasure is as natural as work, therefore be as thorough in your pleasures as in your other duties," hence every citizen of the Fatherland takes his pleasure without scruples of conscience.

Another distinctive feature of Christmas in Germany is, that its manifold delights are shared by the poorest, whose cupboards are well stocked by their more prosperous neighbors. As for the juveniles, I doubt whether the joys of wealthier children can at all compare with theirs. In anticipation of Christmas cheer for them, every Hausfrau lays in stock a considerable supply of confectionary, for which, according to custom, the children call from house to house, until their white calico bags are stuffed to almost equal in size their round-faced owners. The German confectionery is made in a variety of shapes, such as trees, fruit, flowers, animals, or men, and all may be put on a string.

Each child's ambition is to get the most, and the probable result is eagerly inquired into by the children themselves, who call at each others' houses for that purpose.

They often exchange their various kinds of confectionary, much as their English cousins do their marbles.

The festive season over, another matter of rivalry among the children is to see who can make their stock of sweets last the longest. It may surprise my young readers to learn that some of these Deutsche Kinder manage to keep some into the second month of the year.

Christmas in Germany, is usually accompanied by plenty of ice and snow, which greatly enhances the festive pleasures. Should the weather be dry and frosty there is always a good deal of sleighing across land and water, regardless of roads, fences, or gates—all levelled by the "beautiful snow."

Should the atmosphere be moist so that the snow will adhere, the German spirits are not damped, since their pleasures are not lost, but only changed. What now would make walking and sleighing difficult, makes snow-balling easy. The children especially hail with delight these fresh diversions, and they may be seen by the score in the snow fashioning Father Christmas in his native spotless white, ornamented with bright glass eyes, white nose, ears, eyes, and moustache are readily supplied by moist mud from the tip of the finger.

Needless to say, this snow-Father appears in all shapes and sizes, according to the skill and ambition of his young artists, who, like some bigger children, begin their sport by admiring and cheering their self-made god, and vary the amusement by pelting him and knocking him out of shape with snow balls.

Should the weather permit, skating on the ice affords an wearying pleasure to old and young.

To be in Germany at Christmas and not be full of happiness is almost an impossibility.

To be at work, to do things for the world, to turn the currents of things about us at our will, to make our existence a positive element, even though it be no bigger than a grain of sand in this great system where we live—that is a new joy of which the idle man knows no more than the mole knows of sunshine, or the serpent of the eagle's triumphant flight into the upper air. The man who knows, indeed, what it is to act, to work, cries out: "This alone is to live."

#### A Christmas Greeting.

I wish a merry Christmas  
To every home on earth;  
May lowly cot, may palace hall  
Re-echo genial mirth  
May children's laughter gaily ring,  
And happy voices gladly sing  
A fond and joyous welcoming  
To merry, merry Christmas!

I pray a holy Christmas  
May come to every heart;  
A time of sweet tranquility  
From troublous care apart.  
An hour for thoughts to soar above  
For heart to realize the love  
And grace divine that, like a dove,  
Brood o'er this holy Christmas.

God send a blessed Christmas  
To every patient life;  
A little resting from the toil,  
A surcease of the strife.  
May Faith breathe words of gentle cheer,  
Hope point to roses blowing near,  
And tender love and friends sincere  
Make this a blessed Christmas!