

Observing Christmas in Foreign Lands.

To Germany we owe the Christmas Tree and the maintenance of the best of the old-fashioned customs.

By JANE STEWART.

THE crowded streets and brilliant marts of Christmastide, the glowing Christmas tree, the interchange of gifts and greetings, and the services in the churches are the chief features of the Christmas observance in Canada. While there are many to whom the perennial gift-giving is a burden, there are others to whom this is a source of great inspiration and delight because they get an opportunity to contribute to the joy of others.

Home Festival of Canadians.

Christmas has lived down its saturnalian and heathen origin. Today the holiday is par excellence the home festival of the Canadian people, and its observance is always an infinite source of joy to those who have home centers in which to radiate; while it casts the genial glow of its pervasive happiness and warmth upon the loneliness of those who are set apart among the flotsam and jetsam of humanity and of those who are the peculiar product of scattered and shattered homes.

Throughout Great Britain Christmas is the great week of the year. It is the one week when scattered families are reunited, when tender memories and old associations are revived, when friend greets friend with cheery expansiveness, in striking contrast with the characteristic reserve of the English nature. Business is practically suspended in London for the five days succeeding Christmas eve. There is nothing left of the obsolete orgies which so offended the Puritan element in the times of Cromwell. It would be an unimaginable English monarch who would forbid any observance of the 26th of December. The example is set by the royal family of the ideal way in which to spend the happy, merry Christmastide, which the English people cherish. It is the custom of King Edward VII and Queen Alexandra to pass the holiday quietly at Sandringham, and there to give personal supervision to the distribution of gifts.

Their majesties observe the best English traditions by attending service on Christmas morning at Sandringham church, which is prettily decorated with flowers and evergreens. The choir sings Gounod's "Bethlehem," and familiar hymns, such as "Hark! the Herald Angels Sing," and "O, Come All Ye Faithful." The religious service is followed by a quiet family reunion, a prototype of the gatherings in humbler homes throughout the United Kingdom. It is said that nothing creates a better impression in Great Britain than that the sovereign and royal family should observe national customs in the national way.

Customs from the Fatherland.

The Christmas customs of the English-speaking people are drawn chiefly from the fatherland, where the joys of the holiday season are ushered in on Christmas eve. To Germany we owe the Christmas tree and the maintenance of the best of the old customs. Throughout the Fatherland the decoration of the house begins as early as the morning of December 24. One room from which all save "die Mutter" are rigidly excluded contains the Christmas tree. Greens are hung from window to door and garlands are placed upon the walls. On Christmas eve, promptly at 6 o'clock, at the ringing of the bell, the doors of the "Christmas room" fly open and the tree is revealed to the impatient, admiring family in all the glory of its candles, tinsel, sweetmeats and gifts. They find not only the adorned Christmas tree, but each one of them a special table set for him.

Before Christmas everybody in the house has his secrets. Now these secrets are being revealed, and the children hasten to their different tables, curious to see whether their hopes and wishes have been realized. But these tables are not limited to the children in the German homes. Not only the immediate family, but the

whole household, meets under the Christmas tree. For each of the servants Christmas boxes are provided on a big table. Sometimes the servants prefer receiving money, but even then some Christmas tokens are added in order that the table may be full. After the distribution of the gifts there follows a distinctly German custom. Every one, both large and small, indulges in a hearty embrace and an affectionate kiss. No one is exempt. Young and old, friend and relative, rich or poor, take part in the ceremony. Even the Emperor does not forego this feature of the observance. Merrymaking, supper and dancing follow.

Petition to Kris Kringle.

In some parts of Germany, Scandinavia and Holland the custom for all the children to offer a petition at the chimney corner on Christmas eve to Kris Kringle, asking him to fill their stockings for Christmas morning, and many hopes and fears are confided to him. "Kris Kringle" is a corruption of "Christ-Kindlein," who is supposed to descend the chimney with gifts for all good children and has in Germany

Christmas in Italian Homes.

On Christmas even in many Italian homes a family festival is held where the old and young to the third and fourth generations meet at a supper of fish, eels, nuts, cakes and fruit, or vegetables. No meat is included in the magro, which is, however, a satisfying repast. It is followed the next day by the sumptuous dinner, graced necessarily by a fat capon, and ended by pau giallo, a sort of coarse nut and fruit cake. It is the perennial holiday custom of the Italian tradesmen, as well as the German and Russian, to send to their patrons complimentary gifts at Christmas time. These tokens are recognized in Italy by the mangle, or small sum of money which is given in return.

In France as in Italy, Christmas has not the same status in popular regard as in other lands. Yet Paris, it is stated, uses 50,000 Christmas trees each year, the result of German suggestion. In 1870 the famous old cathedral of Notre Dame was made the scene of the German Christmas celebrations, which have left a permanent impression. In the convents of France

lowed by a day of congratulations, when both front and back door bells are kept constantly ringing by friends both rich and poor. Carriages and cabs fly through the streets bearing callers to extend the national form of holiday greeting, "Sprasnikom," "With the holidays," which is the Russian way of saying "Merry Christmas." Tips are expected by all classes of servants and dealers and visits from the clergy involve an invariable donation.

Christmas Calls Becoming Obsolete.

The Russian society man is bound during the holidays to kiss the hand of the woman he greets. But the custom of Christmas calls, like the former New Year calling of Canada, is becoming obsolete. It is now looked on as tiresome and expensive. The third Christmas day is marked by the court reception, during which Nicholas II receives the highest councillors of state—the senators, the representatives of the synod, the army, navy and other chief subjects. Among the Russian common people the Christmas time has customs of local and peculiar significance. That is a type of the early English custom when peasants gather in groups, singing carols in front of the nobleman's houses and eagerly accept the gift of coin thrown to them from the windows. This is called in Russia the Kolenda. It always precedes a quaint representation by the peasants of all ages. They dress themselves in the style of different animals. This is done to commemorate Christ's having been born in a stable.

In most countries Christmas is observed in a measure religiously. To the natives of the Philippines Christmas is largely a religious ceremony, as in Italy and France. All over the islands Christmas bells ring out for hours. A grand mass is celebrated in the early morning. The churches are profusely decorated with palms and fragrant blossoms. Great wreaths and chains of cut flowers are carried by the children, who sing songs and parade through the streets. A Filipino band leads the procession. In Mexico, too, Christmas is a festa much like others on the calendar. Its distinguishing feature is the Christmas eve market of small booths lining the thoroughfares, where everything marketable is offered for sale—candies a foot in diameter, and others scarcely larger than matches; pottery, baskets, rebozos, serapes, huge tissue paper ornaments, candies, fruit, nuts, sausages, mirrors, knives and cigarettes.

In Cuba, where the sun shines fiercely at Christmas time, there is no holiday crowd on the streets. Pig takes the place of turkey. The Christmas dinner is a supper and part of a religious feast at midnight on Christmas eve. Wherever English, Canadians, Americans or Germans dwell, the world around, the Christmas customs of the home land have been introduced. Wherever there is a British or American man-of-war there is a British or American Christmas. This is equally true of merchant and passenger ships of all nations.

Cosmopolitan Character of Occasion.

The cosmopolitan character of the Christmas holiday is best illustrated in some foreign port where half a dozen ships of different countries are anchored side by side. On Christmas day the crew of the Russian ship, for example, will intone the stately chant of the solemn Russian hymn. At its conclusion there is silence. Then the sailors on a Dutch vessel will chant the inspiring national air of the Netherlands. The next ship, perhaps a British man-of-war, and its crew, lift their voices in "God Save the King." The glorious message which has rejoiced the hearts of men of all ages: "Peace on earth, good will toward men." From the foreyard flies the universal friendly salutation, "A Merry Christmas."

Merry Christmas!

WILLIAM MAKEPEACE THACKERAY

MERRY, merry Christmas and a happy, bright New Year!
How sweet the kind old greetings sound in every heart and ear.
No matter how care-burden'd, and no matter how depressed,
A something in their welcome makes them dear to every breast.

We heard them in our childhood, when with spirits light and gay
We dreamed not that life's joyfulness could ever pass away;
And though long years of carefulness have sobered many a heart,
A joy still lingers 'round them which can never quite depart.

"Be Peace on Earth"
As fits the solemn Christmastide,
As fits the holy Christmas birth,
Be this, kind friends, our carol still:
"Be peace on earth, be peace on earth
To men of gentle will."

superseded St. Nicholas, or Santa Claus, the patron saint of children. The way of observing Christmas in Holland is of peculiar interest. In all the towns and villages at midnight on Christmas eve the men, in varied costumes, meet in the principal squares, chanting the "Gloria in Excelsis." A large star, in which there are several lighted candles shining as one, is mounted on a pole. This star is symbolic of the star that guided the wise Men of the East. The scene is deeply impressive. As the long procession chanting the "Gloria" marches slowly along the star casts its radiance in the dark, winding streets.

Christmas in Italy centers around the Church. Nearly all the Roman Catholic churches have a reproduction of the stable of Bethlehem, with all the prominent figures of the nativity. Before the Prespio, as this representation is called, the mothers gather and urge their little ones to recite their hymns of praise to the Madonna and the Child. Roman children receive no gifts on Christmas day. The children of the evangelical churches have lovely Christmas trees, their green, aromatic branches laden with yellow oranges, silvered balls and strings of gilt paper, bright with lighted candles of red, white and green, the colors of Italy, and with mimic snow. The Sunday schools generally have Christmas trees also laden with gifts.

Christmas eve is a very beautiful festival. The sweet custom of making gifts for the poor is carried out. The children all receive Christmas boxes, and usually the first gift taken from these is placed in the basket for the poor. If Christmas week is a great week in Great Britain, Canada, the United States and Germany, it is greater still in Russia. The celebration of Christmas in the czar's dominions is an extensive and unique ceremony. The Christmas holidays comprise two entire weeks. Beginning with December 24, there is one long line of successive holidays till January 8. Work is stopped in factories and school is closed. Everybody takes a vacation, and this condition of things is attributed to the fact that the Russian peasant is not possessed with the fever of money-getting and has not yet reached that stage of civilization where money is everything.

Day Observed in Russia.

The business streets of Russian cities bear the aspect of a brilliant fair in gay decorations and are thronged with crowds of different races—Tatars, Armenians, Circassians and many more, in their various native costumes. The Christmas tree laden with gifts is the prevailing feature in the homes of all classes. Large sums are expended in presents. A quiet family reunion marks the first day. This is fol-