

Christmas in Old Provence

A Land of Hallowed Customs—The Sweetness and Tenderness of the Faith and Their Songs and Stories—Yule Tide for Young and Old.

Poetry has an abiding place in Provence—the poetry of the heart, which touches all men and makes them of one kin. Romance lives on every mountain-side, lingers in every old chateau, larks in every little cottage. The Provençal is a race of poets, as is befitting those who spring from the land of Laura and Petrarch—immortal lovers who loved in vain; of Anacassis and Nicolette, who married and lived happily forever after. Deep green are the oak valleys, water-worn the rocky hills. Ancient as the centuries seem the gray houses of distant villages against the blue sky, above which rear the gayest mountains, where in the early springtime, the almond trees glow, delicately pink. The pale green of the olive orchard. Lower down, lives the whole year round, while on the plateau at the foot of the mountain slopes are vineyards and wheatfields, with the long black lines of cypress running from east to west to protect the green, growing things from the mistral, that north wind which springs up to destroy.

For this is an old, old land, where many people have lived their lives and gone away—a Catholic land, where every little highway and by-way speaks of God, the Church, the Faith. Where nearly all tradition is Catholic tradition and everything sweet and tender and true in its poetry or in its prose is distinctly Catholic.

In such a land it is needless to say that the Christmas scene is not a fall of customs that almost have the force of laws. In Provence the great time begins on St. Barbara's day—the fourth of December. Taking two or three shallow dishes the women fill them with water and sow therein wheat and lentils. After this the dishes are set aside, either on the fireplace or an sunny window-sill. This custom prevails in every household, and is done in order, as they will tell you, that from this the coming harvest may be foretold. For St. Barbara's grain grows lustily the harvest will more than repay their labor. Besides when the supper is eaten on Christmas eve, they would have green growing upon the table to welcome the new year that is fast approaching—the symbol of youth and all their hopes for another twelve-months. All Provençal farmers believe that the twelve days preceding Christmas, called comites, foretell the weather for the coming year. Each in its turn, with sunshine, rain, heat or cold, shows the temperature that will prevail during the month of the new year for which it is numbered. They say too, that when Christmas falls on Friday they may sow in ashes, for the harvest will be abundant that the seed will grow anywhere.

The carrying of the Yule log, whether it be the big almond tree or the weather or the tiny branch of the poor cottager, is surrounded by the greatest ceremony. The head of the family cuts the tree, while all the others take part in bringing home the wood that is to make the Christmas fire. The Yule log is supposed to burn on Christmas eve until New Year's—not continuously, of course, the largest log would scarcely suffice for that—so each night is smothered in ashes, and is not set blazing again until the following evening. But even when this ten care of the log must be a big one to last out the week and it is only the rich who can afford to burn it in this manner. Others are satisfied to keep the little flames alight over Christmas day. About this little flame the good folk gather, grandfather, grandmother, father, mother, sons, daughters, and their children. Then the old songs are sung, and the old tales told. Most of the songs, as the Provençal called in Provence, are simple stories of the life of the Virgin on earth and of the birth and childhood of her blessed son. One of the prettiest of these is that of the Provençal poet, Saboly who tells of St. Joseph and the innkeeper of Bethlehem, in which St. Joseph begs for shelter. The innkeeper refuses roughly, but last gives a corner of his stable. Another relates the story of a blind girl—blind from birth who begs her mother to let her go to the stable with the others—that though she can not see the infant's face, at least she may touch his hand. And when she went and touched the little hand of Jesus, and placed it on her heart, she saw Him whom she touched.

O the tales—they would have filled in many pages—perhaps the favorite is that love-story of Anacassis, the faithful knight, whose father would not let him wed with Nicolette because she had been bought, as a child, from the Saracens. 'Therefore she was beneath the noble Anacassis son of Count Garin of Bauxois, of the best blood of Provence.' So, 'Nicolette was put in ward, In a vaulted chamber barred.

But she escaped and made her way by strange and devious paths to the dungeon where Anacassis himself was confined because of his obsequy. She would hear his voice, but they could not reach or see each other.

Aching Joints

In the fingers, toes, arms, and other parts of the body, are joints that are inflamed and swollen by rheumatism—that acid condition of the blood which affects the muscles also.

Sufferers dread to move, especially after sitting or lying long, and their condition is commonly worse in wet weather.

Hood's Sarsaparilla

Removes the cause of rheumatism—no outward application can. Take it.

'Then she cut her curls of gold, Cast them in the ducegone hold, And stayed holding converse with her faithful lover until warded away by a friendly watchman who did not want to see her recaptured. And Nicolette wanders on and on, until Anacassis, released at last follows her. Their further adventures are many, but the poet clears up all their difficulties in the end.

'Then Anacassis wedded her, Made her lady of Bauxois, Many years ago they were.'

In this land of ballad singers and ballad writers it is only natural that one should find such beautiful stories done in verse. It is a temptation to quote many—a temptation that can not be resisted when it comes to that which lingers about the porch of St. Trophimus at Arles—St. Trophimus who, it is said, was one of the seventy two disciples of Our Lord on earth and brought the holy Faith to Provence with St. Martha and St. Mary Magdalen. The poet tells of that pure and lovely maiden who

'Walked with lowered eyes, To the Steps of St. Trophime.'

As she passed the stone statues of the saints within the doorway they blessed her. For she was pure and sweet, and very fair to look upon. So the stone statues of the saints, watched her day by day, knew that she was meant for all good.

'A white nun she should be,' said St. John, 'for the convent is a haven from the stormy world.'

'Doubtless,' said St. Trophimus 'but I have need of her within my temple. For there must be light in darkness, and the world wants such good examples.'

'Brothers,' went on St. Honorat, 'to-night, when the moon is shining over pools and fields we will go down from our columns to the festival. The holy table will be spread and at midnight Our Lord Jesus Christ will say Mass.'

'Now if you listen to me said St. Luke 'thither will I lead this pious maiden, clad in a mantle of blue and white.'

So, at that word, the four saints moved away as softly as the evening breeze and they took the soul of the girl as she passed by and led it with them. . . . Early the next morning, that lovely maid awoke, and spoke to all that met her of the festival she had attended, and of how the angels had passed down from the sky when the holy table was made ready in the Alysamps, and St. Trophimus had read the responses while Our Lord Christ Himself said Mass.'

Can infidelity or atheism grip the heart of that France which tells such tales as these about the burning Yule log on Christmas eve? But whether the Yule log is great or small, we betide the luckless one who ill treats it in any way! For it is sacred, being dedicated to Christmas, and he will suffer for his temerity, generally by such a dreadful stomach-ache that he can not eat his Christmas dinner. While on the other hand, fittingly honored, it will bring a blessing upon all the household even its ashes being potent for good.

The children make the Christmas crib. There is no Christmas tree in Provence, but the crib is very dear to the hearts of young and old. It is always placed in the living-room on a table in the corner. There is the rocky hillside, covered with snow, and the crib with Our Lady and St. Joseph bending over the divine infant. Quiet indeed are the additions which the pious Provençal has added to the Christmas crib. Besides the ox and the donkey, and the shepherds, there is a little child leading a blind man, a mother carrying the cradle of her own baby to the Baby in the straw, other shepherds with their flocks of sheep, and dogs, geese, turkeys, chickens, camels, lions, bears, etc. There is a piper to play, a spinning woman, a knife grinder, and two or three gypsies looking near to steal the Christ Child if they can! The congregation near the crib is surely an odd one! Generally these little figures are two or three inches high and made of rough clay. They are sold by the thousands at Christmas time.

SCOTT'S EMULSION is the only emulsion indicated. The reason is plain—it's the best. Insist upon having Scott's—it's the world's standard flesh and strength builder.

But the crib is not complete until the Feast of the Epiphany, when the Three Kings, with their train of attendants and camels, are added to the group near the infant in the manger. For the children believe that at sunset upon the lay of the Three Kings they really come to the church to do homage to the Christ Child.

In the olden times when there was more need of charity, pious families were wont to ask some poor friend, or even a passing stranger, to eat the supper with them on Christmas Eve, and everything left was set aside as the share of the good God. 'A gigantic wicker-work figure, named Mal-obior, was clothed grotesquely and a great basket strapped upon his back. He was taken from door to door and when he had finished his rounds, laden down with figs, almonds, bread cheese, olives, etc., Mal-obior's basket was emptied at the orchard door, and the poor came for their portion.' A reminiscence of this still lingers in smaller towns, where, at Christmas time thirteen poor people, 'the Apostles,' receive each two pounds of meat, two loaves of bread, some figs and almonds and a few pennies which the township bestows upon them.

Perhaps the good St. Martha's kindly spirit—St. Martha ended her days here in Provence—lingers still, for the Provençal housewife is very glad to busy herself with much serving at this time. She has the fogginess to prepare a large flat, open-work-plate not unlike a small grating in appearance. It is made at other times in the year, but its making during Christmas season is of obligation. Formerly the women were in the habit of sending a fogginess to each of their intimates on Christmas day, but the custom has somewhat died out. The Great Supper, as it is called is served on Christmas eve in the living-room. The first ceremony—one to which the children delight—is the lighting of the candles. Then comes the laying of the Yule log, which is borne to the earth by the oldest and the youngest, typifying the year that is going and the one that is coming. The oldest man fills out some wine, which is poured three times upon the log. In the name of the Father, and the Son, and the Holy Ghost.

The table is spread with a white cloth, the two lighted candles at either end being watched anxiously, for should the wick of the Christmas-candles (all before the supper is ended, the person toward whom it points in passing will leave the world before the Christmas feast is spread again. Beside the candles are set the wheat that was sown on St. Barbara's day—the harbingers of the harvest for the coming year. In the center of the table, its brown surface slashed with a cross, is the Christmas bread, on which is a bunch of holy tied with the white pith of rushes—held to be the emblem of strength. The loaf is cut into as many portions as there are people present, with a double portion for some poor person—the portion of the good God. This bread is considered most precious and a bit of the blessed loaf, is carried by the sailors with them when they go to sea, to preserve them from the dangers of shipwreck. Nougats, fruit and wine are there in abundance.

Grace is always said by the young set in the family and another odd custom is the stuffing of the family oat. It must not 'meow' on this great occasion, so its sander is kept well supplied. It being fast day no meat is permitted the principal dish is the rago of fried fish with a sauce flavored with wine and capers. The second course is also a fish, and the third is generally of snails cooked in a rich brown sauce flavored with garlic. The cards follow the snails—a giant thistle that grows from five to six feet high. It is really quite a handsome plant, but the stem is edible, and tastes like celery. A few or than seven sweets must be served at the Great Supper, and the wines must be from Provençal vineyards.

No one dreams of missing the midnight Mass on Christmas eve; and the beautiful ceremony of the homage of the shepherds is carried out before the Offertory by real shepherds clad in skins and bearing the pipes, they enter to offer their homage to the Holy Child, whose coming has made them the sons of the King, the brothers of the Prince of peace—just as their humble prototypes nearly two thousand years ago, brought their gifts and laid them upon the altar of the Orb where He lay. The people of Provence would think there was something missing from the Christmas mid-night Mass if the shepherds failed to appear—and the men themselves have the beautiful Faith which regards this custom as one of necessity. When all is over, they go back again across the snowy roads to bed, Christmas day is almost a repetition of the day before, save that a fat goose is served among other dainties. And once more the ashes are carefully brushed aside, the Yule log lighted, and the songs and tales begin.

And there was Mousire St. Joseph, And Mary the Mother lay, While the Holy Child in swaddling band, All on a cushion of hay.

And indeed Christmas day in Provence comes to a close, as should every Christmas day the world over—'In peace and good will.'—Benziger.

Minard's Liniment cures Neuralgia.

FELL AWAY TO A SHADOW.

All Her People Thought She Had CONSUMPTION.

Mrs. Wm. Martin, Lower Ship Harbor East, N.S., writes:—'I am sending you a testimonial of my cure by Dr. Wood's Norway Pine Syrup. Last May I took a cold, and it settled on my lungs. I got so bad I could not rest at night. I had two doctors to treat me but got no relief. "All of my people thought I had Consumption. I had fallen away to a shadow. I had given up all hopes of ever getting better again until my daughter went to a store one day and bought me a bottle of Dr. Wood's Norway Pine Syrup. After taking half of it I felt better, so I got two more, and thanks to it I am well to-day, and able to do my house work. I cannot say too much in its praise, and I shall always keep it in the house."

Dr. Wood's Norway Pine Syrup contains all the lung healing virtues of the famous Norway Pine tree which makes it the very best preparation for Coughs, Colds and all Throat and Lung Troubles. See that you get "Dr. Wood's" when you ask for it. There are many imitations on the market. Price, 25 and 50 cents. See that the name, The T. Millburn Co., Limited, is on the yellow wrapper.

'Miss Greenland, I have something to say to you.' 'Yes?' 'I hardly know how to say it.' She decided to help him a little. 'One need have no hesitancy,' said she graciously, 'in speaking freely to one who feels toward you as I do.'

'That's what I thought. Well, you have a little too much powder on your nose.'

MINARD'S LINIMENT CO. LIMITED. GENTLEMEN,—I have used MINARD'S LINIMENT from time to time for the past twenty years. It was recommended to me by a prominent physician of Montreal, who called it the 'great Nova Scotia Liniment.' It does the doctor's work; it is particularly good in cases of Rheumatism and sprains. Yours truly, G. G. DUSTAN, Quarters Accountant, Halifax, N. S., Sept. 21, 1905.

Beware Of Worms.

Don't let worms gnaw at the vitals of your children. Give them Dr. Low's Pleasant Worm Syrup and they'll soon be rid of these parasites. Price 25c.

Walter (an old gentleman who is hunting for something on the floor) 'What have you lost sir?' 'Old Gent—A piece of taffie.'

Walter—'That is not very important sir.' 'Old Gent—Excuse me, it is. My teeth are in it.'

Minard's Liniment cures Dandruff.

'The landlady taught him a lesson. He started to praise her cooking.' 'Eidin't she like it?' 'Old Gent—A piece of taffie.'

W. H. Wilkinson, Stratford, Ont., says:—'It affords me much pleasure to say that I experienced great relief from Muscular Rheumatism by using two boxes of Milburn's Rheumatic Pills. Price a box 50c.'

Gaoler—'That new prisoner made an awful fuss when I was washing him.' Governor—'Then iron him.'

Mary Ovington, Jasper, Ont., writes:—'My mother had a badly sprained arm. Nothing we used did her any good. Then father got Hagyard's Yellow Oil and it cured mother's arm in a few days. Price 25 cents.'

Lawyer—'In this will you really insist upon being buried at sea?' 'Yes—You see my wife says that when I'm dead she's going to dance on my grave.'

COULD NOT LET ANYONE TALK TO HER SHE WAS SO NERVOUS. Diseases of the nervous system are very common. All the organs of the body may be sound while the nervous system is all upset, on account of the troubles and worry which fall to the lot of one who has to look after the troubles incident to housekeeping, and when the nerves become trusting the heart is also affected. In Milburn's Heart and Nerve Pills is combined a treatment that will cure all forms of nervous disorder and act on the heart itself, and for this reason we would highly recommend them to all run-down women. Mrs. Wm. Smith, Terra Nova, Ont., writes:—'I wish to tell you that I have used Milburn's Heart and Nerve Pills. I was so nervous I could hardly let any one talk to me until a neighbour told me to try Milburn's Heart and Nerve Pills. I got three boxes, and did not have to get any more as they completely cured my nervous system.' Milburn's Heart and Nerve Pills are for sale at all dealers, or mailed direct on receipt of price, 50 cents per box, 2 boxes for \$1.25. The T. Millburn Co., Limited, Toronto, Ont.

Prince Edward Island Railway.

Commencing on December 23, 1912, trains on this Railway will run as follows:

Table with columns: Read Down, Read Up, Stations, and various train numbers and times.

H. McEWEEN, Supt. P. E. I. Railway.

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Fall and winter weather calls for prompt attention to the

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LIME! We can supply from this date Fresh Burned Lime in large and small quantities suitable for farming and building purposes. Orders left at Kilns on St. Peter's Road, or at our office, will receive prompt attention. C. Lyons & Co. May 29, 1912.

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FIRE INSURANCE. Royal Insurance Company of Liverpool, G. B. Sun Fire offices of London. Fidelity Phenix Fire Insurance Co. of New York. Combined Assets \$100,000,000. Lowest rates and prompt settlement of Losses. JOHN MACBACHER, AGENT. Telephone No. 362. Mar. 22nd, 1906. W. J. P. McMILLAN, M.D. PHYSICIAN & SURGEON. OFFICE AND RESIDENCE, 148 PRINCE STREET CHARLOTTETOWN, J. June 15, 1910-11. JAMES H. REDDIN, Barrister, etc. Has Removed his Office from the City Hotel Building, Great George Street, to rooms over Grant's Implement Warehouse, Corner of Queen and Sydney Streets. Collections attended to. Money to loan. Ch'town, Feb. 22, 1911—Gm

Hard Coal. Daily expected per schooner "B. Bowers" (and "Freedom"), one thousand tons best quality Hard Coal in Egg, Stove and Chestnut sizes. C. Lyons & Co. July 26, 1911-12.

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