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365 days are not enough to hold all the good fortune we wish you this Christmas. Prosper friends, and be everlastingly happy.

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OBSERVANCE OF CHRISTMAS IN MANY OTHER LANDS

Some of the Beliefs and Customs Observed in Lands Across the Sea to Note the Christmas Time. Some Heathen Customs Adopted.

(By Miss Alice Goodfellow)

In some of the countries where Santa Claus is welcomed, although not always by that name, the children do not celebrate with a tree, nor hang up their stockings; but they have other customs as interesting, and their welcome is no less warm.

The people who first brought the Christmas tree into favour were the Germans. It is very popular all over Germany and is growing in favour in England. Santa Claus is known as Kris Kringle in Germany.

The Celts and Germans from the oldest times celebrated the season with the greatest festivities. At the winter Solstice, the Germans held their great Yule feast, in commemoration of the return of the fiery sun-wheel, and believed that during the 12 nights from Dec. 25th to Jan. 6th, they could trace the personal movements and interferences on the earth of their great Deities.

Many of the beliefs and usages of the old Germans passed from heathenisms to Christianity, and have partly survived. But the church has combated and banished the deep-rooted heathen feeling by adding its grandly devised litany, besides dramatic representations of the birth of Christ and the first events of his life.

In some parts of Germany there are religious ceremonies in honour of Christ kindler as the Christ Child is called, the people light every window in their houses on Christmas eve so that the Christ Child may more easily find his way from house to house.

The old custom of filling the shoes with toys by the good Saint Nicholas as he rode around the world seeking good little boys and girls, while for the bad children the rod of discipline was left, decorated with ribbon in honour of the special occasion. German children preserve their toys in the attic.

This shoe idea has been improved by substituting the stocking. Likewise came the custom of decorating the fir tree with candles and with gifts.

Russia

In Russia the children try to keep awake the night before Epiphany that they may see the old woman, Bahoushka.

The story goes that she was a careful housewife, lived on the highroad between Jerusalem and Bethlehem, and as the Wise Men neared the end of their journey, passed by, they found her busy cleaning house. She questioned as to where they were going and was told that they were journeying to offer homage to the new born King of the Jews.

As she was not willing to leave her work unfinished, they went their way. She started out later to overtake them, but was unsuccessful, so has ever since been wandering all over the world to find the Christ Child Jesus. So on the eve of Epiphany, Jan. 6th, she comes down the chimneys and leaves gifts for the children, as that is the date when the wise men found the stable where Jesus lay. The week before Christmas they celebrate by telling fortunes and following other ancient customs.

Italy

The Christ Child is known here as "Bambino." The most famous Bambino is in the church at Rome. The little waxen effigy, made to represent Christ, is dressed in its finest clothes and placed in a tiny cradle. Every church has these, and special ceremonies are performed. All over Italy the children empty the pockets of their clothes on the eve of Epiphany and hang them around the great fireplaces. During the night they think the woman whom the Russians call Bahoushka comes down the chimney with candles and other gifts for the good children, and birch rods or charcoal ashes for the bad.

Spain

The Spanish children believe it is Balthazar, one of the three kings who comes on the eve of Epiphany and leaves gifts for all.

They have their plaster representations of Christ and the little manger, trimmed with green, while many candles are burnt. They believe that the kind of things that happen on New Year's day will be repeated in the days to follow. It is pleasant to have a fortunate and happy day to set the example for the rest of the year.

The practice of placing a great community Christmas tree in our parks, decorating it with coloured lights and a great star, while crowds gather about and sing Christmas carols, is taken from the street festivals of Italy and Spain.

France

The children place shoes or slippers by the chimney on Christmas and the little Jesus is supposed to fill them with sweetmeats and candles.

The celebration of Christmas in Paris really begins at midnight on Christmas Eve with an impressive Mass in all churches. The people flock to them to attend the Mass and to hear the fine music, the organ, the choral singing and solos.

The family reunions and the social gatherings are held in the evening, excepting the gifts to the children, there is no exchange of presents, that is reserved for New Year's Day.

Austria-Hungary

In Austria-Hungary Christmas is celebrated with particularly pretty customs in this quaint country. All through the year the best of every crop, and all other provisions have been saved for the Christmas feast. An enormous log is brought from the forest, wine is sprinkled on it before being burnt.

Three wax tapers are an important part of the celebrations, these are made by the grandmother. Two loaves of bread are baked to represent the Old and New Testaments. When Christmas Eve comes the family wait for the church-bell to ring out and summon each family to the living room.

On the table stand the three tapers ready to be lighted. Besides the candles, delicious eatables and two loaves of bread make the table a pretty sight. Near the bread is placed a small cup filled with wheat, barley, oats, and other grains. The father lights the first candle and the family sing a hymn, he announces "Christ is born," and family join in.

On Christmas day, he lights the second candle, after a short prayer, he extinguishes it and pushes it down into the gup of grains. They believe that whichever kinds of grains stick to the candle those kinds will yield the biggest crop next year.

The last candle is always burned on New Year's Day.

Holland

In Holland Santa Klaus rides a white horse, children leave their shoes with hay, oats and carrots to feed his hungry steed, while Santa filled their shoes with toys.

From Scandinavia comes the custom of burning the Yule log, and hanging up the mistletoe.

Great Britain

In the British Isles carol singing and burning the Yule log are both very popular.

The holly wreath, which we hang in our homes at Christmas was copied from the English, who believed the holly leaves represented the thorns Christ wore upon the cross, while the little red berries typified the drops of blood.

A quaint Colonial custom was to enclose a sprig of mistletoe in the letter or card which carried the Christmas greeting—a symbol of happiness and a wish for prosperity through the coming year.

Giving the poor gifts, originated with the folk-tale that among beggars who come to our doors, one might be Christ in disguise, and whatsoever hospitality is given the poor at this time is really given Christ.

Christmas Customs

One of the prettiest of Christmas customs is the exchange of little remembrances which signify thoughtfulness and affection. They engender a warm heart glow if given and received in the true spirit. But the trouble is that the true Christmas spirit is very often wholly lacking in the exchange of gifts.

People frequently give because they received last year, or think they will receive this year; they feel obligations.

There is often a pretty rivalry as to who will give the greatest number or the most expensive presents; there is often an unworthy jealousy; there is worry for days and weeks before, and money spent which can be ill-afforded.

Thus the day becomes one of bitterness and bad feeling, instead of joy and good will.

It's glorious import is lost. I believe on this account that there ought to be less giving of presents at Christmas. Let the custom be confined to members of one's own family and one or two outside its circle who are very dear, and to even them let the gifts be simple and inexpensive. Then if given with sincerity, they will be priceless.

Three Things Needed for Happy Christmas Time

Three things are necessary to a happy Christmas, according to a New York divine. These are "a home, a child and a loving heart."

"It is only in the home, the real home, that Christmas can be enjoyed," he says. "One feels sorry, at Christmas time, for people who live in hotels. A tree in the lobby is a poor substitute for the holly and mistletoe at home. A hotel, like the inn at Bethlehem, seems to shut out the spirit of the season."

"A Christmas without children is as impossible as Mary and Joseph without their Babe. Even one child will do—and this is a joy that even the childless family may know. Why not bring Christmas to some family who has no home? Why not borrow those loneliness of human beings and bring happiness and joy and gladness to them?"

"A loving heart, the third ingredient of a happy Christmas, needs a home to protect it, and the dear dependence of the children to nourish it. And the home needs the loving heart to make it glow and the children need the loving heart to make them happy."

"If our machine age, as certain pessimistic prophets declare, is at once the last period of the rise and first period of the decline and fall of civilization, it is because the mechanism of our society threatens to give neither time nor place for those intimate personal relations of heart with heart which make earth a reflection at least, of heaven."

NOT THE VALUE BUT THE SURPRISE THAT COUNTS

In the matter of Christmas gifts many people needlessly worry because their gifts are "cheap." If they have beauty and interest and come as a pleasant surprise to the recipient, they will find appreciation and they will be truly valuable on that account. At Christmas time it is the thought behind the gift that counts—not the price it cost. Many a gift that cost but little is cherished because of its interest and beauty and the kindly thought behind it, while other more expensive articles are not nearly so much appreciated.



In wishing you a Merry Christmas we would like parenthetically to thank you for a year of pleasant business associations.

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