

HOW I SPENT CHRISTMAS IN THE FATHERLAND.



"AH, MY CHILDREN. HERE IS WORK FOR ALL."

the country being described, as if we had not all been saturated with guide-books." Bearing these words in mind, I will not now "describe" the old German town where I passed the Christmas of 1882, but will only say that I was spending the winter in a German family, consisting of the Herr Vater, the Frau Mutter, Fräulein, her sister, little Lenchen, the eight-year-old daughter, and last, but by no means least, the dear old Herr Grosspapa. How well I remember the first night in my new quarters! A tremendous gale was blowing, but, tired out with the two days' journey, my head had literally no sooner touched the pillow than I was asleep. In the "dead waste and middle of the night" I was suddenly and rudely waked by the sound of glass smashing and crashing all around me. Terrified, and firmly convinced that thieves were breaking into the house, if not actually into my room, I leapt up, prepared to alarm the family. But all was now again still, and nothing to be either seen or heard until my door was opened, and Fräulein, who had been also awakened, made her appearance, and explained matters. It seems that on account of the violent storms and excessive cold the windows are all made double, and the noise I had heard was caused by my outer window being blown entirely away, and falling into the street below. "But it is nothing," concluded Fräulein cheerfully, as, smiling benevolently, she once more left my room. I returned to bed, but for a long time lay awake listening to the raging of the wind, and hearing at intervals the crashing of glass, now near, now far along the street, and thinking what a curious country it must be where the falling out of windows was looked upon so calmly as an everyday, or rather nightly, occurrence.

On the Sunday before Christmas Day, as we came home from service in the cathedral, I was surprised to find all the shops open, and

the first time we went abroad, a wise old lady gave us the following piece of advice: "My dears, I shall always like to hear from you, and you must tell me all you are *doing*, but please remember my objection to the face of

the streets thronged with people laden with baskets and bags. It is the custom for the shops to be open on the two Sundays before Christmas, so that people who cannot get out during the week may do their Christmas shopping.

Christmas in Germany is a very serious business indeed, and everybody, young and old, is in an immense state of excitement about it for weeks beforehand. Lenchen could talk of nothing but what the "Christ-child" would bring her on Christmas Eve; and even the old Herr Grosspapa, when he went out in the afternoon to drink his coffee and read his paper, would come in with his pockets full of contributions for the Christmas-tree.

One evening, about a week before Christmas, we were all called from our usual occupations by the Herr Grosspapa to "come and help to prepare for the 'Christbaum'" (Christmas-tree). There he sat at the table, his long silver hair peeping out from under his velvet skull-cap, as, with a triumphant smile on his kind old face, he pointed proudly to the well-filled table before him, exclaiming, "Ah, my children! here is work for all." And work indeed there was. There were walnuts and Brazil nuts to be covered with gold and silver paper, chocolate and cakes to be cut up into all imaginable shapes and wrapped in like manner in coloured paper, besides oranges, apples, and sweets of various and poisonous-looking colours, which were to be tied up with parti-coloured ribbons for



"THE TREE ARRIVED" (p. 14).

suspending to the tree. These preparations alone occupied us for three evenings, as nothing could be begun until little Lenchen was disposed of for the night; and as the whole party retired to bed at ten o'clock at latest, our time was very limited. The German children believe that if they are good the "Christ-child" will bring them presents, which they will find under the tree. Our custom of hanging up the stockings for Santa Claus to fill seemed quite a new idea to them, but one to which Lenchen took very kindly.

On the morning of the 23rd the tree arrived. It was bought by the Herr Vater at the "Jahr Markt," or great fair, which is held in the market-place at Christmas-time, and where any conceivable thing, from wearing apparel and furniture to ginger-bread and Christmas-trees, can be bought. From that moment every one appeared to be in a state of the wildest excitement and bustle. Frau Mutter was very busy in the kitchen, superintending the making of mysterious and unknown dishes, and the Herr Grosspapa and the Herr Vater set to work at once fixing all the candles and fruit on the tree. I offered my services, which were not accepted, as it is against all the rules and regulations for the "children" of the family to assist in the actual decoration of the tree itself, and from the moment of my arrival the Herr Grosspapa had numbered me among his "Kinder." So I retired to tie up and ticket, according to Fräulein's instructions, the various presents I had secretly prepared for

the family. This done, they were all handed over to the Frau Mutter, to be seen no more until the long-wished for Christmas Eve arrived.

That evening a large skating party was given a short way out of the town, to which we were all invited. Well wrapped up in furs, we set forth about seven o'clock in a sleigh, and half an hour's swift gliding over the snow brought us within view of the lake. It is difficult to imagine what a bright, animated, un-English picture met our eyes. I felt for the first moment as though I must be dreaming—and dreaming of Russia. The whole lake was illuminated with numberless lanterns of all shapes and sizes; the white trees stood out, like giant spectres, against the starry sky, and as far as we could see stretched that "snowy coverlet" which the German poet says the "liebe Gott" lays over the sleeping earth. We were taken entirely round the lake in small, swan-shaped sleighs, which the skaters pushed before them, or tempted to the refreshment tent hard by, where hot coffee, spiced drinks, and cakes took the place of ices and champagne.

The 24th was a lovely bright day, and we were out all the morning skating in the park, as the "Bescherung," or the distribution of the presents, did not take place until after dark. Almost every one we met on our way home was laden with a Christmas-tree; sometimes they were quite little ones, not much bigger than dwarf azaleas, and worth about fourpence or fivepence.

Every one, however poor, makes an effort to have a little household festival and a tree at Christmas-time. The afternoon, to Lenchen at least, crept slowly away, but about half-past four we were all assembled in the dining-room, telling one another stories, and speculating as to what the "Christ-child" would bring us, when the Frau Mutter came in to summon us. Suddenly the folding-doors into the drawing-room



"WE WERE TAKEN ENTIRELY ROUND THE LAKE IN SMALL, SWAN-SHAPED SLEIGHS."

were thrown back—the Herr Grosspapa played a brilliant march on the piano, and we were all ushered in. The “tree” stood in the middle of the room, all ablaze with lights, and sparkling with gold and silver. Beneath it and dotted about the room were many little tables covered with white cloths, and on these the presents were laid out. Each person had his or her own little table, and a prettier sight than this “Bescherung” I have seldom seen. Little Lenchen rushed about, showing us all her treasures, especially a large doll which Fräulein had dressed for her. Every one received a present from every one else, besides three large pieces of the “Pfeffer Kuchen,” or gingerbread, which is almost universally eaten in Germany at Christmas-time. The servants had their tables also filled with presents, for the most part of a more useful kind, but with a liberal supply of gingerbread.

When the noise had a little subsided, we all settled down to “coffee and cakes,” and then, too, we had an opportunity to examine the contents of each other’s tables, to guess from whom the various presents came, and to return thanks accordingly. At supper appeared sundry awful compounds, called “Weihnachtessen”—the Christmas dishes over which the Frau Mutter had been so busy for so long. She informed me that they were “national” dishes, and thinking it my duty to share thoroughly in the German Christmas, I conscientiously tried them all, though in much fear and trembling. Herring is the chief ingredient in these “national” dishes—*herring*, together with *apples* and *oil*. I felt it best not to inquire what else might be there, and breathed an inward thanksgiving that “Christmas comes but once a year.” After supper we had music and merry-making till about half-past ten, at which hour little Lenchen was discovered sound asleep on a sofa, surrounded by her presents, and cuddling the new doll. She was waked to join in singing the Christmas hymn, “Stille Nacht” (“Still is the Night”), after which all trooped off to bed. On my way to my room I was waylaid by Lenchen, who begged me to come in when she was in bed, and show her “how Santa Claus liked the stocking to be put.” I made her hang it on to the bed-post, and left her dreadfully afraid that Santa Claus “might have too much to do in England to make time to come to her.” When she was asleep I filled the stocking with the sort of things we liked so much to find in ours when we were children, not forgetting a little purse with twenty-five pfennige in it. I did not, of course, see the fun of the stocking’s being emptied, but was told next day by the Frau Mutter that at four in the morning she had been aroused by loud shrieks, and hurrying to see what was the matter, had found that all the noise came from Lenchen, who had waked and found her well-filled stocking, and was shrieking with delight and surprise. The best of it all was that she firmly believed it was Santa Claus who had brought the treasures to her, and that it was *I* who had told him to come. This I discovered as she



“SHOW HER HOW SANTA CLAUS LIKED THE STOCKING TO BE PUT.”

proceeded to exhibit to me all my little gifts, with the greatest and most unsuspecting pleasure.

On Christmas morning, after a hasty cup of tea and a biscuit, we started off, a large party, to the nine o'clock Christmas service in the Lutheran Church, where some of Bach's music was to be played. I felt very strange and not a little homesick on this, my first Christmas Day away from home and England, and my thoughts were at first far from the great German building, now filled almost to overflowing. Two gigantic Christmas-trees, filled with candles, stood one on each side of the Communion table, and almost hid the portraits of Luther and Melanchthon. The exquisite Bach music did much to comfort and console me, and then the familiar Gospel and Epistle were read, and a hymn was sung, after which the address was given. The length of that address was something appalling—the author of the *Mikado* would have sympathised with us, for our “mystical German” seemed as if he really would go the length of preaching from “ten till four.” The want of any proper breakfast, and our long trudge through the snow in the cold and early morning, made all this the more trying.

Owing to severe snow-storms, the English post had been delayed, and my disappointment was keen when I found I could have no Christmas greeting from home that day; but every one was so kind and anxious to make me happy, that I hid my depression, and joined a sleighing party into the country. In the evening, as we were all sitting at supper, a loud ring was heard at the front door, and a minute afterwards Augusta (the maid), entering the room, handed me—a telegram—a telegram from home wishing me “A Merry Christmas.” Words could not express how pleased I was—the whole world seemed changed to me, for really Christmas so far from home *does* feel lonely, and

the surprise only added to the pleasure. How often that telegram was read in the course of one evening I should be afraid to say.

As the night before we had sung the German hymns, so now my German friends insisted upon the dear old English ones, and with the last words of the "Herald Angels" still ringing in my ears, I went off to my room, to read the telegram yet once more, and to think over the many new and strange experiences of this Christmas-time. Suddenly twelve o'clock struck, and my first German Christmas was over. At this time of year there is certainly no lack of amusement in Germany—such as it is. My German friends heartily enjoyed their small "whirl of dissipation," and there was general rejoicing when new invitations arrived. On entering the breakfast-room the morning after Christmas, I was greeted by Fräulein with a kiss, and the news that "we had two more invitations," one to a "Kaffee" at the Frau Doktor's on the following day, and one to a party early in the New Year. "Now you will see a true German Kaffee," said the Herr Vater, "and we shall hear no more of your English five o'clock teas."

The next afternoon Fräulein and I set off to the Frau Doktor's, taking good care to arrive punctually at half-past four. To be late seems to be a very great breach of courtesy, and Fräulein was simply aghast at my remarking, "I suppose we must get there about five." "You did not then see Lieschen's letter," she said; "we are asked at half-past four." As we hurried along I endeavoured to explain that at home it was not the "fashion" to arrive on the stroke of the hour at which one was invited, but it was a hopeless task, and all I convinced Fräulein of was that "you English are certainly a curious people;" she was too polite to say *naï*, but I knew what was in her mind. We were introduced immediately on our arrival to the other guests—all young people—and there was a small amount of conversation till the "Kaffee" was brought in on a tray and handed round. We all took some, and I, naturally enough, thought we should remain where we were, dotted "casually" about the room. Much to my surprise, however, our hostess presently requested us "to take places

round the table," which we accordingly did. It was a work of some time to get every one fitted into the right seat, as great complications had arisen when it was discovered that there were fewer gentlemen than ladies. But at last we were satisfactorily arranged—napkins were then dealt round—then plates—and then, all things being now ready, the eatables were brought in. One immense dish, crammed with all kinds of the most delicious and deleterious cakes and biscuits, was placed in the middle of the table, and we "fell to." After this really substantial meal, we occupied the time with various games—such as "What is my thought like?" and others of a similar kind to what one plays at home at children's parties—until about half-past six, when the tray again made its appearance, glasses of some hot drink having taken the place of coffee. After a short interval the command was once more given to "take our places at the table," which little ceremony was now much better managed, as every one knew where to go. Then a large iced chocolate cake was brought in, and as soon as it had been distributed, an apple tart appeared! Things were becoming more wonderful every minute. Think of an apple tart when you are invited out to afternoon "coffee"! It was a very good pie, however, and a considerable part of it soon disappeared. After this second meal, and a little more conversation, which by now had become rather more animated, I observed Fräulein "making the move" to go. I certainly thought it was late enough, being past seven o'clock, but she began by apologising to the Frau Doktor for "having to hurry away so early, as we expected a lady to supper, and must not be late back." The thought of supper, after having done nothing else but eat all the afternoon, was almost too much for me. I returned to the Herr Vater more English and a greater upholder of our five o'clock tea than ever.

This was almost the last of our Christmas festivities, and soon we settled down into the "quiet, working home life," as Herr Grosspapa called it, for which I had really gone out to Germany, but which gives still less to write about than my first Christmas in the Fatherland.

THE GARDEN IN DECEMBER.



HE shortened and still shortening days of December limit our hours of *bonâ fide* gardening work out of doors very much; but there is no reason because the sun is, so far as we are concerned, apparently passing the greater part of his time in bed that we should do the same.

Before, then, going outside to attend to much that in no

month of the year can be omitted in the garden, we will pass an hour of this imaginary snowed-up day in our shed or work-room, our assumed object, of course, being the preparation or repair of any gardening accessories. The cleaning and washing of flower-pots alone will take us a considerable time, and we recollect that as early as February we must commence the general re-potting in the greenhouse. Then, again, very likely a little carpentering will be in requisition: our resolve upon a certain class of flower for next year will tell us what we want. There are, for example, some mignonette-boxes to be made and painted; and