

## CHRISTMAS THROUGHOUT CHRISTENDOM.



THOR.

THE angels in the *Gloria in Excelsis* have probably given us the best definition of Christmas, "On earth peace, good-will toward men." This Christian idea of Christmas, with its love, charity, and forgiveness, has probably found its most striking realization in the *Julafred*, or Yule-peace of the Scandinavians—a custom, though ancient as the Runic stones, still existing in Sweden, by virtue of a Christian baptism, as a Christian institution. Extending from Christmas-eve to Epiphany, and solemnly proclaimed by a public crier, any violation of the Yule-peace is visited with double or treble punishment. The courts are closed; old quarrels are adjusted; old feuds are forgotten; while on the Yule-evening the shoes, great and small, of the entire household, are set close together in a row, that during the coming year the family may live together in peace and harmony.

To this pacific, Christian conception of the Christmas-time not a few pagan elements have been added, which are clearly trace-

able, as we shall see, to the old German "Twelve Nights" and the Roman Saturnalia. Hence its mirth and festivity, its jesting and feasting, its frolic and license. The decoration and illumination of our Christian churches recall the temples of Saturn radiant with burning tapers and resplendent with garlands. The "merry Christmas" responds to the "*bona Saturnalia*," and our modern Christmas presents to the *dona amicis*.

During the Saturnalia, which were intended to symbolize the freedom, equality, and peaceful prosperity of the golden or Saturnian age, all labor was suspended. The schools were closed; the Senate adjourned; no criminal was executed; no war proclaimed. Slaves exchanged places

with their masters, or, seated at the banqueting tables wearing badges of freedom, jested with them familiarly as their equals.

All these customs have found their counterpart during the Christmas holidays in modern society. In Italy, at the present day, masters and servants not unfrequently meet and are seated at a common Christmas table; while among the English aristocracy the "huge hall table," at least in the times when Scott sang of the Christmas-tide,

"Bore then upon its surface broad  
No mark to part the squire and lord."

Nor do we fail to find the outcroppings of the freedom and license of the old Saturnalia even in Protestant England and Puritanic Scotland. In the stalwart times of "good Queen Bess" the Christmas holidays lasted over a month. Those were the palmy days of the Christmas-tide, when the mystic mistletoe bough, as now, conferred upon amorous swains a charter for kissing as "broad as the wind," when the Christmas-

logs flamed and roared, when boars' heads and barbecues smoked, and fun and frolic and boisterous mirth raged furiously through the "wee short hours" until the sky turned round. Then it was that the Lord of Misrule or Abbot of Unreason was the autocrat of the Christmas-time, when, clothed with the same powers as the lord of the Feast of Asses in France, he enjoyed the right to say with impunity whatever he chose, to whomsoever he pleased, even to hooting the minister during divine service, when the congregation would frequently desert the church in a body to join the roistering revelers under his capricious command.

Although Epiphanius dates back the custom of commemorating the birthday of Christ to the days of the apostles, its origin is to be referred with greater probability to the latter part of the fourth century. The primitive Christians, it is true, celebrated the birthdays of Christian martyrs, only they selected the day of their death as their real birthday—the birthday of their eternal life. When, however, Constantine proclaimed the Christian faith as the predominating religion of the Roman empire, the Christian Church, relieved from persecution through-

out both Orient and Occident, began to solemnize, under the ægis of imperial authority, Christmas as the birthday of Christ. One prominent feature, however, of Constantine's political propaganda of Christianity was the adoption under Christian forms not only of pagan rites and ceremonies, but also of pagan festivals. In order to reconcile heathen converts to the new faith, these relics of paganism, like antique columns transferred from ancient temples to adorn Christian churches, were freely incorporated into the Christian ceremonial. Thus it was that Christmas, though formerly observed on the 6th of January, was transferred to the 25th of December, the time of the Roman Saturnalia, and became invested with much of the paraphernalia of the heathen festival. This transfer became the more easy from the fact that, although the early Christians had fixed upon the 6th of January in their symbolic calendar as the day of Christ's birth, the date could never be satisfactorily determined. Piper, however, rather curiously explains the adoption of the day we now celebrate from the fact that the conception of the Virgin Mary was supposed to have taken place on the day corresponding to the creation of the world, which must have been

upon the 25th of March, as the days and nights are then equal, and consequently that Christ must have been born on the 25th of December.

The custom thus established in the Occident spread rapidly, particularly through the efforts of St. Chrysostom, who makes mention of it in one of his sermons as early as 386. Fifty years later it was introduced into Egypt. Here, however, it came into collision with the feast of Epiphany, which was already celebrated, as the feast of the birth and baptism of Christ, on the 6th of January, the birthday of Osiris, the Egyptian sun-god.

In Germany the Christmas holidays appear to have been substituted for the old pagan festival



ODIN AS THE WILD HUNTSMAN.

of the "Twelve Nights," which extended from the 25th of December to the 6th of January. The Twelve Nights were religiously observed by numerous feasts, and were regarded by the ancient Germans as among the holiest and most solemn of their festivals. Regarding, in common with other pagan nations, the active forces of nature as living personifications, they symbolized the conflict of natural forces by the battle of the gods and giants. Thus in the old German mythology Winter is represented as the ice-giant, heartless, inexorable, the enemy of all life, and the relentless foe of gods and men. By the aid of his powerful steed Swadilfari, the all-stiffening north wind, he

constructs a formidable castle of ice, which threatens to inaugurate the reign of Night and Winter, of Darkness and eternal Death. Then follows the conflict of giants and gods, of Winter with Spring, of North Wind with South Wind, until Thor, the god of the thunder-storm, demolishes with his thunder-stone the castle of the ice-giant, when Freija, the beautiful goddess of spring, resumes her former sway, and life and light and prosperity return.

But the restless giants ever invent new stratagems to regain their lost supremacy. Thrym, the prince of the giants, robs the sleeping Thor of his dreaded sledge-hammer, and hides it eight leagues under the earth. This insures the reign of Winter for the eight months of the year when the thunder-storm slumbers, until Thor, accompanied by Loki, the spring wind, again demolishes with his recaptured hammer the castle of the ice-king, when the Winter Storm is again compelled reluctantly to retire. This eternal conflict of the opposing forces of summer and winter frequently occurs under various forms in the German mythology, and constituted one of the most striking features of the old German poesy, as the beautiful legend of Idunna and her ap-



FRAU HOLLE, OR BERCHTA, AND HER TRAIN.

ples and the giant Thiassi, in the poem of "Edda."

In the midst of this struggle of the conflicting forces of nature the Germans and other Northern peoples celebrated the festival of the Twelve Nights. This festival, as already stated, commenced on the 25th of December. Though in the depth of mid-winter, when the ice-king was in the full flush of victory, it was nevertheless the turning-point in the conflict of natural forces. The sun-god having reached the goal of the winter solstice, now wheeled his fiery steeds, and became the sure precursor of the coming victory of light and life over darkness and death.

But while a pagan festival might be transformed into a Christian holiday, there was no place in a system of theism, unless in its poesy, for the pantheon of pagan gods. These were therefore either relegated to oblivion, or, metamorphosed into demons, witches, and ghosts, are now supposed to have special power to work mischief, particularly during the Christmas-time. Hulda, once the producing night of spring, now bewitches the distaff of lazy spinner-girls. Odin, the god of fecundity, who formerly pursued with impetuous ardor the fair and

beautiful Freija, now, as the wild huntsman of hell, sweeps through the air with his devilish crew, foretelling future wars or portending coming calamity. The once-resplendent Berchta, now a malevolent witch, hung with cow-bells and disguised with a horrid wooden mask, has become the bugbear of children, as she mutters from house to house,

"Children or bacon,  
Else I don't go away."

A singular rumor of sea-birds, during the nights of November and December, in the island of Schonen, is still known as the hunting of Odin.

In the Bavarian and Styrian Alps the Twelve Nights are called "Rumor Nights," on account of their visions of ghosts and hobgoblins, when priests and prudent housewives, with prayer and invocation, holy-water and burning incense, fumigate dwelling and outhouse, and sprinkle their cattle with salt. Hence these nights were also called "Fumigating Nights." As an additional protection against "witches' feet" and "devils'

paws," the initials of the holy magicians were formerly inscribed upon the door-posts. On the dreaded Twelfth-night, when Frau Holle, or Berchta, issues with her fearful train from her wild mountain home, where she dwells among the dead, she is generally preceded by the faithful Eckhart, an old man with a long beard and a white wand, who warns every one of her terrible approach.

There is a pretty legend related by Von Reinsberg in his "Festliche Jahr" (to which we are indebted for much of the material and a number of the illustrations for this article), that on one occasion the good Eckhart met two little children, who, coming out of a beer shop with a pot of beer, were overtaken by the fearful troop, who drank all the beer. Having no money to buy more, and apprehensive of punishment, they cried bitterly, when the faithful Eckhart comforted them with the assurance that if they would never tell what they had seen, their pot would always be brimful of beer. And so it was, until their parents prevailed upon the children to divulge the mysteri-

ous secret, when the miraculous gift disappeared.

As with Christmas as a holiday, so with many of its characters and customs. If not of pagan origin, they constitute a curious medley of paganism and Christianity. This is particularly true among the Germans, who were strongly attached to their old religious ceremonies. The Christ-child with his gifts and masked attendant all belong to the German antiquity. In the procession of the star-singers the three kings replace the pagan gods. Only the names have been changed, while the custom has received the rites of a Christian baptism. The German custom of some one going, in a state of nudity, at midnight on Christmas-eve, to bind the fruit trees with ropes of straw, or



THE FAITHFUL ECKHART.



Devil.

Pharisees.

Angel Gabriel.

Star-bearer.

CHARACTERS IN THE CHRISTMAS PLAYS.

of frugal housewives shaking the crumbs from the table-cloth around their roots in order that they become more fruitful, clearly points to the mysterious influence attributed by the ancient Germans to the time of the Twelve Nights. In the Tyrol the fruit trees, for a similar reason, are soundly beaten. In Bohemia they are violently shaken during the time of the midnight mass; while in other localities they are regaled with the remains of the Christmas supper, to which they had been previously and specially invited.

A similar custom, probably of German origin, still prevails in some parts of England. In Devonshire a corn cake and some hot cider are carried into the orchard, and there offered up to the largest apple-tree as the king of the orchard, while those who take part in the singular ceremony join lustily in the chorus,

"Bear good apples and pears enough—  
Barns full, bags full, sacks full!  
Hurrah! hurrah! hurrah!"

Mistletoe and holly, Yule-log and Yule-candle, belong to the same category. The mistletoe was regarded by the Druids with religious veneration, and its berries of pearl, as symbolic of purity, were associated by them with the rites of marriage. From this the transition was but slight to the lover's kiss beneath its mystic bough during the Christmas-tide. At this festive season also they kindle bonfires upon the hill-tops. Nor must we forget that our pagan progenitors burned a great log and a mammoth candle upon the 21st of December, which, being the shortest day in the year, was regarded as the turning-point in the conflict between the contending forces of winter and spring.

Advent is the herald of Christmas. In

Protestant as well as Catholic countries choristers and school-boys during the "holy-nights" go from house to house singing songs or Christmas carols, with which to usher in the auspicious day. In the south of Germany they accompany the singing by knocking at the doors with a little hammer, or throwing pease, beans, or lentils at the windows. Hence the origin of the name of "knocking nights."

In Bohemia, Styria, Carniola, and other German provinces it is customary for a number of persons to associate themselves together in a dramatic company, and perform Christmas plays during Advent. The story of the Saviour's birth, his persecution by Herod, and the flight of the Holy Family into Egypt constitutes the simple plot. The *dramatis personæ*, as well as the performance, vary somewhat according to the locality. Usually, however, they consist of the Christ-child, St. Nicholas or St. Peter, St. Joseph and the Virgin, Herod, the varlet Ruprecht, several angels, together with shepherds and other less conspicuous personages. The devil is notably the merriest character in the play. Before the representation begins he capers about through the village—a sort of peripatetic play-bill—furiously blowing his horn, and frightening or bantering both old and young. During the performance, though figuring in the rather humble rôle of a messenger, he does not cease to joke with the players or rail at the public. A handsome youth of the strictest morals is usually selected to represent the Virgin Mary.

The rehearsal is usually accompanied by a certain rhythmical movement, the players going four steps to and fro, so that a metre or foot corresponds to every step, and on the fourth, which includes the rhyme, the

performer turns quickly around. The holy personages sing instead of rehearsing their parts, but accompany their singing with the same rhythmical movement. On the first Sunday in Advent the play is inaugurated by a solemn procession, headed by the master singer bearing a gigantic star, followed by the others drawing a large fir-tree ornamented with ribbons and apples; and thus they go singing to the large hall where the play is to be performed. On arriving at the door they form a half circle, and sing the star-song; then, after saluting sun, moon, and stars, the emperor, the government, and the master singer, in the name of all the "herbs and roots that grow in the earth," they enter the hall, and the performance begins.

The prologue and epilogue are sung by an angel. As the whole stage apparatus often consists of only a straw-bottomed chair and a wooden stool, every change of scene is indicated by a procession of the whole company singing an appropriate song; after which only those who take part in the next act remain standing, while the remainder go off singing.

These dramatic representations are often very simple, or only fragmentary, consisting, it may be, of a troop of boys and girls disguised as shepherds and shepherdesses, who go about singing shepherd songs, thus announcing the approaching advent of our Saviour. At other times they are performed from house to house, and are associated with the distribution of Christmas presents. In such cases they are made the occasion of a solemn inquest into the conduct of the children, and constitute in Germany—which appears to be at once the paradise and purgatory of Christmas-loving juveniles—a potential auxiliary of pedagogic and parental discipline.

The archangel Gabriel, it may be, first appears upon the scene, and thus announces his advent:

"May God give you a happy good-evening! I am his messenger, sent from angel-land. My name is Gabriel. In my hands I bear the sceptre which the Son of God has given me. On my head I wear the crown with which the Son of God has crowned me."

Thereupon the Christ-child, wearing a gilded paper crown, and carrying a basket full of apples and nuts, enters, singing the song commencing,

"Down from the high heaven I come,"

and greets the company with a similar salutation. In the course of his song he informs the children that the object of his coming is to learn whether they have been good and obedient, and if they "pray and spin diligently." If so, they are to be rewarded with gifts from his golden chariot which stands at the door; if not, their backs are to be

labored with rods. St. Peter or St. Nicholas, as the case may be, is then called in to furnish a faithful account of the children's deportment. If it be St. Nicholas, he enters with a long staff or crozier in his hand, and a bishop's mitre of gilt paper upon his head. His report is not usually a flattering one. On their way from school the children loiter in the streets, they tear their books, neglect their tasks, and forget to say their prayers; and as a penance for all this evil-doing, he recommends a liberal application of the rod. The Christ-child interposes, almost supplicatingly,

"Ah, Nicholas, forbear. Spare the little child. Spare the young blood!"

The two then join with the angel in singing a song, when St. Peter is summoned, who promptly enters, jingling his keys. The saint, who rather plumes himself on his high office of heavenly janitor, carries matters with a high hand. He examines the children's copy-books, it may be, bids them kneel down and pray, and then, by virtue of his high prerogative, pronounces sentence upon the unfortunate delinquents, and calls upon the black Ruprecht, who stands waiting outside the door, to execute his orders.

"Ruperns, Ruperns, enter!  
The children will not be obedient."

The frightful bugbear, dressed in fur, and covered with chains, with blackened face and fiery eyes, and a long red tongue protruding out of his month, stumbles over the threshold, brandishing an enormous birch, and as he falls headlong into the room, roars out to the children, "Can you pray?" Whereupon they fall upon their knees and repeat their prayers at the top of their voices. The five heavenly visitors, standing in a half circle, then sing another song or two descriptive of the heavenly joys, or freighted with wholesome advice to both children and parents. The latter give them in return a few farthings, while the Christ-child scatters apples and nuts here and there upon the floor for the further edification of the children, and then Christ-child, St. Nicholas, St. Peter, the archangel Gabriel, and devil *exeunt*.

St. Nicholas, as all the world knows, is the patron of children, with whom he is the most popular saint in the calendar. Bishop of Myra, in Lycia, in the time of Constantine the Great, if we are to credit the Roman breviary, he supplied three destitute maidens with dowries by secretly leaving a marriage-portion for each at their window. Hence the popular fiction that he is the purveyor of presents to children on Christmas-eve. He usually makes his appearance as an old man with a venerable beard, and dressed as a bishop, either riding a white horse or an ass, and carrying a large basket on his arm, and a bundle of rods in his hand. In some parts of Bohemia he appears dressed

up in a sheet instead of a surplice, with a crushed pillow on his head instead of a mitre. On his calling out, "Wilt thou pray?" all the children fall upon their knees, whereupon he lets fall some fruit upon the floor and disappears. In this manner he goes from house to house, sometimes ringing a bell to announce his arrival, visits the nurseries, inquires into the conduct of the children, praises or admonishes them, as the case may be, distributing sweetmeats or rods accordingly.

St. Nicholas is the Santa Claus of Holland, and the Samiklaus of Switzerland, and the Sönnner Klås of Helgoland. In the Vorarlberg he is known as Zemmiklas, who threatens to put naughty children into his hay-sack; in Nether Austria as Niklo, or Niglo, who is followed by a masked servant called Krampus; while in the Tyrol he goes by the name of the "Holy Man," and shares the patronage of his office with St. Lucy, who distributes gifts among the girls, as he among the boys. Sometimes he is accompanied by the Christ-child.

In many parts of Switzerland, Germany, and the Netherlands St. Nicholas still distributes his presents on St. Nicholas's Eve—the 5th of December—instead of on Christmas-eve. In the Netherlands and adjoining provinces he is especially popular, and is perhaps the only saint who has maintained his full credit, even among the Protestants. For days previous to his expected advent busy housewives have been secretly conspiring with the bakers in gilding nuts, cakes, and gingerbread, and torturing pastry, prepared with flour, sugar, honey, spices, and sweetmeats, into the most fantastical forms, from which the good saint may from time to time replenish his supplies. As to the children, St. Nicholas or Sünder Klaas is the burden of their prayers, the staple of their dreams, and the inspiration of their songs. As they importune him to let fall from the chimney-top some pretty gift into their little aprons, they go on singing with childish fervor,

"Sünder Klaas du gode Bloot!  
Brenge' mi Nööt un Zuckerbrod,  
Nicht to veel un nich to minn  
Sniët in mine Schürten in!"

In Belgium, on the eve of the good bishop's aerial voyage in his pastoral visitation of his bishopric of chimney-tops, the children polish their shoes, and after filling them with hay, oats, or carrots for the saint's white horse, they put them on a table, or set them



ST. NICHOLAS.

in the fire-place. The room is then carefully closed and the door locked. Next morning it is opened in the presence of the assembled household, when, *mirabile dictu!* the furniture is found to be turned topsy-turvy, while the little shoes, instead of horse's forage, are filled with sweetmeats and toys for the good children, and with rods for the bad ones. In some places wooden or China shoes, stockings, baskets, cups and saucers, and even bundles of hay, are placed in the chimney, or by the side of the bed, or in a corner of the room, as the favorite receptacles of St. Nicholas's presents.

In France, though New-Year's is generally observed rather than Christmas for the distribution of presents, it is the *Jésus l'ambin* who comes with a convoy of angels loaded with books and toys with which to fill the expectant little shoes, that tiny hands have so carefully arranged in the fire-place. In Alsace he is represented by a young maiden dressed in white, with hair of lamb's wool hanging down upon her shoulders, and her face whitened with flour, while on her head she wears a crown of gilt paper set round with burning tapers. In one hand she holds a silver bell, in the other a basket full of sweetmeats. She is the messenger of joy to all children, but that joy is usually changed into terror on the appearance of Hans Trapp, the Alsatian Ruprecht. The bugbear, on entering, demands in a hoarse voice which of the children have not been obedient, walking up toward them in a threatening manner, while they, trembling and crying, seek to hide themselves as best they may from the impending storm. But the Christ-child intercedes for them, and, upon their



CHRISTMAS IN FRANCE.

promising to become better in the future, leads them up to the brilliantly illuminated Christmas-tree loaded with presents, which soon make them oblivious of the frightful Hans Trapp.

In the Erzgebirge it is St. Peter who, dressed as a bishop, and accompanied by the dreadful Ruprecht, is impatiently expected by the children on Christmas-eve. The character of his visit does not differ materially from that of the Christ-child, only that, on leaving, he delivers a short sermon, lays on the table a rod dipped in chalk, and then departs as noiselessly as he

came. The children, relieved from the presence of Ruprecht, now breathe free again. They hasten to take off their shoes, polish them, and then tie them together, when the most daring among them, after listening if Niglo's bell has ceased tinkling, runs out into the garden and puts them under a bush. The others, plucking up courage, follow his example. They now pass the time until the clock strikes ten in telling stories, in which the black Ruprecht plays a principal part, when, having reconnoitred the situation through the key-hole to see that the coast is clear, they go noise-





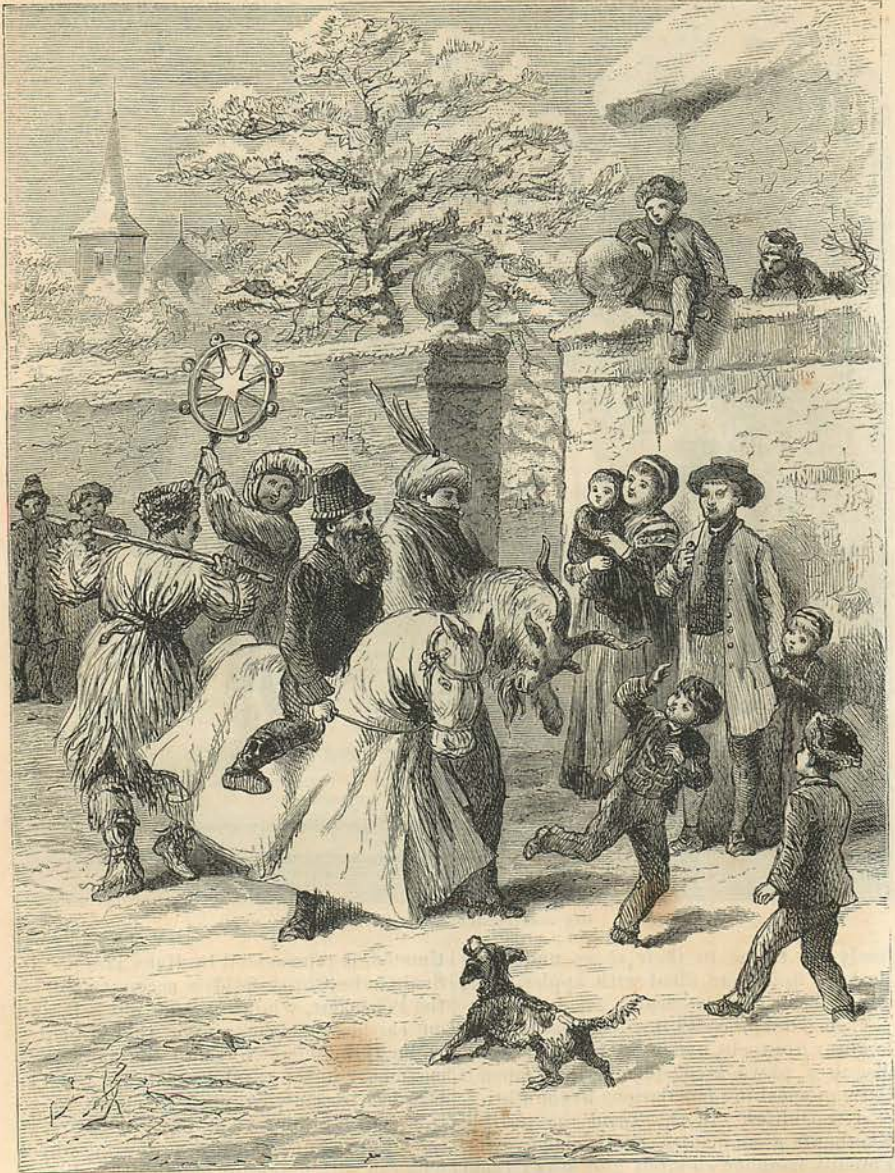
THE CHRIST-CHILD AND HANS TRAPP.

lessly on tiptoe to their shoes under the bush, to find them filled with apples, nuts, and all sorts of sweetmeats.

From what precedes, it will appear that the bugbear Ruprecht, under different names and disguises, plays a conspicuous part among German-speaking populations in the Christmas festivities. In the Tyrol the terrible Klaubauf accompanies St. Nicholas, who kidnaps naughty children and stows them away in his basket. In Lower Austria it is the frightful Krampus, with his clanking chains and horrible devil's mask, who, notwithstanding his gilded nuts and apples, gingerbread and toys, which he carries in his basket, is the terror of the nursery. In the Bohemian Netherlands Rumpanz figures as the bugbear in the train of the Christ-child. Three young men disguise themselves, one as an angel, another as the devil, and the third as a he-goat. The latter catches and holds wicked children, who do not say their prayers, upon his horns, in order that the devil may beat them with his rod. In Alsace Ruprecht, as already in-

timated, is represented by Hans Trapp. In Suabia the Christ-child is accompanied by the Pelzmaert, who carries an old bell, and an earthen pot containing the presents; while throughout Northern Germany it is customary in the rural districts for a black-bearded peasant, wrapped in straw, to go from house to house asking the children if they know how to pray, rewarding those who can with gingerbread, apples, and nuts, and punishing unmercifully those who can not. In Hanover, Holstein, and Mecklenburg he is known as Cläs. In Silesia his name is Joseph.

Sometimes the Christmas bugbear carries a rod, at the end of which is fastened a sack full of ashes, with which he beats the children, and is therefore called Ashy Claws. At others he rides a white horse, called in some localities the "Spanish stallion," and not unfrequently he is accompanied by a bear wrapped in straw. On the island of Usedom three figures belong to the procession of Ruprecht. One wrapped in straw bears the rod and cinder-bag, or ash-sack.



CHRISTMAS MASKS.

The second appears as the rider of the "Spanish stallion." The third carries the *Klapperbock*. This consists of a pole over which is drawn a buckskin. To the extremity of the pole a ram's head is attached, from the nether jaw of which a cord passes through the upper jaw and thence into the throat, so that when the bearer pulls the cord the jaws rattle or clatter. With this *Klapperbock*, which in Denmark, under the name of the *Julbock* or Yule-buck, is the unfailling accompaniment of the Yule-time, they threaten and frighten the children. In the

Harz a similar scarecrow, called the *Haber-sack*, consists of a hay-fork, between the prongs of which a broom is attached so as to present the appearance of a head with horns, while the body is made up of a sheet with a man under it.

In former times there was also a female bugbear. In Lower Austria she was called the *Budelfrau*. In Suabia it was the *Berchtel*, who chastised children that did not spin diligently with rods, but rewarded the industrious with dried pears, apples, and nuts. In the environs of Augsburg the *Buzebercht*,

with her blackened face and streaming hair and flaunting rags, accompanied St. Nicholas, besmearing every one she met with the contents of her starch-pot; while in the Böhmerwalde, or Bohemian Forest, St. Lucy, under the form of a goat covered with a sheet, through which the horns project, is to this day the terror of lazy or undutiful children.

On Sylvester's-day or New-Year's Eve the procession of the "Spanish stallion," einderbag, and Klapperbock is supplemented in Faterland by the *Wépelrôt*. This consists of a wheel made of willow, in the centre of which there is a gilded ornament that flashes like a star. At the extremity of the spokes on the exterior of the rim there is a succession of spikes, upon which apples are stuck. Just after midnight the bearer throws it into the house of his lady-love, demanding a token in return. He then fires a pistol, and runs away at the top of his speed, pursued by the inmates of the house, who, if he is caught and brought back, compel him to drink *Rôtwasser*, and ride astride of the pot-hanger. Christmas masks of a somewhat similar character are in vogue in Naples, and, unless we are mistaken, also in Sicily.

Time would fail to speak of the many singular customs and quaint superstitions associated with the Christmas holidays. In some places, as in Suabia, it is customary for maidens, inquisitive as to their prospective lovers, to draw a stick of wood out of a heap to see whether he will be long or short, crooked or straight. At other times they will pour melted lead into cold water, and from the figures formed will prognosticate the trade or profession of their future husbands. If they imagine they see a plane, or last, or a pair of shears, it signifies that he is to be a carpenter, or shoe-maker, or tailor; while a hammer or pickaxe indicates a smith or a common laborer. The maidens of Pfuldingen, when they wish to ascertain which of them will first become a wife, form a circle, and place in their midst a blindfolded gander, and the one to whom he goes first will soon be a bride; while the Tyrolese peasants, on the "knocking nights," listen at the baking ovens, and if they hear music, it signifies an early wedding, but if the ringing of bells, it forebodes the death of the listener. Among many others a favorite method of forecasting the future is to sit upon the floor and throw one's shoe with the foot over the shoulder, and then to predict from the position it assumes what is about to transpire.

The superstition that cattle kneel at midnight on Christmas-eve, in recognition of the anniversary of the Saviour's birth, is still said to exist even in some parts of England; while the belief that water drawn at twelve o'clock on Christmas-night is miraculously

turned into wine is no less widely diffused. In Mecklenburg it is not allowable to call certain animals by their right names, and he who does not say "long tail," for example, for fox, pays a forfeit.

In Poland, and elsewhere, it is believed that on Christmas-night the heavens are opened, and the scene of Jacob's ladder is re-enacted, but it is only permitted to the saints to see it. Throughout Northern Germany the tables are spread and lights left burning during the entire night, that the Virgin Mary, and the angel who passes when every body sleeps, may find something to eat. In certain parts of Austria they put candles in the windows, that the Christ-child may not stumble in passing through the village. There is also a wide-spread opinion that a pack of wolves, which were no other than wicked men transformed into wolves, committed great havoc upon Christmas-night. Taking advantage of this superstition, it was not unusual for rogues disguised in wolf-skins to attack honest people, rifle their houses, sack their cellars, and drink or steal all their beer. As a specific charm, no doubt, against these wolfish depredations, it was customary in Austria, up to a recent date, after high mass on Christmas-night, to sing in a particular tone, to the sound of the large bell, the chapter of the generation of Jesus Christ.

The Christmas-tree is doubtless of German origin. Though in its present form it is comparatively of recent date, yet its pagan prototype enjoyed a very high antiquity. The early Germans conceived of the world as a great tree whose roots were hidden deep under the earth, but whose top, flourishing in the midst of Walhalla, the old German paradise, nourished the she-goat upon whose milk fallen heroes restored themselves. *Yggdnafil* was the name of this tree, and its memory was still green long after Christianity had been introduced into Germany, when much of its symbolic character was transferred to the Christmas-tree. At first fitted up during the Twelve Nights in honor of Berchta, the goddess of spring, it was subsequently transferred to the birthday of Christ, who, as the God-man, is become the "resurrection and the life." The evergreen fir-tree, an emblem of spring-time, became the symbol of an eternal spring. The burning lights were to adumbrate Him who is the "light of the world," and the gifts to remind us that God, in giving His only Son for the world's redemption, conferred upon us the most priceless of all gifts. This symbolism extended also to the most usual of Christmas presents, apples and nuts; the former being considered as an emblem of youth, the latter as a profound symbol of spring, while the "boy's legs" relate to Saturn, who devoured his own children, and the *Kröpfungel* to the thunder-stone of Thor.

Until within the present century the



THE CHRISTMAS-TREE.

Christmas-tree was regarded as a distinctive Protestant custom. The Reformers, in order to separate themselves more completely from the Catholic Church, dispensed with its rites, ceremonies, and customs, and those

of the Christmas holidays among the rest. The *Krippe*, or holy manger, which was considered a distinctively Catholic institution, strangely enough, was supplanted by an old pagan custom of immemorial antiquity and

kindred significance. To invest the festival with additional importance in the eyes of children, the distribution of holiday presents was transferred from the 5th to the 24th of December, or from St. Nicholas's Eve to Christmas-eve. Such was its origin. Now the Christmas-tree, radiant with light and loaded with its rich variety of golden fruit, is not only to be found every where throughout Germany, but has taken root and become acclimated from the Alps to the Ural, and from the Kiölen to the Apennines; beneath Italian suns and amidst Lapland snows; alike on the banks of the Neva and the Po, the Mississippi and the Thames—in truth, wherever German civilization has penetrated or German Protestantism prevails.

The *presepio*, or manger, has, however, maintained its pre-eminence in Roman Catholic countries. It is said to owe its origin to St. Francis, who constructed the first one in 1223. Subsequently the custom spread throughout Italy, and afterward Germany and the Netherlands. The *presepi* vary in size and expensiveness from the rude wood-

en figures of the Alpine goat-herd, cut out with his own hands during the long winter evenings, to the pretentious representation of the wealthy burgher, with its exquisite carving and gilding, velvet drapery and cloth of gold, costing thousands of crowns. In many churches the whole parish contribute to the expense of fitting up the *presepio*, while moribund misers do not forget to endow it with a legacy in their last will and testament.

One of these representations in a church of the Capuchins near by has become more familiar to the younger members of our household than the Christmas-stocking scene around the old familiar fireside. The Holy Family occupy the foreground. In the manger reposes the *Bambino*, over whom St. Joseph, holding a bouquet, and the Virgin, dressed in satin and lace, with blue veil and silver crown, bend admiringly. Around kneel sundry shepherds in the act of adoration; while overhead, angels with golden wings float among the clouds and chant the *Gloria in Excelsis*. A silver star with its comet-like



THE PRESEPIO.

trail directs the approach of the Eastern magi, who, with their brilliant retinue of horsemen and attendants, dazzle the eyes of the juvenile spectators with their Oriental pomp and pageantry. Here a ragged beggar stretches out a beseeching palm, and there a devout hermit kneels before a rustic chapel. In the background rise the mountains, dotted with villas and *chalets*, with flocks of sheep and goats grazing here and there upon their grassy slopes, while peasants are every where seen approaching, bearing the products of the farm, the dairy, and the chase as their simple offerings to the new-born child. Just opposite a tribune has been erected, from which dapper little boys and dainty little girls, greatly to the edification of indulgent parents, recite, or rather intone, selections of poetry and prose appropriate to the festive occasion.

In some places in Bohemia they use the *Krippe*, or manger, as the receptacle of the presents which the Christ-child, drawn through the air by four milk-white horses, is fabled to bring in his chariot laden with all sorts of toys and sweetmeats. So, too, the representation is frequently accompanied with dramatic performances, styled *Krippenspiele*, or manger plays. In the Bohemian Forest the Christ-child, after announcing his approach in the deepening twilight by the tinkling of his little bell, throws in the children's Christmas presents through the partially opened door, or else, in token of displeasure, he substitutes a rod, or a handful of pease, the former suggestive of punishment, the latter of penance. The kneeling on pease during prayer appears to be still in some Catholic countries a favorite method of doing penance, and an Italian friend relates as an unpleasant item of his boyhood's experience that it was formerly a cherished mode of administering discipline in the schools.

The *Bambino* is the Santa Claus of Italy. It is not unusual, however, among the Italians for the children to accompany their parents in their "shopping" during the week preceding Christmas, with a view of selecting their own presents. Meanwhile the streets are transformed into fairs, and every public square becomes a bazar. Then there is the *presepio* in the churches and private families, and the midnight mass on Christmas-eve, when the *Bambino*, held up in front of the high altar by the officiating priest, is devoutly kissed by the faithful, while old and young emulate the choir in singing that beautiful pastoral hymn, commencing,

"Fra l'orrido rigor di stagion cruda  
Nacesti mio Gesù nella capanna."

Of the services in the churches, however, it is not our purpose to speak, unless incidentally, as our main object has been to illustrate Christmas in its social aspects.

One of the principal features of the holiday is the grand Christmas dinner, which begins early and lasts late, so that Christmas-night in Italy is fairly entitled to the not very elegant epithet of *Vollbauchsabend* as applied by the Holsteiners to their Christmas meal after the midnight mass. The rich feast right royally, and the poor, who can afford to eat meat but once a year, must have it for the Christmas dinner. In anticipation of this, it is customary for every one who has turned a hand for you during the year to call upon you in advance of the Christmas holidays for their *buona festa*. It is simply a generalization of what is true of our newspaper carriers on New-Year's Day. This a resident foreigner especially finds out to his sorrow. If he be a consul, so much the worse. He is not only expected to fee his own employés, but those of the health office, of the captain of the port, of the prefect, of the chief of police—in fact, of all the authorities with whom he has held official intercourse. Then come the telegraph messenger, the penny postman, the scavenger, the washer-woman, the baker's boy, who alone returns you an equivalent by bringing you a *pane dolce*, together with the servants of your friends, where you have called frequently, especially if you have dined with them at any time during the year. The *buona festa* varies from two to fifty francs, and occasionally more. Sometimes, instead of calling in person, the more aristocratic, as the *portiers* of the Bourse, will send you their *carte de visite*, with the compliments of the season, but they would consider it as rather a grim joke if you were simply to send yours in return.

A similar custom prevails in England. The bellman goes round at midnight ringing his bell, and rattling off a stanza or two, for the gratuity which he confidently anticipates; while watchmen, firemen, rate-collectors, postmen, chimney-sweeps, street scavengers, the errand-boys of your baker, butcher, poultry merchant, and green-grocer, even to the hired singers in the churches, all expect their Christmas-box.

In Spain Christmas is observed, we understand, very much as it is in Italy, the Christmas dinner playing a very conspicuous part. In Russia, though St. Nicholas is a special favorite, and they have the Christmas-tree, and services in the churches, all special ceremonies are reserved for the Easter holidays and Epiphany.

On the other hand, throughout the Scandinavian countries, the Yule-time is the gayest and merriest season of the year. It begins on Christmas and continues until Epiphany, and is given up, for the most part, to feasting, dancing, and merry-making. During this time no heavy work is to be done. The watch-dog is unchained. The cattle receive an extra allowance of fodder, and the birds some generous handfuls of

seed. In the rural districts the tables are spread and left standing, loaded with the substantial good cheer of the season, together with the indispensable national dishes, Yule-groats and Yule-buck or Yule-boar — a species of bread, on which is represented a boar or ram. Every visitor is expected to partake of something, otherwise he is believed to take away with him the Yule-joy. In many places the floor of the festive hall is strewn with rye straw, called Yule-straw, which possesses the miraculous property of preserving poultry from witchcraft and cattle from distemper. Over the dining-table hangs suspended from the ceiling an ornamental straw cock. The family go singing to and from the table, while a light is left burning the entire night, and should it accidentally go out, some one in the house will surely die during the coming year.

In Lapland and Norway it is still customary to set out a cake in the snow as a Christmas offering, intended originally, in all probability, to propitiate some pagan divinity, as it dates back to the times of Thor the Thunderer. Nor must we omit to speak of the Yule-club, which was formerly suspended by a ribbon over the table, to be played by the guests in order to decide about the drink, nor of the Yule-cock, a cock made of the Yule-straw, which was played in a similar manner.

In Sweden and Denmark the *Julklapp*, or Christmas-box, inclosed in innumerable wrappers, and labeled with the name of the person for whom it is intended, is suddenly thrown into the room by some unseen, mysterious messenger, who accompanies it with a loud rap upon the door. No little ingenuity is frequently exhibited in the selection of the envelope inclosing the present. Sometimes an elegant vase is inclosed in a monster bale, or a costly brooch in a great straw



UNDER THE MISTLETOE.

boot, or some valuable ornament in an earthenware hen. During the evening all sorts of messengers, in all possible and impossible disguises, some in masks, some in female attire, some as cripples on crutches, others as postilions on horseback, hurry hither and thither, and deliver the presents in the most unexpected and mysterious manner. The Yule-klapp is not unfrequently accompanied by a biting epigram or satirical allusion, like the valentine. Thus, a lady extravagantly fond of dress is liable to be presented with a ridiculously dressed doll, or a newly married couple who are rather demonstrative in their billing and cooing with a pair of young turtle-doves.

In the larger towns and cities, as in Stockholm, they hold a great fair. The shops are richly decorated and splendidly illuminated. There are family reunions, where children receive their presents and adults their Yule-klapps, while in the midst of the festive scene rises a Christmas-tree with its rich burden of flowers, fruits, and sweetmeats, and brilliant with burning wax-lights.



BRINGING IN THE BOAR'S HEAD.

Christmas in England is scarcely the shadow of its former merry, brilliant self, when all classes of society, united around a common banquet-table, indulged in the most unrestrained joviality and merriment. The wassail\* bowl, that once played so conspicuous a part at the Christmas banquet, has become obsolete, while the old-time toasts of "*Drine heil,*" or "*Was hail,*" from which the bowl derives its name, has given place to the modern "*Come, here's to you,*" or "*I'll pledge you.*" Then, too, the singing of Christmas carols, which was once so popular even at court, has greatly fallen into disuse, and is now principally confined to the lower classes. Even the traditional mistletoe, around which gathers so much of poesy and romance, and under which coy maidens coquettishly courted the kiss of their present or prospective lovers, now excluded from the churches as a relic of paganism, has been banished by slow degrees from its high post of favor; while the Yule-block, or Christmas-

log, with its warm welcome, extending even to the poor and the stranger as they gathered around the hospitable board, is being gradually supplanted by the Christmas-tree, whose introduction into England is comparatively of recent date.

But if the Lord of Misrule has been the loser, Christian civilization has been the gainer, in a more rational observance of the Christmas festivities in England. The Christmas-tree sheds its mellow radiance over a more quiet but not less enjoyable scene. Churches and home sanctuaries robe themselves in evergreen holly, ivy, and laurel. Generous rations of beef and bread are distributed to the parish poor on Christmas-eve by jeweled hands, while the Christmas bells

still ring out their silvery chimes on the crisp morning air joyfully and cheerfully. Nor is there wanting a spicy flavor of the old-time feasting and frolic, when there

"was brought in the lusty brawn  
By old blue-coated serving man;  
Then the grim boar's head frowned on high,  
Crested with bays and rosemary,

While round the merry wassail bowl,  
Garnished with ribbons, blithe did trowl."

To say nothing of the roast beef and plum-pudding, Christmas pies, furmity,\* and snapdragons, the Yule-log and the mistletoe have not finally abdicated, while the boar's head, decorated with rosemary or prickly holly, maintains its place at the English Christmas dinner, and is still served up in great state at the royal Christmas table.

The "bringing in of the boar's head" was formerly attended with no little ceremony. At Oxford it was carried in by the strongest of the guardsmen, singing a Christmas carol,

\* *Wassail*—warm ale with apples floating therein.

\* A kind of thick and highly flavored barley-water.



and preceded by a forester, a huntsman, and a couple of pages dressed in silk and carrying the indispensable mustard, which at that time was regarded not only as a great luxury, but an infallible digester. The following celebrated carol of the "Boar's Head" may be found in the book of "Christmasse Carolles" published in 1521 by Wynkyn de Warde:

"Caput apri defero,  
Reddens laudes Domino.  
The bore's head in hande bring I,  
With garlandes gay and rosemary,  
I pray you all syngre merely,  
Qui estis in convivio.

"The bore's head, I understande,  
Is the chefe servyce in this lande.  
Loke wherever it be fande,  
Servite cum cantico.

"Be gladdre, lordes, both more and lasse,  
For this hath ordayned our stewarde,  
To chere you all this Christmasse,  
The bore's head with mustarde."

A somewhat similar custom appears to have prevailed in Genoa in the times of the Dorias, since we learn from Carbone that a boar decorated with branches of laurel, and accompanied by trumpeters, was annually presented to the Doria family by the Abbot of San Antonio at Pré, at mid-day of the 24th of December.

Formerly the Yule-log, a huge section of the birch, was cut from a tree selected on Candlemas-day, which so late as the time of Queen Elizabeth was the last day of the Christmas holidays. On the following Christmas-eve it was dragged in and placed upon the hearth with great ceremony, the merry-makers pulling with a will, and singing the while the modernized Christmas carol commencing,

"Come, bring with a noise,  
My merrie, merrie boys,  
The Christmas-log to the firing."

It was then kindled with a brand from last year's Christmas fire, which, if it was not thus kept continually burning, still linked the merry-making of one Christmas-time to that of another.

In Ramsgate, Kent, and the Isle of Thanet, the custom styled "hodening" is still in vogue. The "hoden," which appears to be a cross between the "white horse" and the Klapperbock of the Germans, is accompanied by a number of youths in fantastic dress, who go round from door to door ringing bells and singing Christmas carols.

The Christmas *mummers*, that carry us back to the old Morality Plays, the origin of the modern English drama, may yet be found in Cornwall and Gloucestershire. The players are for the most part plow-boys or country "bumpkins," variously masked and grotesquely dressed, who, tricked out with swords and gilt paper hats, go about on Christmas-eve from house to house, and, wherever received, giving a rude dramatic performance styled a *Mystery*.

Until the time of Charles I. it was customary in England to proceed in solemn state and present the king and queen with a branch of the celebrated Glastonbury thorn, which was said to bud on Christmas-eve and blossom on Christmas morning. A popular legend relates that this thorn-bush, which once flourished in the church-yard of Glastonbury Abbey, but was subsequently cut down during the time of the civil wars, was a shoot of the staff of Joseph of Arimathea, stuck into the ground with his own hands; that it immediately took root and put forth leaves, and the day following was covered all over with snow-white blossoms, and that it thus continued to bloom for a long series of years, great numbers of people visiting it annually to witness the miracle. When, however, in 1753, a shoot of the Glastonbury thorn in Buckinghamshire refused to blossom, though thousands of spectators with lights and lanterns had assembled as usual to see it, the people declared thereupon that the 25th of December, new style, was not the true Christmas, and refused to observe it as such, most of all as the white-thorn continued to blossom on the 5th of January as usual. To put an end to the dispute, the clergy of the neighborhood issued an order that both days, old style and new, were to be similarly kept.

Our limited space will not permit us to speak of Christmas customs in Scotland, which, however—making due allowance for difference in temperament—are quite similar to those of England. There are the Yule-log and carol singers, the mummers, or guisarts, the mince-pies and plum porridge, with the added "Yule-dow" and "wad shooting." Nor may we, for the same reason, enlarge upon those of the Emerald Isle, where "purty colleens" seek four-leaved shamrocks on "Christmas-ave;" where the haggard banshee, sure precursor of impending evil, with wrinkled visage and great melancholy eyes, and white hair streaming in the wind, sweeps through the glen or gleams out of the darkness; where parish priests brew the whisky punch and bless it with a grace, while the lads and the lasses "fut" the merry jig with mirthful uproar, until the burning lights grow pale and the glowing peat burns low.

Of Christmas in the New World we need not speak at all, since its customs, for the most part, have been transplanted from the Old. Even the negroes of Jamaica elect themselves a king and queen of misrule, and indulge in Christmas masks and mummers. Our own Christmas-tree comes from Germany, our Santa Claus from Holland; the Christmas stocking from Belgium or France; while the "Merry Christmas and happy New-Year" was the old English greeting shouted from window to street, and from street back to window, in the "long, long ago."