

Holidays
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THE CELEBRATION OF CHRISTMAS IN CERTAIN COUNTRIES

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ALASKA

"'Going around with the star' is a popular Christmas custom among some of the natives of Alaska who belong to the Greek Church. A large figure of a star, covered with brightly colored paper, is carried about at night by a procession of men and women and children. They call at the homes of the well-to-do families of the village, marching about from house to house, headed by the star-bearer and two men or boys carrying lanterns on long poles. They are warmly welcomed at each place, and are invited to come in and have some refreshments. After enjoying the cakes and other good things and singing one or two carols, they take up the star and move on to the next house.

"These processions take place each night during Christmas week; but after the second night the star-bearers are followed by men and boys dressed in fantastic clothes, who try to catch the star-men and destroy their star. This part of the game is supposed to be an imitation of the soldiers of Herod trying to destroy the children of Bethlehem; but these happy folks of Alaska evidently don't think much about its meaning, for they make a great frolic of it. Everybody is full of fun, and the frosty air of the dark winter nights is filled with laughter as men and boys and romping girls chase one another here and there in merry excitement."

Source: Christmas Everywhere, by Elizabeth Hough Sechrist.
A book of Christmas customs of many lands. pp. 173-4.

AUSTRALIA

There are three types of people to be considered in discussing Christmas in Australia. First, there are the aboriginals, the native blacks who are mostly uncivilized and un-Christianized, and therefore do not celebrate Christmas at all. Second, there are the bushmen, the white country folk who till the soil and work in the Australia bush. The bushmen are mostly English. Third, there are the English people of the cities and towns.

The bush folk are very hard workers. When Christmas comes (and it comes in the hottest season of the year there), they enjoy a holiday. If some members of the family happen to be off in the hills shearing or taking care of the flocks, they come home for Christmas. Naturally the folks at home prepare a wonderful Christmas dinner. There is a great slaughtering of pigs and chickens and baking of cakes and making of puddings. The youngsters decorate the house with huge ferns and palm leaves and hang green foliage over the front door. The day is spent in visiting, chatting, and eating. At night the neighbors are apt to drop in, then there is dancing to a concertina and lots of fun. The next day, which is Boxing Day as in England, is an occasion of sports. The whole family drive to the sports-meet and take their lunch along for a picnic. The boys and girls look forward to Boxing Day even more than Christmas, for it is sure to be jolly from start to finish.

"The people of the cities observe Christmas in only a half-hearted way, for it is so apt to be a scorching hot day that it seems all too unlike an English Yuletide. For one thing Christmas comes in the very midst of summer

vacations, and many people are away. In that way it is exactly opposite from Christmas in their home land for, instead of rushing home to spend Christmas with the family, they more than likely will be away from home, at vacation resorts or visiting friends. However, among many families in Australia, there is an earnest attempt to celebrate Christmas in the English fashion. Gifts are exchanged at the breakfast table, then there is a Christmas service at church. A Christmas dinner of roast beef or fowl is eaten at noon. Usually the remainder of the day is spent at the beaches with an appetizing picnic supper out-of-doors, and this part of Christmas Day reminds us of our Fourth of July.

"For several days before Christmas, decorations for the house can be bought in the shops or on the street in the form of greens and flowers. The houses on Christmas Day are filled with flowers. Two of these are the Christmas Bush and the Christmas Bell. The first, which grows in great profusion, is a multiple of tiny flowers growing in soft, hazy clusters. It is red and green. The Christmas Bell is a red bell fringed in yellow with bright green leaves. These flowers are quite appropriately in fullest bloom for the Christmas season."

Source: Christmas Everywhere, by Elizabeth Hough Sechrist.
A book of Christmas customs of many lands. pp. 159-161.

CHINA

"Christmas has been celebrated in some sections of China for four-hundred years, but among the majority of Chinese it has never been heard of. However, where the Christian missionaries have brought Christmas to the people along with other Christian observances, it is a day of happiness

and excitement. The little girls receive dolls in their odd stockings which they hang up Christmas Eve just as their western cousins do. These stockings are made by sewing three pieces of muslin together, and are roomy enough to hold the toys that Santa Claus is good enough to bring them. Santa Claus in China is known as Ian Kheong-Khoong which means Nice (or) Father. Still another name for him is Dun Cha Lao Ren, Christmas Old Man. The Chinese people are very fond of the bright colors of the Christmas decorations which they have adopted from their friends the missionaries. They like the red holly berries and green leaves, and the bright tinsel and lights of the Christmas tree. And to these decorations they have added their colorful Chinese lanterns. On Christmas Day they exchange gifts, but these gifts must be in accordance with the custom. Silks, jewels, and other valuable gifts may be given only to members of the immediate families. Gifts of food or cut flowers are customary for friends or distant relatives.

"Christmas in China is ushered in, by those who observe it, with a marvelous display of fireworks. The people enjoy themselves heartily with feasting and singing, and are entertained by Chinese jugglers and acrobats. Thus we see the Chinese method of entertainment mingled with the celebration as it came to them from the missionaries."

Source: Christmas Everywhere, by Elizabeth Hough Sechrist.
A book of Christmas customs of many lands. pp. 152-3.

EGYPT

"The Christians of Egypt burn candles and lamps and logs of wood in great numbers on the Eve of Christmas, probably as symbols of the "Shepherds Fire."

Source: Christmas Comes Again. A second book of Christmaslore,
by John Nicholas Then. p. 61.

ENGLAND

"The Yulelog was usually of oak and it was best to have it cut at midnight. The Yulelog was dragged into the house with much ceremony. To help pull the log conferred immunity from witches. A bit of the log was always kept until the next Christmas to help shield the home against fire.

. . .

"The "Boar's Head" is given special prominence in many English dinners to commemorate the legend that a certain student of Queen's College, Oxford, being attacked by a boar on Christmas Day, choked the animal with a copy of Aristotle and took his head back for dinner. The swan also is sometimes seen on English tables as a dinner dish. They are especially fattened by giving them all the barley they can eat.

. . .

"Wassail or Warsail bowl is regarded as of such antiquity that it is said to have been known by the ancient Britains. It has been a favorite Christmas beverage for centuries. An old recipe for "wassail" as it used to be made at Oxford is as follows: Put into a bowl half a pint of sugar, pour on it half a pint of warm beer; grate a nutmeg and some ginger into it; add four glasses of sherry and five additional pints of beer; stir it well; sweeten it to your taste; let it stand covered up for two or three hours, then put three or four slices of bread cut thin and toasted brown into it, and it is fit for use.

"Epiphany, or the twelfth night after Christmas, is often referred to as 'Little Christmas.' It was on that day that the Magi are supposed to have arrived with their gifts and adored the newborn King. In olden times,

'Twelfth-night' revels were held in England. An invariable feature of this celebration was the great 'Twelfth-night Cake' lit by a number of white candles. Within this cake were baked a bean and a pea. Whoever found the bean, if a man, was entitled to be king, while a pea entitled its lady possessor to be queen, of the party. Then followed the medieval custom of raising the king on the shoulders of four men to the ceiling where he chalked a cross on the rafters to keep away evil spirits. These revelries were presided over by the make-believe 'King and Queen' seated on an improvised throne. Mock trials took place and scenes from English history enacted, and so forth. Merrily the time was thus spent until midnight when the Christmas greens which decorated the room were gathered and burned to close the festivities."

Source: Christmas. A collection of Christmaslore, by John N. Thén, pp. 44-7.

"Christmas in the British Isles is a time of feasting and hearty good cheer. Yuletide is characterized by picturesque customs, old carols, blazing logs, holly and mistletoe. 'He has more to do than the ovens in England at Christmas,' says an Italian proverb, in describing the thoroughness with which British housewives prepare for the Yuletide feast. Every locality boasts its own traditional food. In Cornwall a saffron-colored currant cake is made for each member of the household. In the Highlands of Scotland new sowens, a kind of oatmeal husk porridge, once was popular as an early Christmas morning food. Shropshire has its wigs, or caraway buns, which people dip in ale on Christmas Eve and eat with a toast to the Christ Child. At Queen's College, Oxford, the boar's head is carried in with the traditional carol. ...

In olden days the wassail bowl, or mixture of hot ale, spices and toasted apples, was prepared for friends, ... Plum puddings always have been associated with British Yuletide feasts. One superstition declares that a pudding eaten before Christmas brings bad luck. After the holiday, however, it brings good luck. Twelve puddings (or mince pies, in some places) eaten between Christmas and Epiphany symbolize good fortune for the twelve months of the year."

Source: The Book of Festivals, by Dorothy Gladys Spicer. pp. 62-3.

FRANCE

"Among the French, Christmas is not the family feast that it is with us. The great fête-day here, when all the members of a family meet, and presents and greetings are exchanged, is New Year's Day.

"On this day many of the tradesmen leave their offerings, a pot of cream from the laitier, chocolates or fruit from the grocer. A week later on the occasion of the fête des Rois--Twelfth Night--the baker sends you in a special flat cake, made of a very flaky pastry, and peculiar to this season, called a galette, usually with a tiny doll, a little china sabot, or a bean baked in it for luck. The one who finds the doll, the sabot, or the bean is the 'king' or 'queen' of the evening. Each tradesman then expects a Christmas box. Everyone wishes you a 'Bonne Année,' and no one must be forgotten, from the concierge, whose tip is generally in proportion to the rent of the tenant, down to the girl who brings home the laundry-work.

"New Year's Day is the grown-up feast, but Christmas is kept especially for the children, who look for the 'Petit Noel,' the Christ-Child to come down the chimney, instead of Santa Claus, and fill their shoes with presents.

"For weeks beforehand the big shops have altered their departments to make room for the hosts of toys and Christmas decorations. Each shop has some attraction--perhaps a giant Christmas-tree, twenty or thirty feet high, hung with presents, to be distributed later to small sufferers in the hospitals; or a group of life-size automatic figures--a chef in white cap and apron, who dips a fork into a huge copper cauldron, and fishes up everything imaginable, from a stuffed monkey to a cauliflower, with a human face and eyes that wink at you, to the great delight of the children who crowd there to watch.

"During the few days before Christmas it is difficult to force a passage through the shops, and the toys are fascinating. The mechanical toys and the beautiful kitchen outfits that would make any little girl happy--real stoves to burn coal or alcohol, and miniature sets of copper or enamel saucepans, both tiny dolls'-house affairs and larger sizes that will readily cook--are among the most attractive. Paris is the home of dolls, for the French doll is famous the world over, and everything that a doll might require in furniture, clothes, or toilet articles is to be bought for them. There are even dolls' toothbrushes, tiny flasks of dentifrice, and manicure-sets.

"A feature of Paris at Christmas-time are the baraques--small stalls or booths erected along the boulevards--at which all kinds of knickknacks are sold--sweets, mechanical toys, and all the latest novelties. It is quite like a fair, and the booths remain till after New Year's Day. All during those weeks the streets are very gay and full of people. There are street-vendors as well, and the barrows that sell holly and mistletoe. France is the country of mistletoe, and one sees it here in perfection. Everyone buys it, for a branch hung above the doorway at this season is

said to bring luck to a house during the entire year. Holly is less plentiful, but the flower-sellers will take the scarlet berries and wire them into other greenery so deftly that they seem to have grown there, and the effect is quite pretty. I do not remember to have seen this 'made holly' anywhere else, but a good deal is sold here. It drops less quickly than the real holly, and looks rather quaint and formal.

"There are no Christmas pantomimes in Paris, where as a general rule children or young people are not taken to the theatres; but a sort of fairy-play for children is often put on at this season, but there are several splendid circuses open all through the winter. The cinematograph theatres, also, have often a play suitable for small people, shown in moving pictures, accompanied by music and songs.

"On Christmas Eve are held what are called réveillons--a sort of friendly gathering--when people sit up all night to welcome in Christmas. All the cafés will advertise their réveillon, and invite their regular customers, and many people prefer to spend the evening in this way rather than at their own homes. It is a sociable idea, and as the spirit of the season makes everyone feel friendly, it is certainly pleasanter for a stranger in Paris or anyone living alone to pass the time in such gathering, with its atmosphere of good-fellowship, than by themselves.

"Midnight Mass is celebrated on Christmas Eve in most of the churches in Paris, and the service is very beautiful and impressive. Afterwards one stays to visit the crèche, the representation of the stable at Bethlehem, with the three shepherds, and the Star of the East hung above it, which is set there, in a corner of the church, to remind one of the first Christmas Eve and the real spirit of Christmas."

Source: The foregoing is quoted from Margery Williams "Christmas in Paris" being Chapter Nine "France" in the book Christmas Everywhere, Written and Compiled by Elizabeth Hough Sechrist. Philadelphia, Roland Swain: 1931.

GREENLAND

Greenland, like Iceland, uses wooden Christmas trees decorated with ling, a low bush which resembles our cedar. Celebration begins on the day before Christmas. Children sing their carols at a church service at mid-day, which lasts about an hour.

"The Christmas service, a musical service in Danish and Greenlandic, began at four o'clock, by which time a brilliant full moon was shining over the colony in a curious green light, like a large green cheese. ...

"I found the church crowded, the candles all alight, and for the first time I saw all the Danes assembled, the crowded congregation overflowing into the crowded choir. ...

"The pastor, brilliant as a Christmas rose in white surplice with crimson and golden cope, sang a collect in Greenlandic with a beautiful choral accompaniment. Then followed the Christmas readings, first in Greenlandic, thereafter in Danish: 'And there were in the same country shepherds abiding in the field, keeping watch over their flock by night. And lo! the angel of the Lord came upon them---' ...

"The dark, upturned, attentive faces crowned by the thick dark hair, pious, earnest, absorbed in the sacred words, in what other country of so-called 'civilized' races will one find such worshippers? ...

"I had been invited to spend the evening with a small party of Greenlanders at the parsonage, where there was a Christmas tree. ...

"Taking hands and singing the Yule song, old and young paced round the tree, whose boughs had as realistic an appearance as any pine-tree from Finnish or Swedish forests. Under it were piled gifts for all.

...

"We went into the parlour to drink coffee, and lo! there stood Santa

Claus, complete in scarlet robe and beard, with a great sack of further gifts upon his back. ...

"After he had gone the children went to bed, but until midnight the older guests sat and talked, drinking coffee and eating nuts, while the pastor played hymns and songs, including Colleshill and Selma, upon his American organ.

"Suddenly, outside the window, the Christmas song upon the midnight--

'Ingilit Tusartitat! ' ['Hark! The herald angels sing.']

In the snow under the brilliant moonlight are thronged the dark figures of the choir, the yellow lamplight from within flickering now here, now there, upon the upturned faces....

"The first carol is followed by another English melody--'When He cometh,' and lastly by a noble Greenlandic hymn--'Guterput Kutsingnermio. ['Lord God in the highest.'] Its melody is said to have been heard in a dream by the Greenlandic composer, Rasmus Berthelsen, and written down on awaking. The solemn cadence, harmonious and grand, swells and dies upon the starlit night. It is Christmas morning."

Source: On Greenland's Closed Shore. The Fairyland of the Arctic, by Isobel Wylie Hutchison. pp. 228-235.

HAWAII

"The natives of Hawaii say that Santa Claus comes over to the islands in a boat. Perhaps he does; it would be a tedious journey for his reindeer to make without stopping from San Francisco to Honolulu. At all events, he gets there by some means or other, for he would not neglect the little folks of those islands away out in the Pacific.

"They look for him as eagerly as do the boys and girls in the lands of snow and ice, and although it must almost melt him to get around in that warm climate with his furs on, he never misses a Christmas.

"Before the missionaries and the American settlements went to Hawaii, the natives knew nothing about Christmas, but now they all celebrate the day, and do it, of course, in the same way as the Americans who live there. The main difference between Christmas in Honolulu and Christmas in New York is that in Honolulu in December the weather is like June in New York. Birds are warbling in the leafy trees; gardens are overflowing with roses and carnations; fields and mountain slopes are ablaze with color; and a sunny sky smiles dreamily upon the glories of a summer day. In the morning people go to church, and during the day there are sports and games and merry-making of all sorts. The Christmas dinner is eaten out-of-doors in the shade of the veranda, and everybody is happy and contented."

Source: Christmas Everywhere. A book of Christmas customs of many lands, by Elizabeth Hough Sechrist. pp. 174-5.

ICELAND

There are very few trees in Iceland, so Christmas trees are made by the carpenter.

One tall, straight, round pole serves as the trunk, and into this pole, at angles to it, are fastened many short poles for branches.

People gather armloads of the ling shrub, a low ground bush with foliage similar to our cedar tree. They tie this around the branches of their wooden tree and the effect is that of a real tree. They make their

own ornaments from tin foil and bright papers and light the tree with real candles.

Christmas is the most important holiday of the year. It is celebrated from Christmas Eve until thirteen days after Christmas and preparation for it usually requires two weeks. Among the traditional delicacies is a prune cake, and smoked mutton is generally served instead of fowl.

Holiday festivities start with a family ceremony in which the oldest man of the family reads from the Bible and gives a talk on the meaning of Christmas. Then the family sings hymns, presents are distributed and the big Christmas Eve dinner is eaten. This ends the family celebration and on Christmas Day the family starts the round of visits and at every place they are given cold meats and sausages, leaf bread, cookies, prune cake, and coffee or chocolate. Only the absolutely necessary farm work is done during these thirteen days.

Source: St. Nicholas Magazine, December 1933, pp. 68-69.

INDIA

"India is a non-Christian country and Hinduism is the universal religion, so there is no Indian custom of celebrating Christmas. Most of the foreigners there are Englishmen, who follow their traditional rites and customs connected with Christmas.

...

"Those Indians who have become converted to Christianity, observe the feast as the Christians do, while many of the non-Christians imitate them. Greeting cards are sent, parties are given, and there is much merrymaking.

It is a festival of good will."

Source: Christmas Comes Again. A second book of Christmaslore, by John Nicholas Then. pp. 42-44.

Armenian Observances in India and Persia

"One week before the holiday of Christmas all the villages, without exception, fast by not eating animal food, and on the last day eat no food at all. On Christmas Eve they take communion. All are present at the church and the Book of Daniel is read by the children. After the evening service the people return to their homes immediately. The women light all the lights in the house, and the members of the household break their fast. Pilav, a rice food, is eaten for the evening meal. As soon as the meal is finished the children, in groups, go to the housetops, hang their handkerchiefs over the roofs and sing:

Rejoice and be glad
Open your bag
And fill our handkerchiefs
Hallelujah! Hallelujah!

The people in the houses fill their handkerchiefs with raisins or fried wheat, or tie some money into them.

"That evening the priest visits the homes of mourning in his parish and repeats a prayer for the souls of the dead and words of comfort to the living.

"On Christmas Eve engaged young men present to their fiancées a tray on which are twelve pieces of cake, a candle (Kata), nine eggs, some raisins a plate of Halva (a kind of sweet meat), and a box of Hina (something sweet smelling used to paint the hair and hands).

"Early the next morning church services are held and all the villagers hasten to be present. The ceremony of pouring out the Holy Oil of Baptism

(Meron) then takes place. Glasses are dipped into the blessed water, which is partaken of with the greatest earnestness. Some take the water home to mix with the pure earth, called Meronhogh (Earth of the Holy Oil), and it is kept in a special vessel and used for purifying purposes. For example, if a mouse or any other such thing falls in a vessel, thus making the utensil unclean, the same is washed with Meronhogh to make it pure again.

"During Christmas week young men and women visiting, greet each other with 'Happy blessing-of-the water to you. May you live to see the Holy Resurrection.' And the proper answer is, 'With you together let the blessing of the Holy Oil of Baptism be on your house.' The priest all through the week visits and blesses the homes of his flock.

"Louis A. Boettiger tells us that on Christmas Eve everyone takes a bath, and at the evening meal after the church service they eat fried fish, lettuce, and boiled spinach, for it is believed that spinach was the food that Mary ate on the Eve of Christ's birth.

"In the preceding story we have told how the people go to the church fasting, and Mr. Boettiger assures us that the abstinence from food for one week, with the little snack on Christmas Eve, often results in persons fainting with hunger at the church service. The people start to church an hour before dawn and the service is not over until 10:30.

"The churches are bowers of flowers. Every available space is filled with glorious blossoms.

"The Christmas observance lasts three days, during which all shops are closed. The third day is Ladies Day, on which they give and receive calls."

Source: 1001 Christmas Facts and Fancies, by Alfred Carl Hottes. pp. 202-4.

IRAN

"Christmas in Persia is known as the Little Feast. (Easter is known as the Great Feast.) For the first twenty-five days of December, those days preceding Christmas, a great Fast is observed, during which no meat, eggs, milk or cheese are eaten. It is a time of peace and meditation; a time for attending services at the church. But when the Fast is over the feast is begun. The fattened calf is killed and plenty of meat is prepared for the great Christmas dinner.

"Christmas Eve is the last day of the Fast. Almost before dawn on Christmas Day the people attend Mass to receive Communion, and it is not until they have received this Communion that they are permitted to break fast. The priests will have blessed the bread and wine which is partaken of in the early dawn of Christmas Day.

"The boys and girls of Persia have never heard of Santa Claus, and gifts are not exchanged at Christmas. But the children are sure to receive a new suit of clothes which they proudly wear all during the happy Christmas week. A popular dish for Christmas Day is the harasa, a kind of chicken stew. It is cooked in such large quantities that it is very apt to last the whole week.

"Persia played an important part in the history of the first Christmas, for it was from there the three wise men came. They were Magians who studied the stars, and when they saw the Star of Bethlehem they followed it and came to the stable where the Child Jesus lay in a manger."

Source: Christmas Everywhere. A Book of Christmas Customs of Many Lands, by Elizabeth Hough Sæhrst. pp. 155-6.

IRAQ

"Most of the people of Bagdad are Mohammedans, but there are also many Christians. In the Christian homes Christmas is observed with religious significance.

"There is an unusual ceremony held in the courtyard of a Syriac home on Christmas Eve. It is a ceremony in which the whole family takes part. One of the children in the family reads the story of the Nativity from an Arabic Bible. The other members of the family hold lighted candles, and as soon as the story has been read a bonfire is lighted in one corner of the courtyard. The fire is made of dried thorns and the future of the house for the coming year depends upon the way the fire burns. If the thorns burn the ashes the family will have good fortune. While the fire is burning a Psalm is sung, and when it is reduced to ashes everyone jumps over the ashes three times and makes a wish.

"On Christmas Day a similar bonfire of thorns is built in the church. While the fire burns the men of the congregation chant a hymn. Then there is a procession in which the officials of the church march behind the Bishop who carries an image of the Infant Jesus upon a scarlet cushion. The long Christmas service always ends with the blessing of the people. The Bishop reaches forth and touches a member of the congregation with his hand, putting his blessing upon him. That person touches the one next him, and so on, until all have received 'the Touch of Peace.'"

Source: Christmas Everywhere. A Book of Christmas Customs of Many Lands, by Elizabeth Hough Sechrist. pp. 155-6.

IRELAND

"The placing of lights in windows has become very popular in our

holiday festivities. It originated from an Irish custom connected with Christmas. The Irish place lighted candles in their windows on Christmas Eve as a guide and an invitation to all who, like Mary and Joseph on the first Christmas Eve, may be wandering about unable to find quarters for the night. In Ireland poor wanderers and tramps are welcomed everywhere. They are given a good meal, a place to sleep, and are sent on their way in the morning with a bit of money in their pockets.

"Another Irish custom connected with Christmas is 'Feeding the Wren.' The young people of a village get together on St. Stephen's Day (Dec. 26), obtain a wren, place it in a cage, perch the cage on the top of a bush, and go from door to door collecting money for the relief of the supposedly starving wren. The sum of money thus gathered is used to defray the expense of a dance on New Year's."

Source: Christmas. A Collection of Christmaslore, by John N. Then, pp. 51-2.

ITALY

The Christmas season in Italy lasts for three weeks, from the Novena (eight days before Christmas) until the Twelfth Night. During the Novena the children go from place to place reciting Christmas poems and expect coins in return. These they use to purchase delicacies. For twenty-four hours before Christmas Eve everyone fasts and then an elaborate banquet is served.

At sunset in Rome a cannon is fired from the Castle of San Angelo proclaiming the opening of the Holy Season. By 9 o'clock everyone is in church to behold a procession of beautifully robed church officials, after which an elaborate Christmas mass is celebrated. Many of the congregation

attend church in evening dress. The streets are often flood-lighted so that in Rome and other cities the famous fountains and historic squares are thrown into sharp relief.

Instead of evergreens, bright flowers are used in the home and church. Christmas itself is not the time for gift giving. That is reserved for the Epiphany.

It is on Epiphany Eve that Befana brings the children their presents.

. . .

La Befana is known to the Italians as the principal gift-bringer. Her name is derived from Epiphania, or Epiphany. Some of the Italian grown-ups, not having understood La Befana's true desires, have thought of her as a misshapen old woman and have held her up as a bugbear to frighten naughty children. They even put her image in their windows in the form of an ugly doll.

But the wise Italian children realize that La Befana is a good fairy. Because she was sweeping when the Wise Men passed through, she is always represented as carrying a broom. On Epiphany Eve, the children empty their pockets of all their cherished possessions and hang their clothes in a place where La Befana may find them and fill the pockets with confections, at least one tidbit for each pocket. Inasmuch as all children of Italy are not good, sometimes they find ashes or a birch rod protruding from a pocket, but this is a pleasant warning rather than an angry rebuke.

. . .

On this evening most Italian homes have a large bowl, the Urn of Fate. It is filled with many wrapped presents. Each member of the family draws from this bowl and many draw blanks before getting a real present.

Marionette shows, as in many other European countries, have always been

very popular in Italy, and at the holiday season they become particularly numerous.

Source: Quoted from 1001 Christmas Facts and Fancies by Alfred Carl Hottes. New York, A. T. De La Mare Company, Inc., 1937. p. 264, 31, 248.

MALTA

"The festival of Christmas is heralded in Maltese villages by the appearance of tambour or Zakk players. A Zakk is a wind instrument of dogskin played to represent shepherds of Bethlehem."

Source: 1001 Christmas Facts and Fancies, by Alfred Carl Hottes, p. 253.

NEW ZEALAND

"When children in New Zealand read of the cold, first Christmas in Bethlehem, they are taught that they are specially favored by the Christ Child.

"They have a legend that He, when He was old enough to run about, wished His birthday came in summertime so that He and all other children might spend it happily out of doors.

"Midnight Mass is the rule and the services are broadcast by radio, both in New Zealand and Australia. Cribs of the usual pattern decorated with native flowers are set up in churches and homes. Besides the loved old carols, they have some carols of their own that are suited to the celebration of a festival on which all nature joins in making holiday.

...

"Christmas in New Zealand is a statutory public holiday and after church services, the time is spent mostly out of doors with picnics and boating."

Source: Christmas Comes Again. A second book of Christmaslore, by John Nicholas Then. pp. 57-60.

RUSSIA

"Babushka (grandmother) is the dispenser of gifts at Christmas time in Russia. The legend goes that once upon a time she refused an opportunity to accompany the Three Kings on their journey and misdirected them, when they inquired their way to Bethlehem. According to another legend, she refused to take the Holy Family in when they were fleeing to Egypt. Regretting this, she goes about on Christmas Eve looking for the Christ Child and distributing gifts to all the children.

"In modern Russia, Christmas observance is, of course, against the law. Russian stores are prohibited from selling Christmas toys and from displaying yuletide articles in show windows, and persons cutting Christmas trees or selling them are prosecuted. Artists and singers are forbidden to take part in Christmas programs. St. Nicholas is the Patron Saint of Russia

Source: Christmas. A collection of Christmaslore, by John N. Then, pp. 59-60.

SWEDEN

"In modern Sweden many ancient customs and traditions are cherished, and no festival is more lovingly celebrated than Christmas. Old and young look forward to it with equal eagerness, for Christmas is above all a family holiday, an occasion for gathering around the home hearth, and for sharing hospitality. Although it is the main festival of the year, prepared for long in advance, it is not literally true that 'Christmas lasts a month in Sweden.' That, of course, would be impossible. What has given rise to

this exaggerated saying is partly the fact that the Swedes do go into the Yule celebration with great enthusiasm and thoroughness, and partly because the 13th of December, St. Lucia Day, is generally regarded as the harbinger of the Christmas season, and the 13th of January, 'Tjugondag Knut, traditionally marks the end of this period. In between these two dates, life goes on almost as actively as during any other month. However, from the 24th of December, Christmas Eve, and until the New Year has been greeted, the wheels, both real and metaphorical, slow down perceptibly and there is much more thought of cosy pleasures in the minds of everybody than real attention to business.

"Lucia, as we noted, is the opener of the Christmas season. In this colorful festival old and new blend harmoniously. Lucia was a Christian maiden, martyred under Emperor Diocletian. The story of her death was carried to Sweden, where the Christianized Vikings heard of her. They imagined her shining figure, crowned by a halo of light. Since her saint's day happened to fall on December 13, when daylight soon will increase after the dark winter months, she became even more of a favorite with the people of the north. Today the Day of St. Lucia, or Lucy, is celebrated all over Sweden, in the cities, out in the country, even in factories and offices. Primarily, though, it is a family observance. Early in the dark morning, in hundreds of thousands of Swedish homes, the members of the family are awakened by the young daughter of the house, who serves them coffee and newly baked Lucia buns and cakes in bed. She is attired in a white, flowing gown and on her head she wears a wreath of greenery in which are stuck lighted candles. The song she sings, 'Santa Lucia,' is an old Italian melody that still lingers in the north.

"With Lucia Day over, preparations for the imminent Christmas holidays

are proceeding with speed and determination. In many homes, especially in the rural districts, much of the typical Christmas food is prepared in the family kitchen. This is especially true of baking, for the Yule festival calls for a wide variety of buns, cakes, and loaves of many different kinds, shapes, and colors. There is, for instance, the wort bread, sweet and dark; there are the fragrant saffron loaves, and ginger snaps in the form of goblins, piglets, stars and other patterns. In some places both headcheese and the Christmas sausages are made at home, and there are places where members of the household still dip their own tallow candles for the holidays. This, of course, is only for sentimental reasons, for today the stores in small cities and large offer almost the same wide assortment of food, clothing, etc. as they do in America.

"The most important purchase of all, however, concerns the selection of the Christmas tree, for without one there simply is no Christmas in Sweden. Whole little forests of fresh spruces seem to grow overnight on the squares and market places, and business is brisk. This is a matter that concerns the whole family and every member is consulted as to the size and shape of the tree. When the right one has been picked, be it a very modest or a large, wide-branched one, it is carried home by father or mother, with the children giving a helping hand. There is a personal pride in finding the suitable tree, and it is placed in its traditional corner in the dining room or parlor with something akin to triumph.

"Then comes the trimming of the Christmas tree. Though Sweden is one of the most extensively electrified countries in the world, thousands of families still cling to the old-fashioned custom of lighting the tree with live candles. It is then decked with tinsel, hung with red apples, and topped either by a shining star or a miniature Swedish flag.

"By this time, the last presents have been bought, and the gifts are wrapped and closed with red blobs of fragrant sealing wax. Another old Swedish custom calls for a verse, usually in a humorous vein and of a nature that half reveals, half conceals the contents, to be affixed to each parcel. With the tree shimmering and ready to be lighted and the presents all wrapped, everybody, it seems, stands on tiptoe, eagerly awaiting the arrival of the happy holiday.

[After dinner on Christmas Eve (Julafton), the 24th of December] "the distribution of the gifts begins, and if there are small children in the family, an older male member usually puts on the familiar red blouse and trousers and the flowing white beard of Jultomten, as Kris Kringle or Santa Claus is known in Sweden. He knocks on the door and, after having been admitted, a sack with gifts on his back, he distributes the presents to the little ones - 'if they have been good children throughout the year,' which, miraculously, always seems to be the case.

"Christmas Day, for centuries has been mostly a day of rest and of religious observance. The main church event is the pre-dawn service, observed all over Sweden, in cities as well as in the rural districts. It is, perhaps, most impressive and colorful in the country. Faithful to age-old tradition, the Swedes delight, whenever possible, in driving to church in sleighs. Since the night is still black, the church-goers in some parts of the country light their way through the snowy, silent forests with flaring torches. Here and there the darkness is pricked by glowing dots, because on Christmas morn almost every house in Sweden has a lighted candle in each window. Between the tall pines and spruce trees lies the country church, the candlelight shining invitingly through the stained glass windows. Close by the temple, the worshippers toss their torches into a large pile, which flickers in the dark night and casts its reflection on the snow. At the

door they are met by the organ notes of a stirring Lutheran hymn, and in front of them the altar shines with the radiance of hundreds of burning tapers.

"...Even in its last farewell, the Swedish Christmas offers one last display of colorful customs. For on Twelfth Night the so-called 'Star boys' make their appearance - especially, of course, in the country. They are youngsters from the villages, who dress up in strange costumes, often representing some Biblical character. All carry large, transparent paper stars, mounted on poles, with lighted candles inside. They go from house to house, and the hymns and folk songs they sing are so old that many of them are not to be found in any book of music."

Source: Swedish Information Service; the American-Swedish News Exchange.
New York.

YUGOSLAVIA

"Christmas ceremonies of the Orthodox Serbs in Yugoslavia represent a rather complicated ritual for the foreigner. In normal times, for six weeks before Christmas there was a strict fast in Yugoslavia. According to the rules prescribed by the Orthodox Church, no meat, eggs, butter or milk could be taken and no marriages celebrated. In villages this custom was observed very strictly, as indeed it was in all towns where Orthodox Serbs were in majority.

"The Christmas preparations began with the fattening of the Christmas roast, called 'bozichnar' --usually a small pig. 'One does not fatten a pig on Christmas Eve,' says a national proverb. Three days before Christmas was 'tucin-dan,' or slaughter day, on which the animal was killed.

"Christmas Eve, or 'Badnji Dan,' however, was the big day, especially for the children. The most important ceremony of 'Badnji Dan' was the

bringing in of the 'badnjak' or yule-log. Before dawn the master of the house went out to choose the 'badnjak' from the neighbouring forest. Usually it was an oak tree. This he felled, having first made it an offering of corn. It should fall towards the east as the sun is rising and cleanly without touching other trees. The trunk was then cut into three pieces, the largest being the principal 'badnjak,' and over it were poured libations of corn and wine. It was then decorated with laurel and other leaves and taken home with great ceremony. It remained outside the house until the evening, when the master of the house had to bring it in. As he entered, he was met at the threshold by the other members of the family, who sprinkled him with corn. The logs were then laid on the fire and again sprinkled with corn and wine. One member of the family watched the 'badnjak' until it was entirely consumed.

"The Christmas Eve meal was very important. The master and mistress of the house, imitating the crow of a cock, threw straw over the floors of the whole house, followed by the children cheeping like hen and chickens. The straw had to remain on the floor throughout the feast and the meats were not cleared away until it was all over. Then the remains of the straw were placed in the hen-house.

"The strewing of the straw was the preliminary to the Christmas Eve feast, in which all the members of the family took part. Where the old customs were most strictly maintained, this meal had to be taken from the floor or from a sack stuffed with straw, and no knives, forks or spoons were used. Special dishes were provided, cooked with oil, consisting of various vegetables, fish, nuts, beans, walnuts. The latter were thrown into the four corners of the room. The Christmas roast was then placed on the spit by the master of the house.

"The first person to enter the house on Christmas Day--Bozic--should be the 'Polazenik' or Christmas guest. As he entered early in the morning he sprinkled the members of the household with corn and was himself sprinkled in turn. He then struck the 'badnjak' burning on the hearth, wishing prosperity to the household with special verses such as: 'As much happiness and prosperity be yours in the coming year as sparks fly up from this log.'

"People saluted each other in the streets on Christmas Day with: 'Christ is born,' and the same answer always came: 'He is born indeed.'"

Hristos se rodi!

Source: World Review, December 1942, p. 29. Quoted verbatim.

"MERRY CHRISTMAS" AS SAID IN CERTAIN COUNTRIES

People of the United Nations may say it differently, but they all mean one thing: Merry Christmas!

Belgium (Flemish): Vroolijke Kerstnis

Brazil and Portugal (Portuguese): Boas Festas

China: Gung Tsu Yeh Su Sun Tau

Czechoslovakia: Vesele Vanoce

Denmark: Glaedelig Jul

Ethiopia: Enkwan Ebenhan Ledatoo Yaddarasawo

France and Haiti: Joyeux Noel

Germany: Froehliche Weihnachten

Greece: Kala Christouyena

India (Hindustani): Christmas Mubarik

Italy: Felice Natale

Luxembourg: either French, Joyeux Noel, or German, Froehliche Weinachten.

Netherlands: Vroolijk Kerstfeest

Norway: Gledelig Jul

Poland: Wesolych Swiat

South Africa: Geseende Kersfees

Soviet Union: Se Rozhdestvom Christovym

Spain (Spanish) and Latin America other than Brazil:
Felices Pascuas

Sweden: God Jul

Yugoslavia: Sretan Bozic

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Inquiry Section
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