

RELIGIOUS FEELING IN ERIN'S CHRISTMAS

THE celebration of the festival in Ireland does not differ to any great extent, perhaps, from its method of observance in other countries. The deeply religious sentiment of the country makes the religious observance of the festival its dominant feature.

The humblest habitation wears an air of cheerfulness when decorated with holly and ivy, from which the red berries which grow on the holly peep out in great profusion.

In the Catholic churches in the larger cities and in many of the smaller places as well masses are celebrated hourly from midnight on Christmas eve, thousands flocking first to the midnight mass and later to those that follow. Even in the penal days, when it meant death for a clergyman to perform the holy sacrifice or for those who assisted at it to be caught in attendance, the midnight mass was never abandoned.

When the churches were destroyed by Cromwell and Elizabeth the priest took refuge beneath some protecting rock, and with some among the flock thrown out to guard against surprise by the soldiery the mass was offered up as it had been in the earlier days of Ireland's religious glory.

Today, happily, there is no such ban on the religious faith of the people, and the throngs who then flocked to the glen or the mountain side to assist in the holy sacrifice can attend their religious services in comfortable churches everywhere throughout the land.

On Christmas morning, especially in the rural portions of Ireland, the people flock to the morning masses, often traveling eight and ten miles from their homes in the remote hills and valleys of their respective parishes. The goose hangs high in Ireland on Christmas day, and the family is too busy to provide the delicate dinner.

On Christmas night the waxed blessed candle is lighted in honor of Christ's nativity, and music and good cheer of every kind are enjoyed everywhere.

The day following Christmas, St. Stephen's day, is also regarded as practically a holiday. It is mostly avoided by the young people, especially the boys for fun and frolic of every description. Athletic sports, football matches, hurling and other enjoyments are general.

A CHRISTMAS PRAYER.

WHERE we feel pattered down the hall
Of Want and Wretchedness and Woe,
Where we see eyes shine and wee tips call
Upon a dream they may not know
Or where a mother marks their plea
And turns her misty eyes away
From where they cluster at her knee
To dream with her of Christmas day.

God, hear their prayer through snow and rain
Or wailing wind and driven sleet
Let it not be they call in vain
To find their dream of Christmas sweet.

Let it not be their eager eyes
Shall look in vain through blurring tears
And find beneath life's shadowed skies
The hurt—the heartache of the years.

God, answer them who still hold fast
Or clasp a dream so brave and true
That Christmas sends no phantom wrath
To those whose message wings to you.

To those who whisper through the night
Of one to come at morning's gleam
O Father of the Hearth of Light,
Give them to know their day of dream!

Where love is prone or vanished far,
Where life's gray shadows haunt
Give them to know the eastern star
Which guides them to thy holiday.

Give them for this their day, at least,
All absence from the bitter rod
And through the fullness of their feast
The heart to smile up to their God.

—Grantland Rice.

THE BUSY FAIRIES

I have heard from Uncle Peter, who is wonderfully wise,
That just before the Christmas snow is falling from the skies
The little folk in Fairyland begin to work away
At all the very nicest toys for Santa Claus' sleigh.
He says they choose the nighttime, when you cannot hear a sound
When the playground fire has flickered out and shadows gather round
But silent hours they do not mind, they do not heed the night,
For the moon holds up her candle, and they want no other light.
And Uncle Peter tells me, so I think you should be told,
That those who work for other folk are very seldom cold.
They trim the dollies' bonnets, and they plait the dollies' hair,
They sew the dainty dresses that the pretty dollies wear.
They paint the lovely engines, and the sailing boats they make,
And the best of all the mince-meat pies are what the fairies bake.
And Uncle Peter tells me—and I think he must be right—
That work like this is just the sort to make our Christmas bright.
And don't you think a loving thought should go on Christmas day
To those who for our pleasure work and ask no other pay.
—Madame Magan.

Christmas Greens

EVERYBODY knows the Christmas trees, holly, mistletoe and Christmas greens on our markets, but where these cheering plants come from and how they grow is not so well known.

Christmas trees are furnished principally by two families of trees—the spruces and the firs. The spruces are the more bushy looking trees, with numerous small cones near the top. All through northern New England, northern Michigan, Wisconsin and Minnesota the spruce grows in swamps where few other trees can live, while the white spruce competes with the noble pines for higher and better soil.

Every year millions of young spruces are cut in the northern forests and shipped to the cities and prairie states in carload lots. If the woodmen can find a stand of young firs they take them also. The firs look more refined and less bushy, and their green leaves often stand away from the slender branches like the teeth of a comb.

While the use of Christmas trees has come to us from Germany, the custom of decorating our houses with holly and mistletoe originated in England.

Holly. The home of our American holly is in the woods of New England and the Allegheny mountains. In the north it is a small evergreen shrub, but in the south it sometimes grows to be a tree fifty feet high. With its glossy green leaves and bright scarlet berries the holly is an object of beauty in its native woods as well as in our fashionable flats and churches. The head of man has never cultivated this beautiful shrub, at least not on a commercial scale, but the wild birds are attracted by its bright berries. They eat the scanty pulp and scatter the seeds far and wide.

While some species of holly grow as far south as Texas and westward into Missouri and Arkansas the great forests of Michigan, Wisconsin and Minnesota contain not a single specimen of these beautiful shrubs.

Mistletoe.

A queer kind of plant is the mistletoe. If one saw it for the first time he might mistake it for the common witch's broom which is familiar to every northern woodsman. In reality the mistletoe is a parasite which grows and lives on other trees, such as maple, poplar and tupelo. Its white fruit is eaten by birds, and the small seeds are accidentally dropped on the branches of trees. The seeds adhere to the bark, and if they happen to have been planted on the right kind of host they germinate and send a kind of sucker-like growth into the bark and wood of their host, and a new mistletoe plant begins its life and grows at the expense of its host, from which it derives nearly all its nourishment. Our Christmas mistletoe is restricted to the middle and southern states, growing from New Jersey to Missouri and south as far as Florida and Texas, but is not found in the northern states.

Several species of mistletoe, however do occur in our western forests.

Christmas Greens.

The most humble plant of this happy season is the small plant known as Christmas greens or ground pine. It is a close relative of the ferns and mosses and, like these, occupies the shady nooks and places of the forest floor, where it trails and twines among the roots of the stately pines. It never produces any flowers or true seeds. Its small heads, which look like tiny ears of grain, are filled with a yellow dust. This dust is carried away by the wind or shaken out and carried off by the gentle touch of squirrels, rabbits and other woodland folk. From this fine dust the new plants grow.

Few of us who enjoy the cheer of these Christmas plants do ever meet them in their native haunts in winter. We can only study them where they grow when we take our summer outing to the northern woods and to the mountains.

CHRISTMASTIDE.

RED, red the holly berries glow,
The crimson beads that fairies blow
At Christmastide
When, wonder-eyed
The children gather close to hear
Strange tales that move upon the inner ear
And dim the eyes
With plaintive sighs
Till downward slips the silent tear

And may no sorrow at the heart abide
Now that this gracious Christmastide
Moves down the world from where
to shore
With wonder ships of golden store,
Where every child in fancy soars
The captain of his fleet of dreams,
And may the old forget again
Their unwise wisdom bought of pain
And may their voices sweet and clear
Ring out the notes of festal cheer

Ring, ring the bells with me!
Sing, sing all joyously!
White faith and hope and love still reign
The world must ever young remain
So sing and sing and ring the bells
O'er holt and heath and down the dells
And may no sorrow at the heart abide
Now that this is glad Christmastide
—F. Howard Webb in Los Angeles.

THE CHRISTMAS BABY

WE had the nicest Christmas day
We ever had. The tree,
With candy, toys and picture books,
Was full as it could be.
There wasn't room for one thing more.

Which was the reason, maybe,
That Santa Claus in mamma's room
Just had to put the baby

I got a lovely set of furs
(I'm nearly twelve years old),
And Bobby got a soldier suit,
—Trimmed up with red and gold,
And Beanie got a doll doll
It came from Paris, maybe,
But mamma got the best of all,
For mamma got the baby.

A little mite, all pink and white,
They let me take a peep
Where in his satin bankers blue
—He cuddled fast asleep,
And mamma says: "if I am good
When I grow up, then maybe
Old Santa Claus will bring to me
Some day a Christmas baby."
—Minnie Irving in New York American.

Gifts For Children.

It is, after all, the gifts we make to children at Christmas that are the most interesting gifts we give. No matter how much our grownup friends may like our choice of gifts, they seldom show the liking and appreciation that our smaller friends show. So buying Christmas gifts for children ought to be a real pleasure.

Still Carry Boar's Head at Christmas

THE medieval Yuletide custom of carrying a boar's head in procession to the Christmas banquet was once common in England. Today it is confined to Queen's college, Oxford, and one or two baronial houses.

The reason for the custom surviving at Queen's is, according to tradition, on account of a valorous deed performed centuries ago by a Queen's scholar. He was walking in the fields studying his Aristotle when a wild boar rushed at him open mouthed. With great presence of mind the student crammed the book down the animal's throat, and it was thus choked to death with philosophy; hence the survival of the boar's head at the college of which this bold scholar was a member.

No fitter setting for a ceremony that links up the twentieth century with the past could be provided than the cloisters and dining hall of Queen's college. Queen's, whose foundation dates back to 1340, was the college of the Black Prince, Henry V., Cardinal Beaufort, Addison, Wycherley and many other famous men.

The procession of the boar's head is formed up at the buttery. At its head walks the soloist, a former scholar of the college. Next comes the bear's head. This is borne on a silver salver upon the shoulders of two stalwart servants. The great head presents a quaint and handsome appearance, being surmounted by a glittering and jeweled crown and decked with frills of gilded bay and rosemary. Between the tusks is placed a golden orange. Flags bearing the college arms and devices are fixed in the head.

Immediately behind the great dish comes the college organist, wearing the brilliant robes of an Oxford doctor of music, and followed by his surpliced choir of men and boys.

Meanwhile the provost of the college, standing on the dais at the end of the hall in the midst of the principal guests, says a Latin grace, after which the dinner hall is sounded in the cloisters upon a trumpet. Then with stately pomp the procession slowly advances from the buttery, through the cloisters and into the great dining hall, and the soloist sings the proclamation.

The boar's head in hand bear L. Bedecked with bays and rosemary
And I pray you, my masters, be merry
Then the choir sings in harmonious chorus the curious old Latin carol:
Quot castis in convivio
Caput apriferi
Revidens laudes Domino

By the time the carol is finished the procession has reached the dais, and the boar's head is deposited on the high table. Then the provost, or, in his absence, the senior official of the college who is present, removes the flags, which are used year after year and are of considerable antiquity, and presents to each of the principal guests a portion of the gilded overgreens. The remainder is eagerly scrambled for by the other guests.

After this prelude the dinner is served as ordinarily served that the most valuable and antique silver plate and pewter are used, special sauces are served with the meats, and home brewed ale and queen's own special beer, a liquor of great potency, are served in the valuable old tankards.

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