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Poland, Quaint In Yule Traditions, Faces Sad Christmas

(An issue for N. C. W. C. CHRISTMAS SUPPLEMENT)
 What will this Christmas be like in Poland?
 This is what many people are wondering. Of course one cannot foretell. One must wait and see to really know. But it seems safe to say that it will be the saddest Christmas the heroic Poles have known in nearly a quarter of a century — because their ancient land, partitioned for the fourth time in its history, is divided between two totalitarian neighbors. And what makes this situation such a sad one at this time of year is that of all the peoples on the earth's surface, there is none that observes Christmas with more fervor than the Poles. And, of all the holidays on the calendar, none is observed by the Poles with such enthusiasm and such family celebrations. What then will be the fate of these ancient Christmas observances, when the land is about equal halves between a country which has consistently and relentlessly ground down the Catholic Church and another which is publicly and avowedly anti-God?
 It is possible that Christmas Eve again this year will be the most solemnly celebrated holiday in Poland, at least in some portions of the land, but it is doubtful that the ceremonies will be as widespread, as public, as enthusiastic as they have heretofore.
 Here are some of the customs and traditions that have long been observed in Poland.
 Shortly before the Christmas holidays the organists of parish churches in Poland set about the baking of the "oplatki," a rectangular, unleavened wafer upon which are impressed images of the Christ Child, the Star of Bethlehem, the Crib, etc. These wafers are distributed among the parishioners. Symbols of understanding and brotherhood, they should be found in every household in Poland on Christmas Eve. Before supper on Christmas Eve, the mistress of the household shares the wafers with the members of the family, guests and servants, wishing them prosperity and happiness in the days to come. It is even the custom to send a small piece of the wafer to absent friends as a token of remembrance at Christmas.
 Christmas Eve is a day of fasting rigorously observed in Poland. Until evening hardly anyone eats anything at all. Supper is the first meal of the day and it is an important part of the season's observance. It should, by custom, consist of an odd number of courses, usually nine in memory of the nine choirs of angels that sang the first Christmas Night. The dishes served should include the products of the fields, the forest, the streams and the kitchen garden. None of these domains is neglected, that the fruits of all may be bountiful in the course of the ensuing year. In the Eastern part of Poland that which has come under Soviet Russian domination in recent months, one of the "must" dishes on this occasion is "kutia," a kind of wheat cake with honey.
 One who has been in towns in Western Poland near Christmas time will remember having seen different squares literally filled with fir and pine trees. These are the "choinka" (Christmas trees). The more be Christmas to children of Western Poland without the "choinka" than it would be to American children without their Christmas trees.
 After supper on Christmas Eve Polish villages are visited by the "Star Man," as "Father Christmas" is called in Poland. He has a long white beard, and wears a lamb-skin hat and a fur-lined coat turned inside out. In one hand he carries a basket in the other a rod. A ringing of the doorbell will announce the arrival of the "Star Man" at a given house. The children of the household will huddle about their parents. But the "Star Man" reassures the little ones, calls upon them to recite the Lord's Prayer, reminds them to guard against even little trespasses, and, just before leaving, distributes ginger-cakes, nuts and fruit which the parents have previously put in his basket.
 Blowing winds, blinding snow, frosts or sleet cannot keep the hale and hearty Poles from Midnight Mass. Only the old, the sick and small children remain at home.
 After Midnight Mass, about 2 o'clock in the morning, peasants in some of the mountain regions of Poland go on a tour of visits through the villages wishing the inhabitants a Merry Christmas and strewing oats in their houses.



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Mass of Thanksgiving

Ask the missionary to offer a Mass of Thanksgiving for all the graces and favors you have received through the intercession of Our Lady.

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One of our readers sent us this letter:
 "Dear Father:
 I remember reading in your notes several months ago, a letter offering you two hundred and fifty dollars to pay half the cost of a chapel. I wrote to you at the time and you said you had received the other half. I would like to do something in honor of Our Lady. I have two hundred and fifty dollars. I want to give it for a chapel to be called the Immaculate Conception Chapel. If you can find somebody to give you another two hundred and fifty dollars, I will send you mine at once."
 We hope we will be able to take advantage of this offer. If you can spare two hundred and fifty dollars, a chapel will be built in a mission center. Think of all the good your gift would accomplish.

THAT GIFT

Before you become too busy shopping for Christmas, send us a gift for the missionaries. It's a gift that will last. If you do, we will send it where it is most needed.

FOR OUR MEMBERS

The missionaries offer Fifteen Masses every year for our members. These Masses are for the living and the deceased.

FOR THE CHILDREN

As Christmas draws near we think more and more of the Christ Child in honor of the Divine Child do something for the little ones of the missions. Five dollars will take care of a child for six months in a mission day school.

GREGORIAN MASSES

If you wish to do something in memory of your deceased for Christmas, we suggest that you have a Set of Gregorian Masses offered. Write for our pamphlet on Gregorian Masses.

MEMBERSHIP

Why not become a Member of this missionary association. Those enrolled are helping the Holy Father to maintain the missions in the Near East. All we ask from our members is One dollar a year.

Send all communications to
Catholic Near East Welfare Association
 480 Lexington Ave. at 46th St. New York, N. Y.

Crib On City Hall Lawn

Christmas Custom Introduced To Detroit By Marillac Guild

By Rev. Richard H. Ackerman, C. S. Sp.
(An issue for N. C. W. C. CHRISTMAS SUPPLEMENT)
 LAST November in Detroit, those who represent the active element were surprised to find that they had said on many previous Novembers "Why can't we do something about this place?" and to contend with every Christmas "The Marillac Guild of St. Mary's Hospital determined to do something about it. The determination resulted in the erection of the Crib on the lawn of the City Hall, at perhaps the most public spot in the metropolis.
 Marillac Guild bore the complete expense for the undertaking, and all necessary arrangements were carried out by the enthusiastic Mrs. W. R. Gregory, now Archdiocesan President of the Detroit Council of Catholic Women. The local City Council was approached, and though at first apathetic to the idea, later gave an enthusiastic approval to the project. The same was true of the City Commissioner of Recreation, who eventually entered into the scheme as though it were his own.
 The result was that on Christmas Eve Mrs. Gregory had the great pleasure of presenting to the mayor a Nativity Group property housed in a "stable" built by the Department of Recreation. The figures in the stable were of semi-heraldic style and of a type usually seen in our churches. Thus, the Crib was not so large as to emphasize artificiality, and yet of sufficient size to attract attention. An evergreen background provided by interested friends supplied a simple but adequate decoration.
 At appropriate ceremonies, the Mayor assisted a small crippled child to light the Crib and the setting before the City Hall, from whose height the stone figures of Fathers Gabriel, Richard and Marquette, of LaSalle and Cadillac must have looked down in benediction. It was an uncommonly moving sight to see the Child Mary kneeling with the child before the representation of the Divine Infant, and needless to say, this made a great impression upon the crowd, and if anything were needed to draw the attention of Detroit to the crib at City Hall, the enthusiasm of the original witnesses supplied that need. Brilliantly lighted, the Crib attracted the attention of every passerby. The newspapers also did their share to create interest and many came

Church Manners

(Do's and Don'ts for good manners in church taken from pamphlet issued by Sacred Heart parish, 3140 Avenue and Walnut Street, Pittsburgh, Pa.)

Read nothing but the Missal or prayer book at Mass. Religious papers are meant for your parlor, not your pew. Don't confine the whole of your religious life to fingering the beads.
 When you kneel, kneel. Half-sitters and loungers are lazy.
 When in doubt as to the proper procedure at any religious ceremony, follow the servers—stand, kneel or be seated when they do.
 Do not pray in soliloquy in union with the others who are answering the prayers.
 The proper ending of the "Our Father" is "deliver us from evil, not 'deliver us for all evil.'"
 In going to Communion when the church is crowded, it is good custom in most parishes to approach via the middle aisle and return via the side aisle.
 In going to Communion, don't rush up to the rail—as an Irish server says: "like a lot of cattle." Keep in single file and away from the pews.

Browder Denounced At Jubilee Dinner

NEW YORK.—Denouncing Earl Browder for his recent attack on the American Hierarchy, Judge John A. Mathews, speaking at the silver anniversary of the founding of the High School, said that no American Catholic today "can be in the slightest doubt about the Juda-like offer of brotherhood from the Kremlin through Browder."

India Prelate Tells Need of Native Clergy

NEW YORK.—The hope for a Catholic India lies in the development of a native clergy, the Most Rev. Louis Mathias, Archbishop of Madras, India, said here today in a sermon at the Church of the Holy Innocents.
 The Archbishop appealed for aid from American Catholics, declaring that his Province had a population of 50,000,000 and contains two-thirds of the Catholics in India, who number only about one per cent of the country's 400,000,000 inhabitants.

Varied Views

Herewith are pertinent and significant excerpts from distinguished addresses delivered by noted lay and clerical speakers at the ninth biennial convention of the National Catholic Alumni Federation held in New York.

Wrote Prize Story

The Very Rev. Robert I. Gammon, S.J., President of Fordham University:
 "And what finally are the Alumni to do? They are, above all, to make their own doctrine of the Catholic Church on the subject of Catholic education. They are to recall the vigorous words of the late Pontiff when he said emphatically that we must develop even Catholic graduate schools whenever the spirit of the surrounding institutions is inimical to the Catholic tradition. They are to realize that Catholic education is the shield that identifies the weak sisters, the so-called Liberals in our ranks today. Anybody is capable of enjoying the beautiful liturgy of the Church. Anyone will respond to an appeal for physical suffering; but only those in whose soul the flame of Faith burns brilliantly will sacrifice themselves for higher Catholic education. Shall we find that flame at last in our Catholic alumni? This convention gives us solid grounds for hope."

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