

CHRISTMAS IN EUROPE

How the Children Celebrate

BY DELLA AUSTRALIAN



NORWAY

ENGLAND



SWITZERLAND



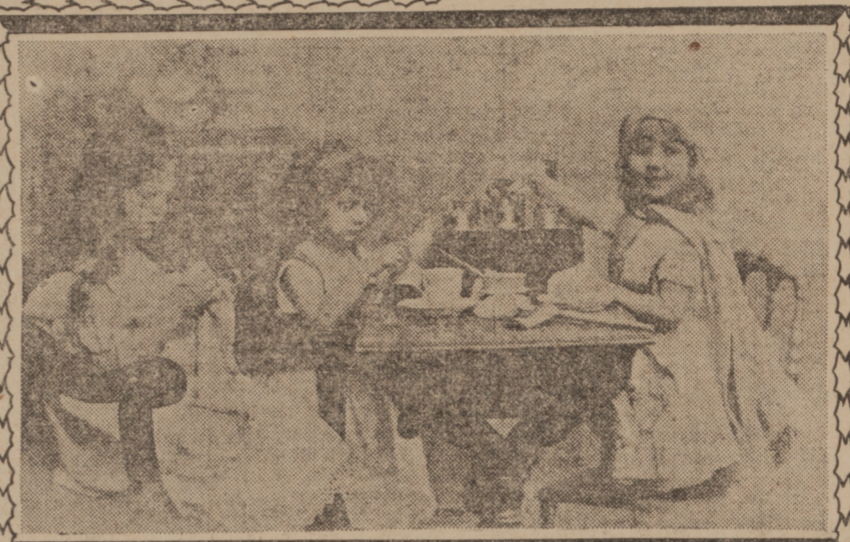
ITALY



GERMANY



FRANCE



RUSSIA

Though every nation has its special holidays and celebrations, Christmas is the one holiday that nearly the entire world celebrates. Much as this day of rejoicing means to the grown-up, it is, above all else, a children's day. When the glad Christmas chimes ring out millions of little folks the world over rejoice and are happy.

Though Germany is supposed to be the home of the tree and Santa Claus, it is in the North countries Sunderkloas first appears. In Norway, Sweden, and Denmark the little folk celebrate its coming for 15 days. The thought of his coming creates a feeling of good fellowship, resulting in much visiting back and forth, dancing and laughter. The children keep the postman busy mailing their letters to Sunderkloas, telling him just what they want. Though their lists are often long, they are careful to explain that if he cannot bring them everything they would like certain things very much, and their parents will look after the rest. On Christmas Eve the household are gathered in the best parlor, waiting his coming impatiently. In the smallest village the church chimes are heard ringing merrily. Inside the family forms a circle and sing Christmas carols. Anxious to make a great noise the younger children join in with wind instruments. A sudden knock tells them he is there. Some rush up to help him off with his fur coat and others assist him to unload his toys. Every little girl and boy expects a pair of skates. In no other country is skating finer, and the children skate so much that they need a new pair every season. They expect caps, hoods and mit-

tens—these are so necessary in a cold climate. They are fond of pets. A gift of a kitten or a bird is prized greatly, and if they cannot have a real horse, a wooden rocking-horse is a satisfactory substitute. When Sunderkloas cannot come he sends his presents on a goat. The goat kicks and, thus scatters the presents on the floor.

In Norway it is customary to make the very birds share in the Christmas gladness. For this purpose a tree is planted in front of every house, hung with herbs and boxes containing tempting seeds, so that the little feathered guests may feast and eat their fill. When Sunderkloas leaves Norway and Sweden he goes to Holland. He always reaches that country on the 5th, instead of the 25th. However cold it is on that day, there is never a fire burning on the hearth, for here he usually comes down the tall chimney, instead of knocking at the door. The children are gathered near the grate, vying with one another to see who will catch the first glimpse of him. Before he unties his bundle he is pretty sure to ask how the children have behaved themselves during the winter. They are dreadfully disappointed if they are not given a kite. Kites mean much to Dutch children, for the winds are strong in Holland, and there is a large sweep of land. In Southern Holland the little girls prefer go-carts to sleds, because their brothers can pull them to school. The children in Holland are as practical as their parents, and they prefer caps and clogs to toys.

Before Santa Claus goes to Switzerland and England he makes a flying trip back

home to Germany. He has had thousands of children writing for trees and toys; he has sent his helpers to Northern Germany for trees and to Munich and Nuremberg for toys. In the great forests men are busy for days cutting down the trees. They are distributed some days before Christmas. The children do not dare to peep into the rooms, for they are certain their inquisitiveness will keep Santa Claus away. Every home, whether a castle or a hut, will want a Christmas tree. It is sure to be trimmed with many candies, gold balls, candies and cakes made to resemble queer-looking men.

It is the custom for large families to gather at grandmother's. They have a large dinner with wine, plenty of cake, apples and nuts. After dinner they rush to the parlor door, which is now unlocked, and as they catch a glimpse of the many brilliant lights, they examine the tree carefully, but they do not touch it until Santa really appears. When they hear the merry jingle and clatter of reindeer's hoofs they form a circle and sing those verses dear to every German child's heart, "O Tannenbaum."

Santa Claus makes haste to pile the gifts at the foot of the tree; he has so many little ones to visit he dare not take

time to hang them up. He hastens on and the children spend the evening finding their gifts and admiring those of their brothers and sisters and cousins. The little boys write to Santa Claus for great soldier's caps, guns and tin soldiers, but their sisters ask for dolls and buggies for their little ones. In Germany Christmas Eve is children's eve, and not a child will go to bed until every candle burns low. In some places the candles are kept lighted for two or three days. But Santa Claus does not forget the little folks in the coldest most far-out-of-the-way places. Every year he makes a flying trip through the mountains. The mountaineers come down into the villages and await his coming. When not playing the children are busy eating cookies, candies, nuts and other goodies, scarce during the rest of the time. The children do not sit up to see Santa Claus; they fear that if they are too curious he will not come. In some of the homes he finds Christmas trees on which to place the toys. Long before sunrise the children are up, busy with their stockings. They all expect to find a pair of skates, a mountain stick and a sled, and whatever else their good friend is kind enough to bring. If it were not for the Christmas gifts winter days in the dreary mountain villages would become very tedious.

Nowhere does Christmas wear a more solemn tone than in Italy. The churches are all lighted and decorated, and the little folks also go to midnight mass to give thanks. On the way they stop to gaze at the brilliant stalls, decorated with candles, lanterns and bright-colored papers. They will not move on until their parents consent to buy them a wax bambino and some sugared hearts. Toward midnight one sees hundreds of women and children walking along lonely country roads going to mass, and the great cathedrals in Rome, Florence and Venice are thronged with worshippers.

Returning, the children hasten home and hang up their stockings, so they may be tight asleep when Santa Claus comes. They are sure to find plenty of confetti and sweetmeats and toys. It is a custom for the royal children to drive about Christmas morning, leaving toys and good things for the poor. Children of the wealthy follow their thoughtful example. They make a great effort to provide the many poor children with clothes, stockings and chicken, a rare treat among the Italian peasants.

New Year is the great holiday in France, though Santa Claus does not neglect them. Fir trees are very scarce, so

only a fortunate few get trees laden with toys, but the toys are so wonderful and beautiful they compensate in no small part. Several weeks before Christmas thousands of children visit the shops to see the toys. There are rooms fitted up especially for the little folks. Here they see wonderful dolls' houses fitted up as completely as a real house. Dolls—beautiful dolls and dressed in the latest fashions. Their gowns are as elegant as though they were made by Paquin and Doucet. The mechanical toys include every kind, from a complete train running on a track to looping the loop. There are airships, balloons, express wagons, trunks, dolls, trousseaus and what not. From then until Christmas Eve they wonder what their toys will be, and have many delightful day dreams thinking of the beautiful toys they have seen. Christmas Eve the children go to bed very early, for they believe Santa Claus will not bring his toys if he finds them awake. They place their stockings on the mantel, and however much noise they hear in the night they do not stir. In the morning they are up early, to find plenty of candy in their stockings, a doll for the girls, and interesting mechanical toys for the boys. As the hour of 12 approaches they rush to the

churches. Immediately after they go to the restaurants, or to their homes for bouillon.

The English are wonderfully enthusiastic about the Christmas celebration. The bakers and mamas are busy for days making plum cakes and tarts. The children are quite as busy writing Santa Claus letters, anxious to let him know what they want. On Christmas Day there is always a great family dinner, with picky of turkey, cider and plum cake. Dinner over, they gather in the parlor and get their first glance of the brilliantly lighted tree. Christmas trees are very plentiful in England, and some are very tall. The children show their gratitude by singing many beautiful carols. When Santa Claus appears he unloads his toys, and they then often dance round him in a circle. In some of the smaller towns the children go through the streets singing beautiful carols. Others dressed as mums, mess knock at friends' doors and play all sorts of pranks.

Though Santa Claus visits little folks in every part of the world, he does not forget his little American friends. He sees they are well provided with Christmas trees, dolls, buggies, horses and everything dear to a boy's heart. In every city throughout the country the Christmas chimes bring words of greeting and love to all mankind, though the sound of these bells means most to the little folks, who are all eagerness to see what Santa Claus has brought them.

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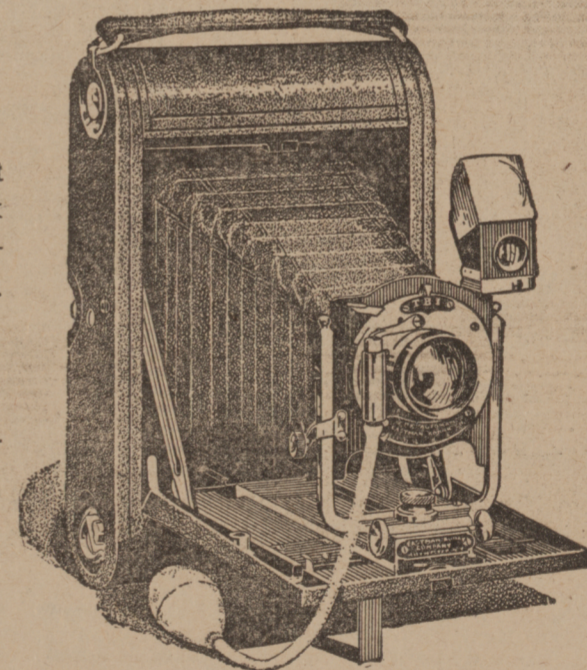
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