

CHRISTMAS IN GERMANY.

Calculating the historical age of man at five thousand years, and assuming that speech at that time ago consisted of one universal language, it is astonishing how many varieties in the method of expressing thought have arisen since then. The influences of climate, the various aspects and surroundings of nature, have effected so many changes on the original unit of intellect, and, to a certain degree, on the physical formation of man, that it has become a matter of serious doubt as to whether the human races really do originate in one common stock. Where time, therefore, works so remarkable changes in such important features as the very form and speech of man, it is scarcely less surprising, though no less remarkable, that such should be the case in such minor points as the observance of Christmas. The customs observed at this period of the year are those of a number of nations, ranging from the sunny, palm-girt shores of the Mediterranean to the bleak, rocky, ice-bound coasts of Norway and "ultima Thule." Christmas, in our minds, is always associated with the glittering snows and icicles of winter; the glossy, dark-green leaves and bright scarlet berries of the holly and the paler colors of the myrtle mistletoe; with the bright blaze and deep-red glow of the yule log roaring up the capacious chimney; and last, but not least, with an unlimited supply of the good things that cheer the heart of man. Christmas, without these accessories, would seem strange and foreign to our ideas. I well remember arriving at Alexandria on the 26th of December, 1863, in the good ship Ceylon, Captain Evans commanding. The sea, the sky, were both bright blue; the fiery sun burnt down upon us as hot as in the hottest days of last July; and as we sailed into the harbor we were greeted with three hearty cheers from the Bipop, which was lying there at anchor, gaily decorated with garlands and festoons of graceful feathery palms, a snow-white tent spread out on deck, and all colors flying. The scene was festive enough; but it was more like a summer fete al fresco than a bona fide Christmas Day, with its wails and carols, in spite of the grog, plum-pudding, and roa t-beef with which an attempt was made to keep up the character of the day. It was no more like Christmas than a picnic to the Devil's Dyke in August. And to make the incongruity of the scene more glaring still, there was the black, dingy hull of the old Ariadne, in which Captain Marrat peered so many of those tales and novels which have made the name of the old ship famous all over the world, and which is now used as a storehouse by the P. and O. Steam Navigation Company. Fancy the shades of "Peter Simple" and "Jacob Faithful" wandering about amongst the divers cases of soft goods, the boxes of the bright sun of Alexandria! And again, in the very home and birthplace of the Saviour, in the city of David—Bethlehem itself—how different the festivities of Christmas to our preconceived notions! The bright, airy, the palms and the varied costumes of the priests, pilgrims, and the procession to the Church of the Nativity; the waxen doll, the "Bambino Santo," representing the Fisherman of Galilee in his infancy, lain in the richly adorned cradle, glittering with gold, silver, and precious stones—forms the component parts of a scene as far removed from our ideas of Christmas as the countries themselves. In all the Southern Italian churches, and along the Italian coast, the altar is adorned at Christmas with a scene of the infant Jesus, a little black figure within a transparency—representing at Christmas the birth of Christ, the adoration of the Magi, the flight into Egypt, and various other incidents in the life of our Lord. From morning to night the churches are crowded with men, women, and children, gazing at and bowing before these creations of the priestly imagination—these ecclesiastical marionettes—stuffed all the mystic accessories of tapers, garlands, silks, and satins, and the steeping clouds of incense roll through the canopied dome. And similar to our own Punch and Judy, these revolving transparencies are shown about the streets, extorting copious homage and veneration from the assembled crowds, in the shape of dimes, pennies, and copper-cents, and in the coin of the temple. It was before one of these exhibitions, shown round by two mendicant friars in the town of Spalato, that I witnessed a scene one Christmas Eve I shall never forget. I had been visiting the magnificent remains of Diocletian's palace, and, strolling through the town with my *compagnon de voyage*, entered a cafe in order to have a game of billiards. But on taking up the cues the padrone came up to us, saying:—"Scusa, signori, oggi e festa e non e permesso di giocare."—"You cannot play to-day; it is forbidden."

Being thus thrown back on our own resources, we strolled into the cathedral, where we were surprised by the sight of the marionettes just as mentioned, and on turning through one of the massive portals of the old Roman palace, wandered down to the quay, and seating ourselves outside a cafe, broached a bottle of Vngava. There we sat, luxuriously sipping the golden liquid, when two men brought one of their revolving silhouettes, and began displaying their exhibition. The crowd attracted by it increased quickly, and there were at least some two hundred assembled, when a stout, burly friar drew near. His approach was quickly noticed, and the appearance soon engaged our own. Black, shaggy eyebrows overhung his glittering eyes like penthouses. The expression of his features was indescribably mobile; there was a hard determination about his mouth, and in fact in his whole manner, the redoubtable orator at once for an original, if not remarkable, man. His name, "Padre Luigi! Padre Luigi!" went round from mouth to mouth; but, totally ignoring the commotion which his advent caused, and apparently insensible to the obsequious change in the demeanor of the two friars, he stood calmly contemplating their exhibition. Suddenly a change came over the spirit of the man, and stepping forward before the two showmen, thundered out to them, "Silence!" and then, elevating the crucifix, continued in a voice that made the place re-echo:—"Eccolo, il vero Pollicenello!"—"Behold the true Punch and Judy!"

Such a scene, signori, oggi e festa e non e permesso di giocare."—"You cannot play to-day; it is forbidden."

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