

**NORWAY AND SWEDEN**

**VULETIDE CUSTOMS IN THE LAND OF THE VIKINGS.**

**Superstitions Regarding Nissen, the Scandinavian Santa Claus—Franks of the Hired Men—Legend of the Brothers Ulv and Grimm.**

The peasantry of Norway and Sweden generally build their homes as near each other as convenient. Often five to seven families live adjoining, constituting a miniature village. After the first day has passed the enjoyment commences. Dancing is the principal enjoyment for the youth, while the old people and the children stay at home and rehearse tales that are replete with orgies and "Nissen," or "Tomtegubben," as he also is called. The latter is a miniature being that corresponds in many respects to the Scotch brownie, but is quite Santa Clauslike in general appearance. The tales that are told have been handed down from generation to generation, and were at one time believed, and even in some districts considerable credence is still given to what is stated about these unnatural beings.

Nissen is the being that is of the greatest interest to the young. He is not a bad fellow at all, if he can only have his way. Where he lives no one knows. It is supposed that he spends the days sleeping in some of the hills or under the ground. Although he is small, he is possessed with supernatural power and can do much to shape the fate of a person, either good or bad. Great care is therefore exercised to do what is known will please Nissen. Special attention must be given him Christmas eve. Should he come around after midnight and his favorite dish, romeogrod, has not been placed outside near the door, trouble will result.

When the people awake in the morning, they can expect to find their cattle in a terrible condition. Nissen generally vents his vengeance on the animals of the farm. They will be tired the next day, showing that Nissen has been playing some prank with them, thereby keeping sleep from them. Articles in the barn will be found topsy turvy, while the horses have been turned around in their stall, but if the dish has been placed out for him he is happy. He shows his gratefulness in deeds. When the hired man in that case goes out to the barn Christmas morning, he may expect to find all his chores done. The horses have been curried so they look fine as silk, while the cows give twice their usual amount of milk. In many cases the wood has been split.

Many superstitious people on this occasion bar the door with a piece of steel. They are afraid of him, and steel is the only thing that Nissen has no power over. He has often been known to have entered the house and stolen food. Many a hired girl can vouch for the fact that she has heard him climbing about on the shelves of the larder, and even in a few cases he has been seen.

The youth still in a manner retain the habits of their ancestry. At eventide they gather together from the small villages and visit their neighbors. As a rule, the ground at this time of year is heavily covered with snow, and the trip has to be made on skis. This is one of the most delightful features of the celebration. The ski is the national article of locomotion, and the boys and girls are adepts in the art of standing on them in the deep declines and rugged hills. The young people go from neighbor to neighbor gathering more of them. They have often no particular destination, but know they will end somewhere. When they come to some particularly large farmhouse, they drop their skis and go inside. Here everything is in readiness for them in the way of food, drink and music. The fiddler strikes up his merry tunes, and those present are hurled into a vortex of merriment.

In most parts of the country this feature is in no way marred, and the dance goes on until late in the morning, when the young go home, only to meet somewhere else the following night.

In some of the primitive parts of Norway, as Guldbrandsalen and Voss, fights were indulged in in years gone by. This custom has not entirely changed, but the fatalities that were so common then do not exist now. Then when a couple went to one of these dances the girl would generally take her lover's funeral gown along, fully expecting that he would need it before the night had gone.

In the southern part of Sweden, Yuletta, a custom that is very beautiful, is recognized by the peasantry. The early morning mass at 4:30 Christmas day is attended by nearly every one. The members of the congregation have often as far as seven miles to walk through the snow. They come from all directions in delegations, each carrying a long pole upon which a piece of pitch is burning. As the surroundings are still in darkness, the sight of those moving lights toward one center is imposing. The hired men in this part of the country have a rather peculiar joke that they try to play upon each other Christmas morning. It is to try to get up early and go over to the neighbors and perform the chores of the hired man there before he gets up. Great delight is taken in the perpetration of this trick.

In the early part of the century it was a belief that on Christmas eve all the unnatural beings joined together in a grand carousal. They were led by Thor, the god of the elements, and they flew through the air, creating a terrible noise and often damage. Johan Welhaven's poem "Asgaardsreien" tells of a deed that was committed by this flock. It was Christmas eve, and a wedding was being celebrated. The bride was of the fairest and the bridegroom the worthiest. Many had been invited, and the general enjoyment was enhanced by the free flow of liquor. When every one was in a sleepy condition from its su-

perfluous use, the doors flew open, and the brothers Grimm and Ulv entered. Ulv had recently been refused by the bride, and he was out for revenge. An attack was made. The women huddled together, while the men tried to rally. The brothers had seized the bridegroom, and Ulv was about to plunge his dagger into his breast. Then a terrible crash was heard, and it seemed as if 10,000 demons were on the outside. The brothers stood as if transfixed. They knew it was Asgaardsreien, and they faltered. The doors flew open, and Ulv was seized by the throat and dragged on the outside. Then the people gathered in the house heard a shrill whiz, as of something flying through the air, and then all was quiet, but Ulv was never seen again. His brother Grimm was badly hurt, but recovered, and on Christmas evenings in years hereafter he told to the children the wedding festival that was visited by Asgaardsreien. —Minneapolis Tribune.

**CHRISTMAS GREENS.**

**A Beautiful Custom Which Comes to Us From the Romans.**  
The fashion of decking the house with greens as we do at Christmas dates back into old Roman times, when a feast in honor of Saturn was celebrated and the temples of the dwellings were dressed with green boughs—possibly a remnant of that tree worship which, "in itself," says Ruskin, "I believe was always healthy," when "the flowers and trees are themselves beheld and beloved with a half worshipping delight, which is always noble and healthful." The plants most in demand for church decoration at Christmas time in England as well as in this country are holly, bay and laurel. English holly is sometimes imported, but the American holly, which comes from Virginia and other sections of the south, is a very good substitute for it. The bay is the rarest plant of the three in this country, but ground laurel is commonly sold and is one of the most effective of the Christmas greens.

In decorating a room with Christmas greens it should be remembered that a very slight touch of color should be used with green and that the most objectionable of all things is too profuse decoration. Christmas greens are usually kept till after Twelfth Night, which occurs on Jan. 6, and they should certainly be cleared away by the 2d of February, or Candlemas day, or otherwise, as tradition says, a goblin will appear for every green leaf left behind. It certainly must have been a slovenly housewife who would leave her Christmas greens up for so many weeks, and goblins of discontent and uncleanness would be sure to invade such a house. —Philadelphia Times.

**Christmas in Denmark.**

The tree is always lighted on Christmas eve in Denmark, and the family all meet together then. The older people get their presents on a plate at their places at the table, and the children's gifts are on the tree. Roast goose is always the chief feature of our Christmas eve dinner and a dish of rice is eaten on Christmas eve before dinner is served. Apple fritters are eaten instead of plum pudding. Christmas day itself is observed strictly as a religious festival, but the day before and the day after Christmas are holidays. The theaters are open, and the young people give dances. Our little Danish children do not know about Santa Claus. They have instead what they call a Nissen, meaning a Christmas brownie in the shape of a little old man with a large gray beard who is supposed to live under the ground. Another Danish superstition is that at midnight Christmas eve the cows in the stable rise and low in salutation, and on Christmas eve young maidens tell their fortunes by breaking the white of an egg into a glass of water and watching the shapes it assumes.

"Glagelig Jul!" is the Danish greeting for "Happy Christmas!" —Selected.

**Christmas in England.**

I fancy an English Christmas is too well known to need much description. English novels have described it fully, and the English illustrated papers at Christmas time give a good idea of the festivities. Every one who has a country place goes there for Christmas. There is generally a large house party, and dancing and skating help to pass the time. The houses and churches are decorated with holly and greens, and "mistletoe hangs on the castle wall." The tree is almost as universal an institution in England as in Germany, and the evening is given over to amusing the children, who play blind man's buff, snap dragon and hide and seek. The proverbial English Christmas dinner always includes roast beef and plum pudding. Every self respecting Englishman goes to church on Christmas morning, and in some country parishes the "waits" still sing their carols from house to house on Christmas eve. In other respects it is kept very much as the American Christmas. —British Consul in Chicago Tribune.

**Christmas Song.**

In the darkness of the morning  
Shepherds on the eastern plain  
Saw a glorious brightness dawning  
Heard a joyful, sweet refrain:  
"Glory in the highest!  
Peace on earth!"  
Then before them, wondering, listening,  
Came the beautiful angel train,  
Came in garments brightly glistening,  
Singing o'er and o'er again:  
"Glory in the highest!  
Peace on earth!"  
Till to all below the story  
Of the wondrous Saviour's birth,  
Till of how he came from glory  
To be crowned the King of earth.  
"Glory in the highest!  
Peace on earth!"  
Sin no more shall close heaven's portals.  
Open far and wide they swing,  
For Messiah unto mortals bring.  
Full forgiveness now doth bring.  
"Glory in the highest!  
Peace on earth!"  
—M. W. Falconer in Chicago Record.

**CHRIST CHILD LEGENDS.**

**Beasts and Birds Have a Prominent Place in Christmas Lore.**

The story of the hunting of the wren in the isle of Man every Christmas is well known. She is known as Our Lady's hen, God's chicken, Christ's bird, because she was present at Christ's birth, brought moss and feathers to cover the Holy Babe and made a nest in his cradle.

In France the cuckoo was believed to have flown from a Christmas log.

A Latin poem of the middle ages tells that the crossbill hatches her eggs at Christmas and her young birds fly off in their full plumage at Easter.

The Mohammedans have many legends of Isa, or Jesus. One tells that when he was 7 years old he and his companions made birds and beasts of clay, and Isa proved his superiority by making his fly and walk as he commanded.

In the Tyrol they say the ravens used to have snow white plumage, but one day Jesus wanted to drink at a stream, and they splashed and so befouled the water that he could not, so he said, "Ungrateful birds, you are proud of your snow white feathers, but they shall become black and remain so until the judgment day."

A Russian legend tells that the horse flesh is considered unclean because when Christ lay in his manger the horse ate the hay from under his bed, but the ox would not and brought back on his horns to replace what the horse ate.

The Britons believe that the ox and the ass talk together between 11 and 12 o'clock every Christmas eve.

In Germany the cattle kneel in their stalls at that hour. Another version says they stand up.

The ass and the cow are sacred because they breathed upon the Holy Babe in his stall.

The ass is the most sure footed of animals because he carried the holy family to Egypt by night. He has had a cross on his back ever since.

Old women used to sprinkle holy water on the ass and the cow to drive away disease.

Bees are said to buzz in their hives at the exact hour of our Saviour's birth.

In north Germany the version of the man in the moon is thus told: One Christmas eve a peasant greatly desired cabbage, but as he had none in his own garden he stole from his neighbor. Just as he filled his basket the Christ Child rode by on his white horse and said, "Because thou has stolen on Christmas eve thou shalt sit in the moon with thy cabbage basket." And there he still sits. —Philadelphia Ledger.

**CHRISTMAS GIVING.**

**A Custom That Comes From the Three Wise Men Who Followed the Star.**

Of course you need not be told of the origin of presenting gifts at this season of the year. The three wise men who followed the star until it remained stationary over the stable in Bethlehem, and who, entering the hovel wherein were the cow and the ass, knelt down before the beautiful Babe in the manger, placed before him presents of myrrh, frankincense and gold. Their example is the example that you follow today, 1,895 years after the Magi made obeisance to the Child Jesus, and when you place presents before the little ones who are made in the image of the Divine Babe you are doing what was done by the eastern kings, but remember that to carry out their example to the full the babes in the mangers, the little ones in hovels, must not be forgotten.

Most of our Christmas customs come from the German. Kris Kingle is a legendary myth whose origin is involved in much doubt. Formerly in the small villages of Germany the presents made by all the parents were sent to some one person, who, in high buskins, a white robe, a mask and an enormous flax wig, and known as Knecht Rupert, went from house to house. He was received by the parents with great reverence, and, calling for the children, presented the gifts to them according to the accounts of their conduct received from the parents. It appears as highly probable that this custom gave rise to our present innumerable legends about Santa Claus. —Philadelphia Times.

**Christmas Weather.**

In a note following some quotations regarding Christmas and winter weather the author of an old London publication says, "These prognostics of weather, etc., I look upon as altogether uncertain, and were they narrowly observed would as often miss as hit." Besides being quoted as above the proverb is varied as follows: "A hot May makes a fat churchyard" and "A green winter makes a fat churchyard." To the latter proverb is added this note, "This proverb was sufficiently confuted in the year 1667, when the winter was very mild, and yet no mortality or epidemical disease ensued the summer or autumn following." —Philadelphia Ledger.

**Christmas.**

Heap on more wood.  
The wind is chill,  
But, let it whistle as it will,  
We'll keep our merry Christmas still.  
—Walter Scott.  
Lo! now is come our joyful feast!  
Let every man be jolly.  
Each room with ivy leaves is dressed  
And every post with holly.  
—Withers.  
For little children everywhere  
A joyous season still we make,  
We bring our precious gifts to them,  
Even for the dear child Jesus' sake.  
—Phoebe Cary.  
Blow, bugles of battle, the marches of peace!  
East, west, north and south let the long quarrel cease.  
Sing the song of great joy that the angels began.  
Sing of glory to God and of good will to man.  
—Whittier.  
Again at Christmas did we weave  
The holly round the Christmas hearth.  
The silent snow possessed the earth.  
—Tennyson.

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