

# Christmas Customs of Every Land Seen in Washington

By EDWARD B. CLARK  
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WASHINGTON not only has a United States Christmas celebration but it has the festivities that mark the Christmas season in all the civilized nations of the world. At the Russian embassy there is a Christmas fete after the manner of the people in the land of the czar; there are French doings at the great European republic's official residence, and there is the genuine old English Christmas at the home of the British ambassador, and so one may go on through the entire list of foreign representatives, not even barring the embassies of the day, as Christian nations view it, the oriental officials have holiday dinners.

The South American people make much of Christmas. It is the great feast day in all Latin-American countries and the ambassadors and attaches and their families do not forget the customs of their native lands simply because for a few seasons they have been transplanted to new scenes. The "open house" is the order of the day in nearly every official residence in Washington after the holiday. Large families are the rule rather than the exception among the ambassadors and ministers from the southern European and from the Central and South American countries. The children have a gala time of it at home and then the visiting begins. The presents that

green and so are the wild honey-suckle and the laurel, trees and plants that are abundant along the Potomac.

President Roosevelt was, as everyone knows, a nature lover. He took every opportunity that offered to get away from the city. His daily walks and rides took him far into the country, and on Christmas day during the last four years of his term of office he went to Pine Knot, a wooded, mountain country place that belonged to his wife. Mr. Roosevelt stayed in Washington until



CHINESE STUDENTS AT CHRISTMAS REUNION AT CHINESE LEGATION

are purchased and stored temporarily in the embassies are not all for the adults and children of the household. The probable visitors of the day are borne in mind and as a little Brazilian boy in Washington put it once: "I have had ten Christmases in ten hours."

Church going on Christmas day is the rule in Washington. Some persons have been unkind enough to say that all the American officials go to church on Christmas because the fact is very apt to get into the newspapers and "it reads well at home." The majority of the Central American and South American diplomats temporarily resident in Washington, are nominally at least good churchmen, and they attend service as a matter of training and as a matter of course. Practically all the women from the Latin-American countries are religiously devout, and with them church going on Christmas is a matter of duty that is not to be neglected under any circumstances. No child is allowed to miss church and the result is that all the capital city temples of worship are well filled on the feast day.

President Taft always has been a regular attendant at church and his service going since he became president establishes no precedent. Mrs. Taft and the children are Episcopalians, while the president is a Unitarian, and so it is that Sundays and other church days are the only days in the year that the family becomes in a sense divided. The president attends service at the Unitarian church of All Souls, of which the Rev. U. G. B. Pierce is the pastor. Mrs. Taft and the children are regular attendants at St. John's Episcopal church which in years past was attended by so many presidents of the United States that it came to be known semi-jocously as "the Church of State." Mrs. Roosevelt and her children also attended St. John's on Sundays and Christmas days, while Mr. Roosevelt went to the little German Reformed church on Fifteenth street, and rarely missed a service.

This Christmas season the majority of the members of both houses of congress are in the capital city. Time was, and not so long ago, that senators and representatives took their families and went home to spend the holiday season, but now, for financial reasons, the national legislators in the main elect to stay in Washington for their holiday making. Prior to the passage of the last railroad rate bill most of the members of congress had passed on the railroads. Now they have to pay their way when they travel and for those who live at a distance from Washington this means a considerable expenditure of money in case they desire to go home at Christmas.

Every employe of the White House is given a Christmas turkey by the president. This is a custom of many years standing, and only once or twice has it been broken. The clerks in the departments, and there are many thousands of them, not only get a Christmas holiday, but are allowed to leave their work at noon on the day previous in order that they may do their Christmas shopping. The lot of the department clerk in Washington is not a hard one, as far as the matter of holidays is concerned. Every employe is given a month's leave on full pay in each year, and is allowed another month "to be sick in." This last statement means, of course, only that if an employe is ill he or she receives full pay for one month on receipt of the physician's certificate that the illness has been real. The clerks get seven or eight holidays each year, and these, taken in connection with the month's leave, and with the fact that the hours of work number only seven and a half each day, make the laboring condition of the department clerk fairly comfortable.

Washington's Christmas is always a green Christmas, even if there is snow on the ground, for in this latitude there are many trees and shrubs that hold their leaves and their color all through the year. As a matter of fact there is rarely any snow in the capital city that is worthy of the name. All last winter, save for a few hours, the streets were bare of snow. Then came March 4th, inauguration day, and a record-making blizzard with a downfall of snow, hail and rain mixed. The holiday is always

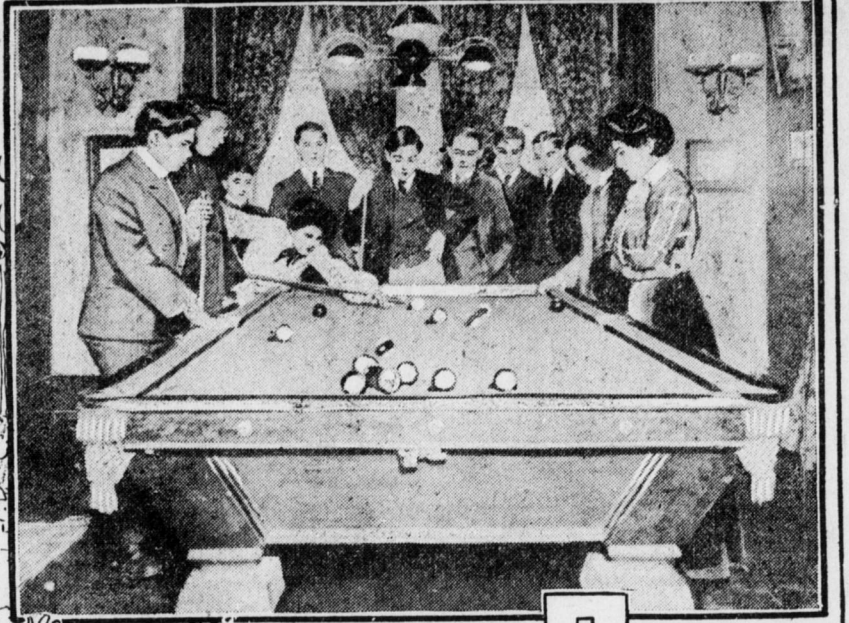
the festivities of the day were over and the children had a chance to take account of their presents, and then he left for the log cabin in Virginia where he could sit in front of a huge open fire with a genuine "old Christmas" back log. On these Christmas outings Mr. Roosevelt did a little rabbit shooting and tried to do some turkey shooting, but the major part of the day time he spent in the fields armed only with an opera glass, with which he studied the winter birds, always with an eye sharpened to the possibility of finding some species that was rare.

President Taft loves nature, too, in a way, but he is not much of a trumper excepting where the walk leads over the golf links on which he spends his holiday afternoons, Christmas included, for in Washington because of the comparative mildness of the climate, the game of golf is possible nearly every day in the year.

There are several hundred officers of the army and navy stationed in Washington, most of them being detailed for office work in the departments for a term of four years. The naval officers perhaps enjoy their holiday-making in the capital more than do their brothers of the army, for the sailors have been compelled to spend many Christmases at sea away from their wives and families, while here they may gather their families about them and not break any sea regulations in so doing. The army officer, whether he goes to the Philippines or to some distant frontier post, ordinarily takes his family with him and so Christmas day does not to him necessarily bring with it the sense of loneliness and homesickness that it brings to the man at sea.

In the biological survey, which is a bureau of the department of agriculture, there are many scientists at work. Most of these men have spent a large part of their lives in the wilds studying birds and mammals, and shells, plants and fishes, to say nothing of reptiles. The office life is irksome to these scientists. They belong to the free air, the barren plains, and the pine forests. So it is that on every holiday that brings with it a release from office cares, they take to the open fields. About the hills in many places about Washington on Christmas day there are to be seen the little camp fires of the scientists who are cooking their mid-day Christmas dinners under the open sky.

Some time ago all the bird students in the United States were asked, if they could, to make a trip afield on Christmas day and to make a list of the birds that they found. Thousands of bird lovers followed the suggestion and are still following it. Each one of the students turns in a report to a central headquarters giving the names of the birds that on Christmas day fell under his observation. As a result of this practice the Washington scientists have many valuable notes concerning "out of season" birds. For instance, the report came to Washington on a Christmas or two ago, that on the holiday four mocking birds were seen and positively identified in the fields near Boston, Mass. Other birds were reported from other northern localities, birds that in the ordinary course of things ought to have been far south of the Ma-



CHRISTMAS PARTY OF PAN-AMERICAN YOUNG PEOPLE

son and Dixon line. So it is that a Washington Christmas day idea has been made to serve the ends of science.

It has been said that in years past a great many of the senators and representatives in congress went home to spend the holidays, but that now the practice largely has passed. An exception should be made for the past, and the present, as well, in the cases of those senators and members who have in charge legislation which has been proposed in bill form at the opening of the session of congress. When bills are introduced they are at once referred to committees and if once referred to committees and if the measures are of importance the chairmen of the committees to which they have been sent, make

were all busy erecting presepios in the homes of the quality, while the poorer folk were constructing their own. As the mainland grows more sophisticated the quaint old devotion is fading away; but in conservative Sicily people still make the presepio every year as they dress Christmas trees in New York. All over the island families are busy from December 1 to 15 putting their old presepios in order, or making new ones; and there is much calling to and fro to compare results and admire new and elaborate specimens of the art. The presepio may be a little thing on a stand in one corner, or it may occupy the whole side of a room.

It may represent a whole mountain side, made of the rough, flexible bark or the cork tree. Peaks, crags and precipices abound, with winding trails, houses and castles of colored cardboard, forests of twigs and sometimes tiny pipes to furnish brooks and lakes. In the center is the grotto, with the holy family within. A sky of blue paper is stretched above, with the Star of Bethlehem conspicuous, and over the hills come the shepherds bearing the gifts to the babe.

Spain, like Sicily, has never lost the presepio, and in both Spanish and Sicilian cities there are booths for the sale of miniature shepherds, magi and all the accessories of the art. In France the creche is not made at home, as in the southern countries, but it used to be a part of the Christmas decorations of every French church, and is still so in the rural districts. Many a polished cosmopolite of Paris can remember working busily for days before Christmas in his childhood to help freshen up and rejuvenate the creche of his parish church in some little village of France. In the villages close by Paris to-day children who go about the streets singing Christmas carols carry a little creche in a box upon their shoulders.

The manger typifies the difference between the Latin and the Teuton Christmas. The Latin Christmas is a purely religious festival, as much so as any other feast of the church. It has no particularly domestic or social quality. Italian children never get presents on Christmas day. That is done on All Souls' day, in October, when they believe—if they are very small—that the spirits of their departed relatives have come back in the night and left presents for them; undoubtedly a very ancient relic of ancestor worship. It is the great Teuton family of nations that give presents to children on Christmas day. And the Christmas tree came out of the vast forests where dwelt the heathen German and Scandinavian tribes. It is, in fact, a pagan relic, passed down from primitive forest dwellers and worshippers. Where Celt, Slav or Latin use it, they have borrowed it.

France, half Latin and half Celt, dashed with Gaul and Viking, is a family by herself in this, as in everything. She builds the manger in the churches, but at home, though she seldom dresses a Christmas tree, little Babette and Pierre set their shoes by the fireplace instead of hanging up their stockings. Pierre and Babette, if they are very small indeed, believe that "le petit Jesus" or "le petit Noel"—"the little Jesus" or "the little Christmas"—have brought the gifts. But the average French child is as sophisticated as young America, and Pierre has to be a very little boy indeed, to believe in "le petit Jesus." No French or Italian child ever hears of Santa Claus till he comes to America; by which it may be gathered that that good saint was strictly German, and when he emigrated, came to America like all the rest of the Germans.

The growth of the typical American Christmas, with its universal Christmas greens and present-giving, is a curious phenomenon. It has no roots in American history. The original settlers of New England never observed it. The Dutch of New Amsterdam scarcely noticed it, but made New Year's the great, joyous, popular festival. Within the memory of old people still living Christmas passed unobserved in New York, while all holiday merrymaking centered in New Year's day. Modern America has built up a Christmas festival of its own, and has rejected definitely the religious feast in favor of the social and domestic one. In one way, however, the American Christmas is more religious than any and all the Latin church feasts put together. One who has lived through a year's changing round of saints' days in Italy, in all of which no work is done and the people take holiday, will observe that the thought of the people never goes out to those in need. The abounding giving of an American Christmas; the uneasy, uncomfortable feeling that every child, at least, must have, if possible, a good dinner and a present on Christmas day, is quite unknown in the Latin countries.

The feeling that poor old bums and hoboes, even the criminals in their prisons, the paupers in their almshouses, the beggars, the unworthy—all ought to have something good to eat on that day, and a little Christmas cheer in some form—is part of the American Christmas.

The races that come to the melting pot of America keep their home Christmas for only a few years after they arrive. Then they drift off into a more or less Americanized Christmas. For a few years after they come, also, they try to eat their traditional dishes at Christmas time. The Hungarian housewife makes the Christmas cakes which a long line of ancestral cooks made before her across seas. They are round balls of dough, covered with honey and poppy seed, and then baked. The Bohemians and Poles also make poppy seed cakes, each in a different style. The Sicilian housewife, too, has a traditional Christmas cake. It is a ring of dough with a hole in the middle—the Italian doughnut, in fact—which is fried, sprinkled with sugar and eaten hot.



SPANISH MINISTER AND SECRETARY STARTING ON ROUND OF CALLS



MISS KIYO TAKAHIRA, DAUGHTER OF THE JAPANESE AMBASSADOR

a study of them in order that their merits and demerits may be determined. In some cases this means long and continued study and it is not at all an unusual thing to find a committee chairman giving over the joys of the home life on Christmas day to consult precedents and to formulate arguments to be used for or against some proposed legislation, and to find him doing this in the seclusion of a stuffy office room on Christmas day.

A good many Washington people, especially those who came here from the south, go over into Virginia to hunt on Christmas day. In parts of the Old Dominion fox hunting is still the order of the winter day, and if the fox is not in evidence there are always rabbits and quail, while on the lower Potomac and in the marshes along Chesapeake bay in open winters, the ducks and the geese are fairly abundant. The outdoor life appeals strongly to the southerner, and in many cases the northerners who have come to the Potomac country have formed the hunting habit and join the Christmas day outing parties of their southern cousins.

Christmas is the great holiday of Washington. From high to low the people make the most of it. There is good cheer everywhere evident and charity is not forgotten.

## AMERICA'S CHRISTMAS THE BEST OF ALL

An occasional Jersey commuter, familiar with the religious section of Barclay street, is commonly the only sort of American in New York who knows a presepio by sight. Yet the presepio is the sign of the Latin Christmas, as the fir tree is of the northern. The manger of the Barclay street windows shows only the inside of the stable, with the figures and the cattle done in Italian terra cotta. But the real presepio in its native land may show the whole countryside as well, and if the pilgrims wending their way to the manger are good Sicilian peasants, bearing good Sicilian wine and cheese on their donkeys, they are only the more interesting.

St. Francis, born in the quaint little town of Assisi among the brown Umbrian hills, in 1182, invented the presepio to make the Christmas story plain to the simple, illiterate common people. During the 800 years since it has remained a favorite devotion in Latin Europe. The Italian and Spanish call it the presepio, the manger; the French the creche, the cradle; and the Hungarians and Belgians, Bethlehem, or Bethlehem.

Only a few years since not a carpenter could be hired in Rome or Naples for weeks before Christmas. They