WELCOME CHRISTMAS.

Thrice welcome, day of days! The skies
  Ope wide their gates at thy command
And Heaven's sublimest symphonies
  Roll grandly over sea and land.
The dews of charity distill
  Their incense everywhere, and comes
A universal joy to fill
  The highest and the humblest homes.

Thy son doth bless with holier kiss!
  Thy breath a grander these doth hymn!
Thy wings do close the black abyss
  Of evil, and no longer dim
Are valleys of eternal peace,
  Or land where its own restores,
But skies uncurtained show increase
  Of glory on thy crystal shores!

And thou dost light for me again
  The yule-log on the homestead hearth.
The graves where long the dead have lain
  Do open, as a vernal garth,
And bloom for me once more the loves
  That roseate made my youthful days;
Within thy firelight lives and moves
  My mother, haloed with the rays

Of Paradise, and as her twin
  Lips with the olden fondlings part,
And I, enraptured, cuddle in
  The velvet haven of her heart,
I see the pall of doubt unfold,
  And on the pathway of the sun
God's finger writes in lines of gold
  The words, "For Home and Heaven are one!"

Then, too, thy chimney glow reveals
  My father's face; the old armchair
Is his again, and Lulu kneels
  Beside him with her Christmas prayer;
The sweet-voiced pleadings uttered are,
  And grandpa's lips do part to say,
"Thank God the gates are all ajar
  'Twixt Home and Heaven on Christmas Day!"

Then, welcome, day of days! Thy dawn
  Is vibrant with familiar tones,
The veil that dims our sight is drawn,
  The farther shore thy sunlight zones.
No growth of skeptic fancy now
  Our faith in glad reunion leavens,
For 'tis engraven on thy brow
  That Heaven is Home's, and Home is Heaven's!

—Century

CHRISTMAS IN MANY CLIMES

IN ENGLAND.

AMONG all the Germanic nations Christmas has ever been the most popular of all church festivals. In England it was, and is, the one great national feast, and in the Anglican church and among the Lutherans of Germany the exclusion of many minor festivals from the calendar has only concentrated the popular affection upon Christmas.

The Puritans made a vigorous battle against what they thought a superstition, and in 1652 it was ordered by Parliament "that no observation shall be had of the five-and-twentieth day of December, commonly called Christmas Day, nor any solemnity used or exercised in churches upon that day in respect thereof." A little before, in 1647, the town crier of Canterbury proclaimed that "Christmas and all other superstitious festivals should be put down, and a market held upon Christmas Day." But none of these orders had much effect. In Scotland John Knox did succeed in pretty effectually suppressing the observance of Christmas, in the Lowlands, at least, but he simply transferred the popular customs and superstitions to New Year's Day. There is an English rhyme of this period that illustrates the popular feeling on the subject:

All plums the prophets' sons defy,
  And spice-broths are too hot;
Treason's in a December pye,
  And death within the pot.
Christmas, farewell, thy days I fear,
  And merry days are done;
So they may keep feasts all the year,
  Our Saviour shall have none.

In Germany.

At home around the tree, is the culminating point of Teutonic revelry in Yuletide. The enthusiasm and the sentiment of youth and age have then attained their pitch, and they are permitted to give full vent to it for the evening. The tree is illuminated at the appointed hour; "Still night, holy night," is sung in the domestic circle; a sweet vapor of domestic unity is inhaled amid smiles and tears, and the feast of the Nativity is thus initiated.

In Norway.

One of the prettiest of Christmas customs is the Norwegian practice of giving on Christmas Day a dinner to the birds. On Christmas morning every gable, gateway, or barn-door is decorated with a sheaf of corn fixed on the top of a tall pole, wherefrom it is intended that the birds shall make their Christmas dinner. Even the peasant will contrive to have a handful set for this purpose; and what the birds do not eat on Christmas Day remains for them to finish at their leisure through the winter.

In France.

In Paris Christmas Day is kept as a religious festival, and many who would not dream of going to church on Sundays make a point of attending mass on le Jour de Noel, and the blaze of the tapers falls on crowded congregations, men, women and children, kneeling, standing and sitting on the wide area of the Madeleine and Notre Dame. Of late years it has become chic to attend midnight mass on Christmas Eve, and so, pouring down along the boulevards, all the world and his wife try to find a place in one or other of the fashionable churches, and, after the service is over, all go round to see and criticise the Creche.

In Mexico.

The devout of Mexico go to early mass on Christmas morning. The minority devote themselves to a toothsome breakfast, in which tortillas, chile con carne (boiled beef and red peppers), tomalis (corn husks stuffed with force meat), are the leading features. After breakfast come the festivities. These are of all sorts and are imbued with a religious spirit of almost another age. In each house, where the residence can afford it, a little nacimiento (altar) is raised in parlor, drawing-room or library, which is supposed to typify the birth of the Holy Child. Wealthy people go to great lengths at times, having a manger and a barn constructed, and hire men to play the parts of the wise men of the East and St. Joseph.

Another curious custom consists in friends going from house to house, tapping on the door, and on being asked: "Who is there?" replying: "The Holy Virgin and Saint Joseph ask lodgings in your household." This custom continues for nine days before Christmas to illustrate the journey of Mary and Joseph to Bethlehem

SERVIANS PREPARING THE NATIONAL DISH.

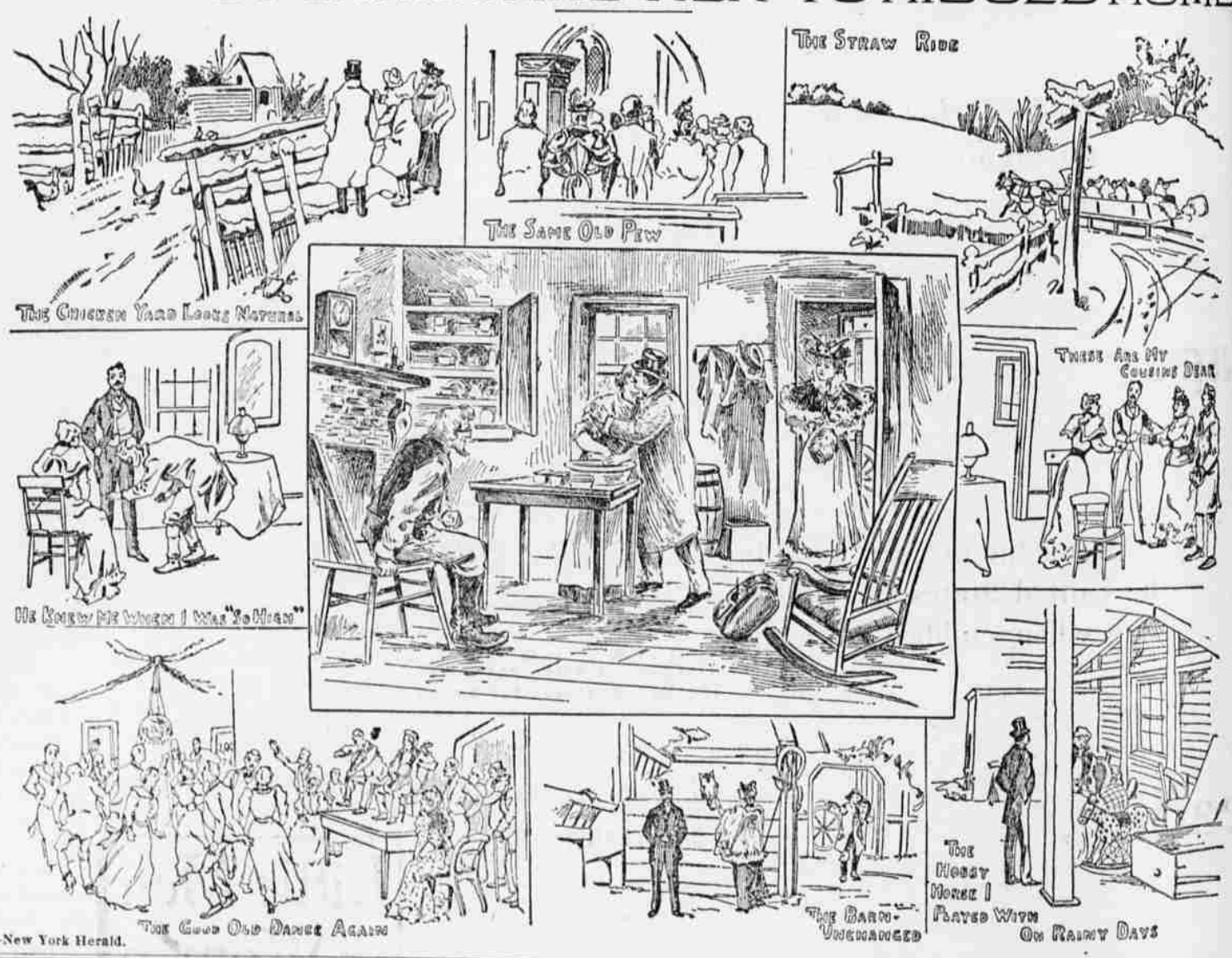
In Servia.

The Servians have many curious Christmas customs, half pagan, half Christian in their origin. There is the Badnjak, a piece of wood, corresponding somewhat to the yule log, cut down and brought into the house with great ceremony, and then, after being basted with honey and butter, in the hope that bees and cattle may be prosperous in the coming year, is burned; and there is a sort of Father Christmas or Santa Claus, in the person of a Polazenik, a specially honored visitor, who is the first person received into the house on Christmas morning. Then there is the cooking of the national Christmas dish. What turkey is to the American, pork is to the Servian. Even the poorest family will save up all the year round so as to be able to purchase a pig at Christmas. On Christmas Eve the pig is killed, and on the following day, after dinner has been served and the roast pig duly discussed, toasts are drunk, and heroic songs sung to the accompaniment of a one-stringed instrument. The room is strewn with straw, in memory of the stable in which our Lord was born.

In Austria.

As early as the 6th of November, Vienna assumes an air of festivity; her citizens have not forgotten that it is the anniversary of their patron saint, St. Nicholas. After a week's intermission, the public squares are once more crammed with booths of all dimensions and description, forming regular avenues, crowded several weeks before Christmas with representatives of every social grade. If we take a stroll through the Ringstrasse, Christmas Eve, we shall find that aristocratic thoroughfare deserted, but all the flats or apartments are illuminated. Christmas trees, loaded with presents, form the evening's chief attraction.

HER FIRST CHRISTMAS VISIT TO HIS OLD HOME



—New York Herald.

FELLOW-TRAVELERS.

CHRISTMAS eve away from home and the loved ones is a dreary period of the year. At least so thought Charles McKeena, as he traversed the top of his nine cars of potatoes en route for the Southern market. He was one of the young dealers, and, as his operations were not extensive it was imperative for him to personally "fire" his own cars. If none of the potatoes were frozen before he reached New Orleans, a handsome profit would await him there, for there was a big margin just at this time.

It was lonesome work at the best, not without an element of danger, and work which required constant attention in order to keep the fires from going out. Seated before the fire in one of the cars he rested his head on his hands and meditated about his wife and the two little ones. The fire glowed brightly and his heart was filled with hope, energy and ambition as he gazed into its ruddy depths. The train was speeding along at a normal rate, and the steady rhythmic sound was resumed upon the rails and —then he fell asleep.

How long he rested in his chair he did not know. Then he came to himself with a start, being almost thrown from his chair by a jolt as the train again stopped on a switch. Drawing out his watch he consulted it, and then gave an exclamation of alarm. He had overslept himself; the fires were probably out by this time; the frost had entered the potatoes, and he was ruined. Hastily making his way

"HELLO,' SAID M'KEENA."

to the next car, to his surprise the fire in the stove was burning brightly, and the interior, if anything, was too warm. He hurried to the next car. There it was even warmer than in the first car. He stared at the stove in amazement.

"That's funny," he commented, pulling at his mustache.

The next five cars were in a like condition and he was immensely relieved and more puzzled than ever. Who in the world could have fired his stoves for him? He entered the last car, and was surprised to see a tramp seated near the stove, toasting his toes to his heart's content.

"Hello," said McKeena.

"Hello," responded the tramp to McKeena's exclamation.

For a moment they stood there, and then McKeena, waving his hand, said:

"Don't mind me."

"All right," remarked the tramp, and with that he seated himself again before the stove. McKeena also drew up a chair. Then he took a cigar case from his pocket.

"Smoke?" he asked.

"Thanks."

After a few whiffs the tramp remarked:

"Be you the feller that runs the potatoes?"

"I am."

McKeena himself lighted a weed and then said:

"I presume it was you who fired the stoves?"

"It were."

"Much obliged."

"Don't mention it. You lemme ride and I'll call it square, pard."

"Very well. How far are you going?"

"New Orleans."

Then they both smoked in silence. McKeena examined his companion casually.

"HIS VISITOR ATE RAVENOUSLY."

He was a tall man of athletic figure, and it was evident that he possessed enormous strength. His face was covered with a bushy growth of whiskers and with eyes about as bright as two coals. He puffed at his cigar with evident enjoyment.

"How's potatoes?" he said.

"Good."

"Any family?"

"Yes; wife and two, and I miss them especially on Christmas eve."

The tramp took another whiff, and something like moisture appeared in his eyes.

"I had a wife once," he remarked.

"Indeed!" said the other with a show of interest. "Where is she now?"

"She was sent to j— I mean, she died. She had consumption."

McKeena attempted to give evidence of sympathy and the ragged intruder tipped back his head and his eyes gleamed more than ever.

"Had a kid, too," he remarked.

"What's become of him?"

"He's in the reform—that is to say, stranger, he is now a prosperous merchant in New York. He lives on Fifth avenue, he does, and has an English coachman."

"You don't tell me?" commented McKeena, endeavoring to look as though he believed the other's narration.

"I'on honor."

"Any vittels?"

"Yes."

McKeena produced his lunch-basket and his visitor ate ravenously, as though he had not touched food for twenty-four hours.

"You turn in, pard," remarked the tramp. "I'll keep up the fires."

The other hesitated, but finally laid down and took a nap. All the way to New Orleans this programme was followed. Early one morning as the train stopped, the tramp said:

"Good-bye. I think I'll light out before we git to town."

Then he turned to the other and handed him an envelope. Before McKeena could answer he was gone. The former mechanically handled the envelope and gazed doubtfully at the new, crisp $20 bill and the following message:

"You Did me a good Turn. Bi a Christmas present fur de Kids. I wus Hard pressed Wen I cum to de train an yu Took a stranger in an Nourished Him. Giv mi Regards to de little wife; Likewise de Kids an Bi a Drum fer de Boy. at first i thought i'd Bore you, But i'm glad i diddent Now. i Had de gun on you wen yu com in, but yu were Kerteous an i diddent Shoot. i wuz thinkin' to Lay yu out an i Ain't sory i diddent. with Kind reggards, From yur ole Pal, believe me, verry Faithfully yourn, Bill McGinnissy."

Bill McGinnissy was the name of the train-robber whose misdeeds had made him the terror of the South. He was wanted for about fifty crimes. The young merchant shuddered and then gazed doubtfully at the new, crisp $20 bill.