

## Christmas Around the World

**Sweden.** – In Sweden the celebrations last for a month, from Saint Lucy's on 13th December to Saint Knut's Day on 13th January.

On Saint Lucy's Day, Swedish families are awakened with coffee and freshly-baked buns by the daughter of the house. She is dressed in a white gown with a red sash<sup>1</sup>, and wears a wreath of greenery topped with lighted candles on her head.

To end the Christmas meal "rice porridge" is served. This is rice pudding containing a single almond<sup>2</sup> ... the person who finds the nut will marry within the next year.

**Norway.** – Norwegian children always remember a little gnome called 'Nisse' at Christmastime. He guards all the farm animals, and he plays tricks on the children if they forget to put out a bowl<sup>3</sup> of special porridge for him.

In the dark afternoons the Viking tradition of 'Christmas buck' is practised by children who go from house to house asking for goodies.

**Germany.** – In Germany Christmas preparations begin on the eve of 6th December. Children leave letters on their window sills<sup>4</sup> for Christkind, a winged figure dressed in white robes and a golden crown, who distributes gifts. Sometimes these letters are decorated with glue<sup>5</sup> and sprinkled<sup>6</sup> with sugar to make them sparkle<sup>7</sup>.

**France.** – In France, on Christmas Eve, children leave their shoes by the fireplace to be filled with gifts by Père Noël<sup>8</sup>.

In the morning they find that sweets, fruit, nuts<sup>9</sup> and small toys<sup>10</sup> have been hung on the tree. In cathedral squares the story of Christ's birth is re-enacted by both players and puppets.

**England.** – In England, almost every town has a Christmas tree, full of coloured balls and lights. English parents helped by their children decorate their homes with ivy, holly and mistletoe. Holly leaves represent Christ's crown of thorns, the berries represent the drops of blood. Holly guards against the evil eye. Ivy is a symbol of fertility.

Mistletoe stands for peace, protection and love. An old custom is to kiss under mistletoe, picking a berry each time until all are gone.

**Australia.** – Christmas comes in the middle of Australian summer, when the weather is very hot. Many people have their Christmas Day meal on the beach. Homes are decorated with ferns<sup>11</sup> and palm leaves, together with special flowers. As evening falls, parks fill with hundreds of people for carol services by candlelight.

**United States.** – Christmas celebrations vary greatly in the United States, as the inhabitants are of many ethnic origins.

In the South firearms are shot to greet distant neighbours on Christmas Day. In Alaska a star on a pole<sup>12</sup> is taken from door to door, followed by 'Herod's men' who try to capture the star. Colonial doorways are often decorated with a pineapple<sup>13</sup>, a symbol of hospitality.

**Canada.** – In Labrador, turnips<sup>14</sup> are saved from the summer harvest and are given to children, with a lighted candle pushed into a hollowed-out hole; in Nova Scotia, a country settled by Scottish Highlanders, songs and carols are sung each Christmas morning.

(adapt. from 'The Christmas handbook' by M. Bird and A. Dart)

1. sash [sæʃ]: sciarpa, fascia (a tracolla o alla vita); – 2. almond [ˈɑ:mənd]: mandorla; – 3. bowl: ciotola, scodella; – 4. sill: davanzale; – 5. glue: colla; – 6. to sprinkle: spruzzare; – 7. to sparkle: scintillare, luccicare; – 8. Père Noël: Babbo Natale; – 9. nut: noce; – 10. toy: giocattolo; – 11. fern: felce; – 12. pole: polo; – 13. pineapple: ananas; – 14. turnip: rapa.