

The Cult of the Christmas Tree.

It is characteristic of the German that he keeps Christmas, and this observance is symbolised by the ritual of the Christmas Tree. In every German home, from the Kaiser's palace to the poorest cottage, on *Helige Nacht* you will find the ubiquitous Christmas Tree and its votaries gathered round it. I believe our Teuton kinsman would prefer to forego his dinner on that day rather than his traditional *family tree*!

It is to him a kind of fetish; no luck would follow him without it. It is not intended alone for children, as is the case with us. Oh, dear, no. If the family consists of merely "Darby and Joan," the tree will be there, decked in all its usual panoply. The custom of giving presents which goes with it, although a very charming practice, yet is so rigorously observed that it has resolved itself into a mere system of exchange. Not only does every member of the family indulge his generous fancy, but the guest, or "stranger that is within his gates," knows that he will receive gifts, and therefore must present them.

Some years ago I spent Christmas in Germany, and, as I write, pleasant memories of that past are conjured up in my mind.

"I wish you could come with me," the letter ran; "I can't speak a word of German.

Whatever shall I do!"

My heart gave a bound; the invitation came at the psychological moment. I was free to accept it; I was about to leave my present engagement in a few days. I needed change and rest, and, oh, how I longed for something cheerful and happy! The prospective patient was not a stranger to me. She had been ordered to Wiesbaden to undergo

treatment for her eyes by one of the famous oculists there.

"Hurrah!" I said mentally, if not audibly, as I sat down to answer the letter in the affirmative.

Wiesbaden has two seasons, of which I believe winter is the principal. The patient's trouble was not of a nature to confine her to bed, or even to the house; she was able to get about and enjoy the gaieties of the season until an unfortunate attack of influenza put a full stop to it.

The weather, I remember, was of that kind that one always reads of — but seldom experiences — in the stories of Christmas in the olden times; in every respect *seasonable*.

The ground was covered with a thick carpet of clean snow, made crisp by the action of several weeks' frost. The sun shone daily without intermittance out of a perfectly cloudless sky; the air was still and fresh, and exquisitely clear.

The ornamental piece of water near the



THE THRESHOLD OF FAIRYLAND.

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