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Slava

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SLAVA.

THE Servian national custom called "*Slava*" (literally, "Glory and Celebration"), and sometimes "*Krono ime*" (or Baptism), is one which distinguishes the Servian people not only from races of Latin and Germanic origin, but also from all other Slavonians.

During their pagan period each Servian household had a particular deity as its patron and protector. Annually, on an appointed day, the family offered to its especial deity special sacrifices. Of all religious rites in those early days this annual celebration was the most important, and was always accompanied by much feasting and varied entertainments.

This act of household worship was a deeply-rooted custom with the Servians. When baptised Christians, in the seventh century, they would not surrender this cherished usage, so the Byzantine missionaries, in the spirit of compromise then prevalent, instead of abolishing all heathen ceremonies, substituted the worship of saints for that of pagan deities. So the *Slava* custom remained, only, on receiving Christian baptism, each Servian family chose a saint of the Eastern Church as its special guardian. And to the ancient appellation of the household festival "*Slava*" was added, as a synonyme, the new name "*Krono ime*", or baptism.

The favourite family patron-saints of Servia are St. Nicholas, St. John, and St. George. The archangel Michael is also very popular. Households having the same patron-saint consider themselves in a holy relationship to each other, so much that in some districts they do not intermarry. The *Slava* aids in deciding to which

family a Servian belongs—the son inheriting with the father's name his father's patron-saint, the daughters likewise until married, when they change to the patrons of their husbands and keep to the same even if widowed.

Slava is probably the only ancient national custom that is still zealously preserved by all classes of Servians, city and country, the unlettered peasant and the most highly-educated scholar, alike cherishing it. Formerly, each Servian kept especially two annual feasts, Slava-day and the birthday anniversary. The latter festival is now in the towns frequently forgotten; but very few Servian households fail to celebrate their Slava-day to the utmost of their means.

As my present object, however, is to describe the country customs of Servia, I will speak of Slava as yet kept in a well-to-do peasant household.

Several days prior to the Slava-day the parish priest comes to the house to read prayers and sprinkle the walls with holy water. All the family are busy cleaning and decorating the home, that on their great fête-day it may appear bright and gladsome. The day preceding the fête is particularly bustling. The house-mother's first duty is to make two immense cakes, each divided on its surface by a cross into four equal parts. On each division is a circle inscribed "Jesus, the Victor", and surrounded by a wreath made with her utmost skill. In the middle of the cakes is put a small bunch of besitikum. These details are essential to a Slava-cake. It must also be made with yeast, and of the whitest wheat flour.

With equal pleasure, and even more devotion, she prepares what is called "Kollivo". A quantity (according to the number of expected guests) of the finest wheat is first baked thoroughly, and then boiled until it is soft and readily digestible. This is afterwards thoroughly mixed with sugar or honey, and walnuts, and moulded into a pyramid, the sides covered with small crosses and other figures made from different coloured sugars. It is intended

as a *sacrifice* to the patron-saints, its name implying what in olden times such annual sacrifice must have been. "Kollivo", meaning literally something which is cut with a knife while alive. The verb "Klats, Kollyim", signifying in all Slavonian dialects to kill with a knife.

While the mother is busy making these cakes and kollivo, the house-father is roasting as much mutton or pork, and procuring as large a stock of wine, as his means permit. The younger members of the household go through the neighbourhood inviting friends to the fête. The invitation runs, in a stereotyped form, thus: "God's house be yours! Our father (or uncle) sends greeting, and invites you this evening to a glass of wine, that we may talk a little and shorten thus the night. What our Saint — has brought will not be hidden from you: do not hesitate, but come!" The answer being, "Thanks, we well know where to come, and what we shall meet."

At the time of Vesper service the master of the household carries, as a present, to the nearest church or cloister a large wax candle, a bottle of wine, and some olive oil. The house-mother meanwhile, with a short, improvised prayer, placing a lighted oil-lamp before the picture of their patron-saint, usually hung in a corner of the principal room.

At evening the guests arrive, each one stepping into the house with this greeting: "Good evening; happy be the day of your saint! God grant you may celebrate it yet many years in joy and health!"

The master of the house (who, from this time to the end of the Slava feast, is called "Joechat", or the Celebrator) answers, "God grant it. Thou art welcome: happy be thy soul!"

Each guest kisses and embraces the host, and brings an apple or citron as a present to the house-mother.

They sit in the spacious kitchen drinking coffee and brandy until all arrive, when the master leads them into the best room, which on this occasion is spread with carpets

made in the house. There the young women of the family approach the guests, hand them sandals, and, as a mark of utmost respect, wash their feet. The guests then wash their faces and hands, and ranging themselves, with the master in the centre, before the picture of the saint, pray together.

After this the guests choose a president of the feast, who must be a man thoroughly conversant with the Slava routine, and ready at the proper intervals with the appropriate and traditional toasts. In placing themselves around the liberally-loaded table, the oldest take the higher seats.

The master does not sit down, it being essential that he should personally serve the wine to his guests. When handing the first cup around, he gives the first toast of the evening, which is a prayer that, by God's grace, to-morrow, the day of his patron-saint, may auspiciously dawn upon all present, and that every one may be his Slava-guest again next year, and many other years to come.

The president, rising, crosses himself, repeats the toast, with the wish that the patron-saint may increase and strengthen the friends and confound the enemies of the family.

As the cup goes round, each guest adds a word or two; the last one asking God to forgive all improper requests and change them to good ones.

A second toast goes alike around; and when the cup again reaches the president, turning to the master, who fills it, he says: "Thou givest us a third cup, may God give thee joy, health, and love to the end." Then to the guests he says: "My brethren, to your feet. This toast is to the Name of God, and to His exalted Glory, strong and able to help us."

All arise; the master brings in a pan of lighted coals, and, while someone reads a long church-prayer, burns incense before the illuminated picture of the patron-saint. This invocation ended, the president continues the third toast, thus: "This toast is to the One and Undivided

Triune God! May He grant that His beautiful Glory may ever dawn upon this and all Christian homes until the end of Time! May He help and guide us now and for ever! and especially help all those who do, or (if they could) would, keep Slava to-day, enabling them to keep it in all coming years, until we, altogether, celebrate the anniversary in the celestial Kingdom."

Turning again to the master of the house, he adds: "Brother, drink to the honour of your Saint! May he aid thee and thine to-day and for evermore." They embrace and kiss each other. The master, replying, desires that all Slava good wishes "uttered now on Earth may be registered and granted in Heaven."

The cup goes round again, each guest giving a short toast and kissing his neighbour. The cup then circulates throughout the entire household, every member having to drink from it and embrace the next one to him; this, considered the chief act of the evening, is called "the toast of Slava".

The orthodox usage includes seven toasts. The fifth being very long; commencing with mentioning "The Church of Jerusalem lying precisely at the central point of the *White* world like a lovely flower", a vestige of the mediæval geography. It includes all priests, monks, cloisters, churches, and, by name, every one of the household of which they are the guests on "this ever-memorable day".

After the seventh toast, designated "honourable", the party quit the table and repair, if in winter, to the kitchen fire, or, in summer, to the gardens, where they listen to the recital of patriotic ballads and others like "The Slava of Czar Dushan", or "The Dream of St. Nicholas". A very popular recitation is "The Archangel's Slava", which I may translate hereafter, as it gives a lively version of the commingled pagan and Christian views of Paradise prevalent in Oriental lands during the Middle Ages.

In what is now the kingdom of Servia, the guests wend

their way homeward at midnight. But in other parts of the old Servian lands, as Bosnia, they remain to sleep in the house whose Slava they are celebrating.

Next morning the master carries the Kollivo and Slava-cakes to the nearest church, placing them, with a lighted wax-taper, before the altar. After matins the priest reads a prayer over the Kollivo and Slava-cakes, cuts the cakes *underneath* into four equal parts, pours a little red wine over the cross-cuttings, lifting the cakes in his hands, intones a chant, commencing "Great be your joy", and then, assisted by the master, breaks the portions, retaining half of each for himself. The other halves and the Kollivo the master takes home.

In wealthier households this visit to the church is dispensed with, the parish priest being invited to the family festival, where the cakes are cut and broken with similar ceremony.

By this time the friends have again gathered together, and with new congratulations, the master, bareheaded, serves them with wine and food, the guests remaining with covered heads.

About midday all rise "to the Glory of God". The Kollivo and pieces of Slava-cakes are brought into the best room, where wax tapers are lighted and incense burnt. All remove their hats, and the master himself drinks to "God's Glory", giving a toast filled with good wishes, to which all answer, "Amen, God grant it." While the cup passes around the party, some of the younger guests sing a popular song, beginning :

"Whoever drinks to the Glory of God,
May God and His Glory help him."

After which come toasts "To the Memory of THE Baptism" and to the Trinity. The Kollivo is then served around by the master, the eating, drinking, singing, talking, and merriment continuing some hours, broken by occasional toasts to the family, the saints, the king, and nation.

Should the weather permit, the young people gather in the yard or street with bagpipes and flutes, and dance until nightfall. From time to time guns are fired, as the Servians consider no celebration complete without the noisy explosion of powder.

In territories under Turkish rule, the use of firearms is sometimes forbidden; and, in years gone by, the Servian Slava celebrations in districts under Turkish authority had usually to be held privately and at midnight.

It is to be remarked that however lengthy and profuse the Slava-toasts, though many and reiterated good wishes for the members of the household are expressed by the visitors, a woman's name is never mentioned; the Servian etiquette preventing the peasant speaking before men of his wife or daughter by name. But with happy delicacy, while none can name the modest and almost invisible mistress of the home, the president, in proposing the toast of the Slava-cakes, in reality gives the health of the housewife, thus: "Let us now drink to the honour of these Slava-cakes! God give that where they have now been broken, such may be broken many years, and that the hands which made them may continue handsome and distinguished amongst all other hands, as the Morning Star outshines all other stars."

When alluding to his help-mate in company, the Servian peasant usually says: "My wife, I beg pardon for mentioning her, said (or did) so-and-so."

The Slava festivals formerly continued three days. Even now, and in large cities, the household must be prepared to receive and regale guests at least two days. Slava was consequently a heavy draft upon the family income. In the kingdom of Servia the advice of the priests and other authorities against too costly feasting is having a good effect. But with the Servians in Bosnia and Herzegovina the end of the Slava fête is still the last drop of wine: the guests remaining until they see the casks and wine-skins are empty. They then reluctantly leave, with effusive hopes

to meet again the next year and many successive years. A standard farewell wish is that their host may long live to celebrate his "Slava, the day of the baptism of his forefathers, twelve hundred years ago."

Perhaps one of the best of the stereotyped Servian Slava parting-phrases is :

" May God teach us to know what true
Friendship is, and how to appreciate it."

GRANT MAXWELL.