

THE DREAM OF THE CHRISTMAS TREE

Now, this was the wonderful dream I had—a dream of the Christmas Tree: I dreamed that a melody sweet and glad rang out from somewhere to me, And out of the silvered east they came and out of the west— More children than ever a man might name or ever a man has guessed; And going and coming, and coming and going, With drummers ca-drumming and buglers a-blowing, Were all of the children that ever were known since ever there was an earth. In hundreds, in couples, and all alone, each chanting a song of mirth. And then in this wonderful dream of mine the children ran to and fro And marched in a long and winding line as swiftly as they might go, And each as he passed by the Christmas Tree looked up with a radiant face, And each as he came there bent the knee with curious, childish grace, And coming and going, and going and coming, With bugler a-blowing and drummers a-drumming, Were all of the children that ever have been since there was a world at all. And none was a hunched or pale or thin, or crippled or lame, or like to fall. And all of them sang in this dream of mine, a song that I wish I knew, For it had a melody fair and fine, and every tone was true; And all of the children they looked at me in pity—or so it seemed— While stars in the boughs of the Christmas Tree in marvelous glory gleamed. And going and coming, and coming and going, With drummers a-drumming and buglers a-blowing, Were all of the children that ever have played since ever the world began, And each little maid and each little maid delightfully laughed and ran. And then in this wonderful dream I dreamed, I gazed fairer and fairer until it seemed no fairer a thing could be; And all of the children they called by name and all of the children smiled, And suddenly then to my heart there came the faith of a little child. And going and coming and coming and going, With drummers a-drumming and buglers a-blowing, I marched with the children of all the lands of all the years and times, And laughed as we ran with our close-linked hands and chanted out world-old rhymes. —Walter D. Nabb.

THE CHRISTMAS SUBSTITUTE.

A Boy from the Slums in the Choir at St. Martin's.

Five minutes of eleven! The choir-master of St. Martin's looked impatiently from the clock to the door. The choir-room was nearly full of men and boys, arrayed in black cassocks and white coats. The professional cross, with its bunch of holly tied upon it, leaned against the wall. From the choir could be heard the strains of "The Messiah," and through the open door of the vestry room the choir-master could see the clergy all ready to move. "Why, where's Charley Reed?" asked one of the bass singers. "I was supposed to send him off for a substitute—Bill Johnson, Healey's place. Johnny sent word at the last minute that he was sick and could not come. It would have made the procession uneven, and Charley said he knew a boy—went to the same school—who had a good voice and was the right size; so as it was only over on Second Avenue, and he had half an hour, I let him go. I wish I hadn't. It annoys the doctor to have the boys come in late. Christmas morning, too! But suppose something has happened to the boys; what should we do for our soprano solo?" "His first in the 'Te Deum'?" "Yes—and—oh, here he is!" A long breath of relief told of anxiety suppressed. Charley Reed stood in the doorway, ushering in the substitute. The choir-boys exchanged glances; the men turned away to repress a smile. Even the master, whose one thought was to keep his procession intact, looked aghast. The substitute was a boy perhaps ten or twelve years of age, distinctly dirty, though an attempt at face-washing had left broad streaks of light and shade. He wore an old jacket and a pair of trousers perhaps so much too large that they were pulled in a shirk and over each ankle. His shoes were breaking apart. He held in his hand an old cap which had once been fur, but was now only skin. It was not his poverty alone that marked him, however. There were many poor, respectable boys in St. Martin's choir. It was his face—cool, cunning, impudent, a face that before twenty must acquire the original look for life. A cadet in the ranks of the dangerous class, he stood there, self-possessed, confident, slyly alert. The choir-master hurried forward with an evident attempt to make the best of the situation. Charley Reed looked apologetic. The substitute had an amused twinkle in his keen, hazel eyes. "Come, Charley, take him into the lavatory and see that his hands and face are clean and his hair combed." "Here, Tom," to another boy, who stood grinning by, "look in one of the lockers beside the organ, and see if you can find a pair of shoes. Then get out Johnny Healey's vestments." In a few moments the robing was over. Teddy Fitzgerald, the east side boy, stood in the line in front of Charley Reed, an open boy in his hand. The boy with the crooked toes placed at the head of the procession. The clergy came down the steps into the choir-room. There was a short prayer, a quick "Amen" chanted by the boys, then the first verse of "Adagio Fidele." As the music soared, "joyful and triumphant," the procession began to move. Teddy's look was open, but he was not singing. There was too much to see. The doors of the choir-room were thrown back, the great organ and the cornet took up the theme and Teddy Fitzgerald was in the house of God for the first time. Churches had been quite outside Teddy's life. In the summer-time he had stolen his way upon several Sunday-school picnics up the river on a barge. Once he had gone with an older gang of roughs from Avenue A to help break up a Salvation

Army meeting; but there had been his sole experience touching religion.

So here he was—a heathen in a long black cassock and snow-white cotta, his face radiant with joy, keeping perfect time as the long line swept through the transept and into the chancel. With his clean face, his short, brown, curly hair in order and this expression, he looked almost handsome.

The boys filed decorously into the stalls, Teddy hoping with all his heart that an outside seat might fall to him. Yes, here he was! On the end, with Charley Reed beside him!

Now the service began. Charley would nudge him to kneel, rise of stand, as the occasion demanded, and Teddy, who was full of curiosity and interest, obeyed implicitly. When the chanting of the Psalms began, Teddy took his first active part. They were Gregorian chants, full of solemnity, and the boy quickly caught the movement, for he loved music passionately.

Sin had closed every channel to his soul—sin for which he was little responsible, for he was what his life had made him; in his closed every channel except this one! He had never heard any really great music before. The best had been at the Central Park concerts on Saturday afternoons, when the child would sit, forgetful of the black past and the blacker future, wrapped in that bliss which only a musical soul can know.

One masterpiece followed another today—the "Te Deum" and the Creed. Charley Reed had solos in both. Teddy listened greedily, enviously. "I bet yer could do it if I only knew how! I bet yer could put more 'in' in ter!" thought Teddy, who, with critical instinct, had found the lack in Charley's beautiful voice—the inability to touch the heart. The music was the choir-master's own, and he had put into it some of the love of man and love of God which filled the great heart of him who wrote the words.

Teddy listened through the first verse; then, with the second, he began. The choir-master heard the clear, full tones, and listened with fear. Would he sing false and ruin it? No, Teddy was incapable of singing false as a bird. He had a true ear and a most retentive memory. Above the choir, above even Charley Reed's sweet soprano range that contrasted with its rare, pathetic quality,—that something which can never be acquired—and the congregation listened with hushed breath.

The choir-master's heart beat high. The substitute's voice was an exquisite one. With a soloist like this, his choir in six months would be unequalled. All through the sermon Teddy looked round. The wonderful, pictured windows, streaming, the fine lines of arch and roof, the mosaic pavement, the carved stalls, the shining marble altar with its gleaming cross, and above it a picture which caught and held his eye—the picture of a Child, a Boy, with outstretched arms coming toward him through a field of hills.

"I wish he wouldn't look at me like that! Seems as if He wanted me to do something" for Him. Kinder sorry, too. Looks like He'd lived on the east side, so poor and mournful. I bet yer He knows what it is to be cold and hungry, and sleep in a barrel! I wish, now, I hadn't knocked down that little kid 'goin' for beer this mornin' or chided Jim at 'draps." And so, while the good doctor preached in the pulpit, the Boy above the altar preached to the boy below.

Suddenly Charley Reed said, "I say, Teddy, you'll have to go an' get an' sing the contribution. I sing solo in the offertory. Follow the boy at the end of the opposite stall; keep step with him, march to the rail then, and the doctor will give you both plates. Then turn,—be sure you wheel toward the other boy,—march to the top of the steps and wait. Stand perfectly still, and the vestrymen will bring up the offering. Then wheel inside, carry the plates and empty them into the alms-basin the doctor will hold. Do just as Tom does, keep step, and oh!" Charley said impudently, "don't bungle, for then they'll blame me!"

Charley did not know his boy. Teddy bungle! He reached the rail in perfect time, shoulder to shoulder, and stood facing the vast congregation, that wore a general air of riches and luxury. "All blokes from de avenue!" thought Teddy, and this drove the tender thoughts of that unhappy Child, whose love and love had touched him so strangely, out of his heart. Teddy was himself again—bitter, hard, defiant; the courage of the block, the terror of the apple-woman, the east side "out on the make!"

Two by two the vestrymen came up, each emptying his full plate into the larger ones held by the boys. Would they never stop? What heaps of money! Teddy had never seen as much, and now he was holding it! Such a chance! Right beside his thumb lay a bill folded very small. Some lady must have tucked it in her glove. Just as he wheeled he put his thumb on it—his coat sleeve lay full and loose over his hand—and with a dexterous movement he concealed it in his palm. Teddy had not played 'draps' for nothing. He went back to his stall, flushed with a sense of triumph, and tucked the bill into his jacket pocket. He must not look at it yet. It might be a "five!" Then he was sure of the fifty cents. What a morning's work! Wouldn't he "blow her in!"

All this while the service was going on, but it was only the opening notes of Gounod's "Sanctus" that brought him back. As the first "Holy, Holy," stole out, he forgot his money, and all the glories it could buy. Again and again rang out that marvellous organ, each repetition higher and stronger and nearer the throne, and the heart of the boy went with it. He looked at the picture with a radiant smile. This must surely make Him glad! The sunshine fell on the calm face; it lighted up those eyes filled with inscrutable sorrow, and a pang struck into Teddy's heart like a knife. The money! He had taken it from Him!

The boy had known nothing but misery from his birth, but as he laid his head down on the stall, beside which he knelt, an agony which no hunger, or cold, or pain had ever forced from him racked him. Teddy Fitzgerald's soul was being born! The service ended and the procession moved out of the church and into the choir room once more.

"Here's your fifty cents. Come around here tomorrow morning at nine, and let me try your voice. I think you have a fortune in your throat," said the choir-master, and he handed Teddy the money; but the words seemed to fall on deaf ears. "What ails you, Teddy? Are you sick?" said Charley Reed, kindly, as they reached the street. "Lemme alone, or I'll break your head!" said the boy, savagely as he jerked away, still holding the service-sheet.

"All right," said Charley, good naturedly. "I wish you a 'Merry Christmas.'"

The same evening, as the rector of St. Martin's rose from his Christmas dinner, a servant entered the room to say that a policeman was in the hall, waiting to see him. "Dear me, I hope nothing has happened," he said, as he went to meet the officer.

"Sorry to disturb you, sir, but there's a boy been asking for you at the Bellevue Hospital, and as the doctors say he won't live till morning, why, I've come for you. He's just been run over by a cable car on Third Avenue. Don't know what he can want with you, sir. He's a regular gutter-snipe, not your kind at all, sir!"

The doctor sighed at the unconscious rebuke. "I'm afraid not. I only wish he were!" and hurried into his overcoat. Before long he was leaning over the poor crushed frame in the first pure white bed Teddy had ever known. "Gimme de money," said the boy, in quick, fierce tones to the nurse beside him. "and then go way!" The nurse obeyed. The doctor knelt beside the bed to hear these parting words: "Here it is! Have yer got it? Give it back to Him! I swiped it this mornin' out of your collection plate. You're softies over there to trust any one. No, I'm not crazy. I was a substitute in the choir, and all the afternoon I tried to spend it and I couldn't. I could see him a-lookin' at me Him behind the altar a-comin' through the hilly field after me! So I was comin' back to yer with it when I slipped on the track. 'Please believe me,' he gasped on. 'Tain't because I know it's all up wid us that I'm sorry, but—because I couldn't be such a sneak to Him! You see He was like me. He had lots against Him!"

The doctor's white head sank as he looked at this child, who was also "despised and rejected," and then he prayed, holding the grimy-bony hand which had fought the world from the start. The little life was drifting fast now, and he was babbling of many things, but never of home or mother! The streets,—their length, their heat, their chill, but always the streets! It was all his past. Suddenly the faltering voice began to sing:

"O little town of Bethlehem, How still we see thee lie! Above the deep and dreamless sleep The silent stars go by, Yet in thy dark streets shineth The everlasting Light; The hopes and fears of all the years Are met in thee tonight."

A rapturous look came into the dying eyes and then all was still.—By Anna Sprague Packard, in Youth's Companion.

Christmas in Porto Rico.

Many of the children of Porto Rico last season saw a Christmas tree for the first time in their lives, says a writer for an educational journal. Christmas Day and the visit of Santa Claus are not observed in Porto Rico as in northern countries. The real Christmas comes twelve days late in Porto Rico, so far as the exchanging of gifts and remembrances is concerned. January 6th is Three Kings' Day. Instead of having a Christmas tree or of hanging their stockings in the fireplace, the youngsters there on the eve of January 6th put up a box filled with grass and their shoes out on the balconies or on window-sills. The Three Wise Men who are traveling through the country proclaiming the birth of the Infant Christ, stop at each box, and if the little boy or girl to be remembered is good the mules which the Wise Men are riding eat the grass and leave a toy or a bit of "dulce." If the youngster has been bad during the year, the box is left untouched, and the Wise Men depart, leaving nothing. To fill these little boxes children of all ages are at work for a week, and nearly every blade of grass in the little parks is pulled.

In the schools, on the last school days before Christmas, the teachers told the stories of Santa Claus, and in some of the schools Santa appeared in person, much to the delight and astonishment of the children, who had never before imagined such a thing. Christmas trees imported from the United States especially for the occasion, with tinsel and lighted candles and laden with candy and cakes, were a revelation to the children.—Ez.

Christmas Adam.

Mamma—"You have addressed your letter 'Mr. Santa Claus Adam.' Why did you put the Adam there dear? That isn't Santa Claus' name."

Babbie—"Well who is the Christmas Adam, then?"

"What Christmas Adam? I never heard of one."

"There's a Christmas Eve and there ought to be a Christmas Adam, I should think."—Kansas City Journal.

When Jesus was Born.

Once upon a time, long ago, the most beautiful and wonderful thing happened that ever happened in the world. Well, I'll tell you. Who first knew about it? A very good woman named Mary. She lived in a country away off, in a little town called Nazareth, and one day an angel came to her from heaven and told her that God was going to send his only Son down to the earth, and He was to come as a little baby, just like other babies, and Mary, because she was such a good woman, was to be His mother and take care of Him while He was young. Just think how astonished Mary was! And the angel told Mary and her husband that when the baby came they were to call Him Jesus, and when Jesus became a man He would be called the Son of God and have a great kingdom and rule forever and ever.

They both watched for the wonderful child, but God did not send Him to them while they were in Nazareth. Mary and Joseph had to take a very long, hard journey to a town many miles away called Bethlehem. They were poor and had to walk, and when they got there they were very tired. They looked for a place to sleep in, but all the houses were full because a great many people had come to Bethlehem that day. At first they didn't know what to do, but some one told them of a nice clean stable where they could rest on the hay, and they were glad to go there. It was night and Mary and Joseph and all the tired travelers who had come to Bethlehem that day had fallen asleep, and all the lights in the little town were put out; only the beautiful stars looked down from heaven.

But down in the valley, outside Bethlehem, the shepherds couldn't go to sleep because they had to take care of their flocks. Suddenly while they were talking together they saw a very much frightened, they saw an angel standing by them and a wonderful bright light shining all around. The angel told them in a very kind voice not to be afraid, because he brought them happy news. He told them that Jesus had come that very night in Bethlehem, and they would find Him lying in a manger, in a stable.

Then beautiful angels came from heaven and sang songs praising God. The shepherds watched them till they went back to heaven, and then they hurried to Bethlehem as fast as they could. O, how happy they were to find Jesus just as the angel had told them! They told Mary and Joseph all about the angels, and everyone wondered at it. Then the shepherds went back to their sheep, praising God for all the wonderful things that had happened. Do you know why God sent His dear Son down to earth? So that He could teach us all how to be good and happy. I think God was very kind.

When Shepherds Watched by Night.

Some historians contend that the shepherds could not have watched by night on the Bethlehem plains in December, it being a period of great inclemency. In answer to this a well known student says: "Bethlehem is not a cold region. The mercury usually stands all the month of December at 46 degrees. Corn is sown during this time, and grass and herbs spring up after the rains, so that the Arabs drive their flocks down from the mountains into the plains. The most delicate never make fires till about the end of November, and some pass the whole winter without them. From these facts I think it is established without doubt that our Saviour was born on the 25th day of December, the day which the church throughout the world has united to celebrate in honor of Christ's coming in the flesh."—Washington Star.

Christmas Chimes.

England has appropriately been called "the land of bells and bell-ringers." For nearly two centuries it has been the general custom in England to welcome Christmas with musical chimes. St. Paul's Cathedral chimes are rhythmical and musical.

In the great Russian city of Moscow, on the grand church festival five hundred bells ring in a magnificent, harmonious chorus. Belgium, Germany and France are also renowned for their beautiful chimes.

America has the famous chimes in Trinity Church, New York city. The historic Old North Church in Boston possesses bells which rung in 1774 and pealed forth glorious music on the birthday of the king.

In whatever land they may dwell, a peaceful, sacred message do the bells carry.—Selected.

—That famous landmark of the city of Hartford, Conn., the Charter oak, was blown down Aug. 20, 1856, during a fierce storm which prevailed in that city and section.

AT BETHLEHEM'S INN.

The Princess came to Bethlehem's inn, The Keeper he bowed low; He sent his servants here and yon, His maids ran to and fro. They spread soft carpets for her feet, Her bed with linen fine; They heaped her board with savory meat, They brought rich fruits and wine.

The Merchant came to Bethlehem's inn, Across the desert far, From Ispahan and Samarcand, And hoary Kandahar. Rich Orient freight his camels bore, The gates flew open wide, As in he swept with stately mien, His long, slow train beside.

The Pilgrim came to Bethlehem's inn, Wayward and old was he, With beard unshorn and garments torn, A piteous sight to see! He found a corner dim and lone; He ate his scanty fare; Then laid his script and sandals by, And said his evening prayer.

The Beggar came to Bethlehem's inn; They turned him not away; Though men and maidens scoffed at him, They heaped the varied stay. "The dogs have room; then why not he?" One to another said; "Even the dogs have earth to lie upon, And piteous broken bread!"

But Mary fared to Bethlehem's inn, Dark was the night and cold, And early the icy blast Swept down across the wold. She drew her dark brown mantle close, Her simple round her head, "Oh, hush on, my Lord," she cried, "For I am sore bestead!"

Maid Mary came to Bethlehem's inn, There was no room for her; They brought her neither nest nor wine, Nor fragrant oil, nor myrrh. But where the horned ox fed Amid the sheaves of corn One splendid star flamed out afar When our Lord Christ was born. —Julia C. R. Dorr, in The Atlantic Monthly.

Keeping Christmas.

It is a good thing to observe Christmas day. The mere marking of times and seasons, when men agree to stop work and merry together, is a wise and wholesome custom. It reminds a man to set his own little watch, now and then, by the great clock of humanity which runs on sun time.

But there is a better thing than the observance of Christmas day, and that is, keeping Christmas. Are you willing to forget what you have done for other people, and to remember what other people have done for you; to ignore what the world owes you, and to think what you owe the world; to put your rights in the background, and your duties in the middle distance, and your chances to do a little more than your duty in the foreground; to see that your fellow-men are just as you are, and try to look behind their faces to their hearts, hungry for joy; to own that probably the only good reason for your existence is not what you are going to get out of life, but what you are going to give to life; to close your book of complaints against the management of the universe, and look around you for a place where you can sow a few seeds of happiness—are you willing to do these things even for a day? Then you can keep Christmas.

Are you willing to stoop down and consider the needs and the desires of little children; to remember the weakness and loneliness of people who are growing old; to stop asking how much your friends love you, and ask yourself whether you love them enough; to bear in mind the things that other people have to bear in their hearts; to try to understand what those who live in the same house with you really want, without waiting for them to tell you; to trim your lamp so that it will give more light and less smoke, and to carry it in front so that your shadow will fall behind you; to make a grave for your ugly thoughts and a garden for your kindly feelings, with the gate open—are you willing to do these things even for a day? Then you can keep Christmas.

Are you willing to believe that love is the strongest thing in the world—stronger than hate, stronger than evil, stronger than death—and that the blessed life which began in Bethlehem nineteen hundred years ago is the image and brightness of the Eternal Love. Then you can keep Christmas. And if you keep it for a day, why not always? But you can never keep it alone.—Henry Van Dyke. (In "The Spirit of Christmas," copyright, 1905 by Charles Scribner's Sons.)

Is There a Santa Claus?

No Santa Claus? Yes, my little man, there is a Santa Claus, thank God! The world would indeed be poor without one. It is true that he does not always wear a white beard and drive a reindeer team—not always, you know—but what does it matter? He is Santa Claus with the big, loving, Christmas heart, for all that; Santa Claus with the kind thoughts for every one that make children and grown-up people beam with happiness all day long. And shall I tell you a secret which I did not learn at the post office, but it is true all the same—of how you can always be sure your letters go to him straight by the chimney route? It is this: send along with them a friendly thought for the boy you don't like; for Jack who pouted you, or Jim who was mean to you. The messenger he was the hardest do you resolve to make it up; not to bear him a grudge. This is the stamp for the letter to Santa. Nobody can stop it, not even a cross-draught in the chimney, when it has that on.

Because—don't you know, Santa Claus is the spirit of Christmas; and ever and ever so many years ago when the dear little Baby was born after whom we call Christmas, and was cradled in the manger out in the stable because there was not room in the inn, that spirit came into the world to soften the hearts of men and make them love one another. Therefore, that is the mark of the spirit to this day. Don't let anybody or anything rub it out. Then the rest of your letter. Let them tear Santa Claus's white beard off at the Sunday school festival and growl in his bearskin coat. These are only his disguises. The steps of the real Santa Claus you can trace all through the world as you have done here with me, and when you stand in the last of his tracks you will find the Blessed Babe of Bethlehem smiling a welcome to you. For then you will be home.—Jacob A. Riis.

Christmas Fun.

Jaggles—Have you decided on your makeup for the holiday masquerade? Waggles—Yes, I intended to wear the things my wife bought me for Christmas. Deacon Goodleigh—Ah, Christmas teaches everyone a great lesson! Mr. Brokeleigh—You bet it does! It teaches us to begin saving right away for next Christmas, unless we want to be bankrupt again.

"Colonel," said the fair young grass widow, "supposing a lady sent you a sprig of mistletoe on Christmas, and you should meet her just after you had opened the box, would you hold the sprig over her head and claim the sweet reward?" "Perhaps," said the grizzled warrior, edging over toward the crowd, "but I'd mighty hard to see her first."

THE LEGEND OF THE FIRST CHRISTMAS TREE.

December, close to midnight in a German forest, fifteen hundred years ago. At that time, even as now, the steep sides of the Haiz mountains were carpeted with immense stretches of woods. Here wild animals made their home and men hardly less fierce had their habitations. Though the sky which spread above the spot could scarce be seen through the thick branches of the oaks, its broad bosom shone bright with stars much as on another night in Judea centuries before.

Signs of life in plenty where the forest was densest. Under interlacing boughs that arched like unto a temple vault over a rounded space covered with velvety turf were a group of white clad, long-bearded men. Near at hand a giant oak tree, and by it a large, square stone set low in the ground. On this rude altar blazed a fire. The garb and bearing of the men beside it made plain they were ministers of some mystic rite. Circled about the ring of which the altar was the centre was gathered an assemblage of men, women and children so large that its numbers were lost in the shadowy background of the woods. The former were mostly tall and wild-featured. Some were clad in rudely woven cloth and others in hides of beasts. Many wore spears, others axes of odd shape, and still more massive clubs whose size, when swung with vigor, boded little good to an enemy. All stood with eyes intent on those by the altar as the foot of the giant oak.

The forest clearing was an open-air temple dedicated to the pagan god Thor, the Hammerer, whose Hammer, Mjolner, never fails of its blow. And the oak by whose vast bole the stone-altar is laid is Geismar, revered by Thor's votaries above all its forest kindred as the holiest sanctuary of his rites. Tonight's is the year's most solemn sacrifice—that of human blood. It is the great festival. For now the winter's sun turns toward the North, symbolical of heat and fire as the vivifying principle of earthly life. Names given in baptism are frequently prophecies of a child's future. In God's own good time a lad had been born in England on whom was bestowed the name of Winfred. In the simple Saxon tongue then spoken this meant "Peace-winner" or "Peace-maker." He grew up, entered the church and became earnest in the work of saving souls. He longed to help in the conversion of the benighted peoples of the continent. His wish was granted. He spent his days preaching the truths of the Cross, and won martyrdom as Boniface, the patron saint of Germany. In many ways he worked to open the ears, the eyes and the hearts of the incredulous. Victory attended him. Each passing hour saw belief in the old superstitions lessening. He had driven in from place to place, and even here to Geismar—the Thunder Oak—whose sacred trunk Thor chose as his abiding place. It was near midnight, and all was ready for the crowning ceremony of the festival. A child was to be offered as a propitiation to the heathen divinity. Struck into senselessness by the hammer—Thor's symbol—in the high priest's hands, the altar's flame would do the rest. Into the space before the altar was brought the intended victim. His robe of sacrifice showed less white than his boyish face. Fear had paralyzed the tongue and no sound came from his pallid lips. No there was no murmur or pity in the surrounding throng, though he was a child. They bind the youth's eyes with a fillet and place him, with bound arms and bent head, helplessly before the stone. A moment more and all had been over. The priest of Thor and his associates prepare for the final act. Suspense has the assemblage spellbound. Suddenly from the encircling crowd starts St. Boniface. Whence he came or who he was none knew. The sight of the venerable stranger at such a time cast more than awe over the multitude. Would mortal man dare such profanity? With stately stride he moves toward the altar. There, with never a word, he snatches the fateful hammer from the poised hand of the astounded priest. Terror seizes each mind as he lifts up the expectant victim and claps him close with his encircling arm. A silence as of the grave. Then, with giant strength, one-handed he whirles the hammer above his head and smites the blazing flames. Far and wide fly the starlike sparks and begin to lap with their fiery tongues the sacred oak—the tree of Thor the Hammerer. Rapidly the flames spread from branch to branch. Now, aroused from their stupor by what they deem the worst of sacrifice, priests aid people try to press closer to the daring stranger. In vain. A wall of fire from the burning tree holds them back, while the Saint and child stand upon the altar unscathed as those in the fiery furnace of old. Nor is it long ere with fearsome crash the Thunder Oak falls a smoking, smouldering mass of embers to the ground. They cry it is the work of some great God, and drop upon their faces. Hereupon speaks the apostle. He tells them the story of Christ: how He wills no sacrifice at blood, but only of selfishness and sin. "On this," the words of the legend run, "his eyes caught sight of a fair young fir-tree standing near and lifting its green crown to Heaven. In place of the oak of Thor," he said, "behold a living tree with no stain of blood upon it. Be it a sign to you of the new worship. See how it points to the sky! Henceforth for you it shall be the Tree of the Christ-Child. Carry it to the children's hall, for this is the birth-night of the Lord! You shall come no more to forest shades to keep this festival with unholy rites. Instead, hold it in your homes and hearts with kindness and charity, with joy and song and laughter!" Thus the pagan oak—hardness of heart—whose roots were fed with sorrow and blood, gave place to the First Christmas Tree, full of never-ending lessons of mercy, gentleness and love.—H. H. Doyle.