

Legends

ALl around the season of the Coming of Love as a little Child there have sprung legends and beliefs, like blossoms in a gracious clime, which testify with subtlety to the depth of the appeal of the birth of Christ. Here divinely spiritual symbolism and there sweet human tenderness and pathos appear, and, blended, they evidence the world's belief that this was both Son of Man and Son of God.

An Irish legend tells that, on Christmas eve, the Christ-Child wanders out in the darkness and cold, and the peasants still put lighted candles in their windows to guide the sacred little feet, that they may not stumble on their way to their homes. And in Hungary the people go yet further in their tenderness for the Child, they spread feasts and leave their doors open that He may enter at His will, while throughout Christendom there is a belief that no evil can touch any child who is born on Christmas eve.

The legend which tells how the very hay which lined the manger in which the Holy Babe was laid put forth living red blossoms at midwinter at the touch of the Babe's body could only have arisen from belief in the renewal of life through the Lord of Life.

The Holy Thorn.

IT is not so many centuries ago since there was that holy thorn at Glastonbury which blossomed every Christmas, and, so ran the legend, had done ever since St. Joseph of Arimathea, having come as apostle to Britain, and landing at Glastonbury, had stuck his staff of dry hawthorn into the soil, commanding it to put forth leaves and blossoms. This the staff straightway did, and thereby was the king converted to the Christian faith, the faith which preached life from death.

The holy thorn of Glastonbury flourished during the centuries until the civil wars. During those it was uprooted; but several persons had had trees growing from cuttings from the original tree, and those continued to bloom at the Christ-season, just as their parent, which had grown from St. Joseph's staff, had blossomed. And about the middle of the 18th century it was recorded in the Gentleman's Magazine how the famous holy thorn would not deign to recognize the new style calendar, which had then come into force but would persist in blossoming as of old on Christmas day!

In those days the anniversary of the advent of the Babe had certainly meant more to the common people than merely a time for feasting and revelry, for giving and receiving; it had been also a season for holy observances, for they refused to go to church on New Christmas day, the holy thorn not being then in blossom. So serious became the trouble that the clergy found it prudent to announce that Old Christmas day should also be kept sacred as before. Only another story of men's weak, superstitious minds? True, perhaps; but they are better who evidence some spiritual weakness than those who wallow in the wholly material, and when we cease to be careful of the cup and the platter, we become not over careful of their contents.

The First Christmas Rose.

NOTHER of those spiritual parables is the legend of the Christmas rose, and it tells how good things, fit for giving, spring up ready to the hand which earnestly desires to give to the Child. It is said that a certain maiden of Bethlehem was so poor that she had nothing to give to the Babe to whom kings brought wealth from afar, and, as she stood, longing and mourning, and angel appeared to her, saying: "Look at thy feet, beneath the snow," and lo! on obeying the maiden found that a new flower had miraculously sprung up and blossomed at her needs. Every since then, runs this story, this exquisite flower, with its snowy petals just touched by suggestions of pinkish bloom, is to be found at this season; and, indeed, its half-opened cups are like chalices of love, and its fully-spread petals are like a happy innocence, fit symbols for the gifts for the Babe of spotless innocence, whose heart was the vessel of love.

Christmas Eve Legends.

HERE are several exceedingly touching legends concerning the bells, which are heard ringing from buried cities and villages at this season. One belongs to a village near Raleigh, in Nottinghamshire, and the story runs that once, where there is now but a valley, there was a village which, with every trace of life and habitation, had been swallowed by an earthquake; but ever since, at Christmas, the bells of the buried church are heard to ring as of old.

A similar legend is told of Preston, in Lancashire, and yet another and more moving one comes from the Netherlands. It is said that the city of Been was notorious for its black and shameless sins, as well as renowned for its beauty and magnificence. To the Sodom of the middle ages came our Savior on one anniversary of his birth, and went as a beggar from door to door, but not one in all that Christmas keeping city gave the Master of the abundance. Sin he saw rampant on every side, but not

the city of sin, was buried deep, clean out of sight, beneath the waves. But ever at Christmas up from beneath the covering waters comes the sweet calling of church bells buried in Been. It is a legend which appears to tell in parable that nothing which ever belonged to the Christ, and was dedicated to his service, is ever wholly lost from him and alienated from service; that ever and again something of their inherent beauty and compelling sweetness rises from the depths through all seeming ruin.

The Manger.

TRADITION declares that within the stone manger there was another one of wood, and that the stone manger in the Chapel of the Nativity is, indeed, the outer manger. Splendid is that humble stone trough now with white marble, softly rich with costly draperies, and radiant with a silver star, which is surrounded by 16 lamps, ever alight. But yet more glorious is the wooden manger at Rome, held to be the veritable manger in which the Christ-child lay. It was removed to Rome in the seventh century, during the Mohammedan invasion of the Holy Land, and there it is preserved in a strong brazen chest, from which it is brought forth on Christmas days, when it is placed on the Grand Altar. It is mounted upon a stand of silver, which is inlaid with gold and gems, and the shrine in which it rests is of purest rock crystal. In the days in which this was accomplished men, whatsoever may have been their shortcomings in other directions, gave magnificently to the Church Visible.

Christmas Bells.

TRADITION says that the hour of the Babe's birth was the hour of midnight, and legend adds that from then until dawn cocks crow. In Ireland it is held that those who look into a mirror on this eve will see the devil or Judas Iscariot looking over his shoulder, surely thought sufficient to drive the hardest soul to a thought of the innocent Babe.

Another legend tells that, on Christmas eve, Judas Iscariot is released from that hell—"his own place"—and is allowed to return to earth that he may cool himself in icy waters.

Wild and improbable although such and such legends appear on their faces, they bear study and repay it, for we then see that they are full of subtle spiritual expression, as it were; that they are parables of certain spiritual facts, and it will be ill for us should the Christmas day ever dawn on which such flowers of tender faith and wonder shall appear to us no more than dry curious specimens from the dead roots of superstition.

What Christmas Means.

Christmas means hope and its realization. The child grows eagerly expectant as the time approaches for the visit of Santa Claus. While this fiction remains unquestioned, the imagination opens new and wider worlds, and ideals become so much part of the mind that the prosaic and commonplace can never crush them. Until the youth reaches manhood and independence, Christmas is the happiest day of the year. Its gifts and hearty good cheer impress family affection, parental thoughtfulness and brotherly love. The dullest and most irresponsible of fathers and mothers are uplifted to a vision of higher life by the interchanges of souvenirs and the merry meeting with children and grandchildren at the table and fireplace. Few can escape and all enjoy the meaning of the festival, the lessons it conveys and the inspiration it gives, and we enter upon a brighter future and a fuller appreciation of the beneficence of the practice of faith, hope and charity. The loved ones, who have crossed to the other side, the loved near and far who are still with us, the old homestead with its precious memories, the old church whose sacred associations tie together childhood, maturity and age, love, marriage and death; the schoolhouse where the beginnings of education were so painful, and the ever-increasing pleasures of the pursuit of learning through the high school, academy and college are recalled and recited, and there is exquisite delight in these oft-told tales, and new experiences even this blessed anniversary.—Leslie's Weekly.

First Christmas Observance.

Christmas gets its name from the mass celebrated in the early days of the Christian church in honor of the birth of Christ, its first solemnization having been ordered by Pope Telesphorus. This was in or before the year 138, for in that year Pope Telesphorus died.

At first Christmas was what is known as a movable feast, just as Easter is now, and owing to misunderstandings was celebrated as late as April or May. In the fourth century an ecclesiastical investigation was ordered, and upon the authority of the tables of the censors in the Roman archives December 25 was agreed upon as the date of the Savior's nativity. Tradition fixed the hour of birth at about midnight, and this led to the celebration of a midnight mass in all the churches, a second at dawn and a third in the later morning.

Guests At Jule

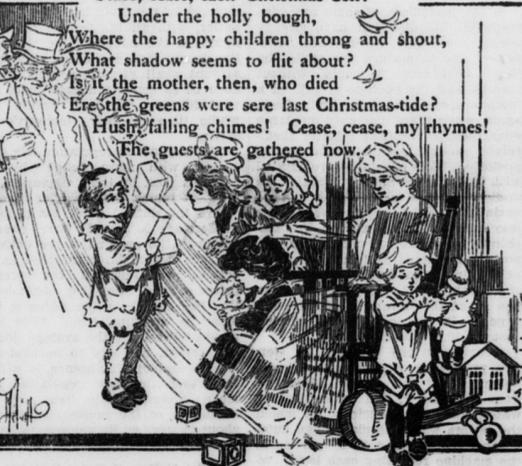


Edmund Clarence Stedman

NOEL! NOEL!
Thus sounds each Christmas bell
Across the winter snow,
But what are the little footprints all
That mark the path from the churchyard wall?
They are those of the children-wakes tonight
From sleep by the Christmas bells and light:
Ring sweetly, chimes! Soft, soft, my rhymes!
Their beds are under the snow.

Noel! Noel!
Carols each Christmas bell
What are the wreaths of mist
That gather near the window-pane
Where the winter frost all day has lain?
They are soulless elves, who fain would peer
Within, and laugh at our Christmas cheer:
Ring fleetly, chimes! Swift, swift, my rhymes!
They are made of the mocking mist.

Noel! Noel!
Cease, cease, each Christmas bell!
Under the holly bough,
Where the happy children throng and shout,
What shadow seems to flit about?
Is it the mother, then, who died
Ere the greens were sere last Christmas-tide?
Hush! falling chimes! Cease, cease, my rhymes!
The guests are gathered now.



The Spirit of Christmas.

There is hardly a festival in the calendar which has such a hold on the hearts of old and young alike as Christmas Day. The ring of the car bells and the voices upon the streets seem to take on a more cheery tone, and the spirit of the time seems to throw a glamour over places and things which ordinarily are devoid of all beauty. As it is with places, so it is with people. They, too, not only seem to change, but the transformation does take place in millions of hearts to a greater or less degree. The spirit of Christmas even affects people who for the rest of the year are devoid of sentiment and of feeling for their fellows. The most interesting stories of Christmaside are those which will never appear in print—true stories of men and women whose thoughts have been only of their own selfish aims and pleasures, but have been awakened, if only for a day or two, from their usual self-complacency, moved by some force of which they are only half-conscious to do some act of kindness to make the day happier for someone less fortunate than themselves in a worldly way.—The Christian Herald.

The Christmas Spirit.

But don't you see that there is a Santa Claus! He isn't a man in a fur coat, and a reindeer sleigh and all that, but he is the Spirit of Christmas, isn't he? They've personified that and made a saint of him and invented legends about him—for the children, but when we're no longer children and don't believe in him, we still have that Christmas spirit—and it's that that gives presents and makes us feel toward one another, and makes Christmas what it is.—Harvey J. O'Higgins.

Christmas Customs.

It is interesting to trace the origin of festival customs to those connected with Druidical superstitions of classic observances, and it will surprise many to learn that present-day sports very closely resemble the celebrations observed of old in honor of Saturn or Bacchus.

The Roman Saturnalia, which occurred in the winter solstice, were a season of great festivity and rejoicing, honored by many privileges and exemptions. The spirit of gaiety had free charter, and even quarrels were suspended, to be resumed after the holidays. As a manifestation of the gratitude felt at the renewed prospects of the returning march of the sun, gifts were exchanged and special hymns were sung. These latter were really the Roman representatives of the modern carol.

At the Saturnalia the Roman feasted, sang and danced, as we do at Christmas. A ruler or king was appointed, who enjoyed certain prerogatives. He presided over the sports of the season. Probably he is the ancestor of the lord of misrule, who exercised a similar power in more recent times. Merriment was a matter of general concern, and the joyous spirit of entire districts is now narrowed to family parties.

It is the touch that makes the whole world kin, and it is a pleasant reminder that, after all, history repeats itself.

Not Blessed.
The presents you forget to give to others who don't forget to give to you are not so blessed.

Criminal Court Methods Thare Utterly Different From Ours.

Criminal court trials in Italy are conducted under a very simple system, though utterly different from the system which governs procedure in American or English courts, says an exchange.

The trial takes place before three judges and a jury, to which are added a certain number of extra jurors, who are sworn and are present in court to hear the testimony and are held ready to take the place in the jury box of any juror who may in the course of the trial be incapacitated from further service. The depositions of all the witnesses have been taken in writing and signed before the trial begins. Each of the judges has a copy of these before him. The prosecutor and the counsel for the accused furnish to the court a list of the witnesses they desire called, and these are all summoned by the court, which has power to punish nonattendance.

The first thing that happens when the trial begins is the questioning of the accused by the presiding justice. In Italy, as in most of continental Europe, a man accused of a crime is considered by the law to be the very best witness to his own guilt or innocence. In England and America the accused need not testify unless he chooses. In Italy he is the first and most important witness.

The accused is allowed the widest scope in defending himself. He has a right to tell his own story in his own way, to offer anything he can in the way of justification or palliation. Even hearsay evidence is admissible. The judge has absolute discretion as to what testimony may be received and what excluded, and any judge who exercised this discretion unfairly would be an object of execration. Bias on the part of one judge is possible, but there are always the other two judges on the bench with him, and they are a perfect check against unfairness.

When the accused has given his testimony he is confronted personally with his accuser. The accuser is necessarily the principal witness against him. Strictly speaking, the prisoner has no right to interrupt his accuser while the latter is telling his story, but in practice the judges permit it, and the confrontation sometimes becomes a three-cornered debate between accuser, accused and judge, the latter giving the accused the widest leeway to demonstrate his innocence.—Case and Comment.

How Watches Vary.

Theoretically, says a jeweler, the best watches of today are perfect, but actually they both gain and lose time every day. Even if the good watch does not vary one second at the end of the twenty-four hours, the expert insists, it has both gained and lost in that time. If it is wound in the morning it runs fast and toward the next morning runs slow, thus equalizing the time. He says the best watches should be wound twice a day and then at only two-thirds of the capacity of the mainspring, thus preventing either binding or extremes of strong or weakened spring. The balance wheel was expected to equalize differences of mainspring tension, but really this is not the case to what is called perfection.—New York Press.

Boston's Winter and Summer.

Nearly all visitors to Boston, if they do not see it, are told of the place where one may "step from Winter into Summer or from Summer into Winter at any time of the year without giving a thought to his clothing." This may be done at the point where Washington street intersects the street which is "Winter" on one side and "Summer" on the other. A guide was enquiring on this bit of humor to a visitor from New York a few days ago, but was not rewarded by the smile which the Winter and Summer joke usually calls forth. "That's nothing," said the New Yorker, "but what is really funny here is to see the entrance to the underground railway marked 'The Elevator.'"—New York Tribune.

The Church Cough.

Of all coughs the church cough is the most difficult to check, and it is almost as contagious as yawning. The late Mr. Havelis practically cured his Marybone congregation of coughing during the service. He used to announce an interval for coughing with a polite request to those who found this insufficient to go outside. There is a somewhat similar practice in the Russian army—the nose blowing drill—which is performed by the whole regiment at a signal from the colonel. And no soldier dares sneeze at any other time.—London Spectator.

Pulling Power of Men and Animals.

Interesting tests were recently made to determine the respective pulling power of horses, men and elephants. Two horses weighing 1,900 pounds each together pulled 3,750 pounds, or 150 pounds more than their combined weight. One elephant weighing 12,000 pounds pulled 8,750 pounds, or 3,250 pounds less than its weight. Fifty men, aggregating 7,500 pounds in weight, pulled 8,750 pounds, or just as much as the single elephant; but, like the horses, they pulled more than their own weight. One hundred men pulled 12,000 pounds.

An Exception.
"Take my advice and mind your own affairs. No man ever got rich fighting other people's battles."
"I don't know. How about a lawyer?"—Boston Transcript.

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