



IN a place built, like Bethlehem, in many cases against the soft limestone rock it often happens that the existence of a cave where the house was to be was a great attraction since it offered a ready made, dry, above ground cellar as well as a specially suitable spot for the household animals and for a storeroom. It would seem that Joseph was at last able to get room in some such back portion of a house, and there, we are told, Mary bore her divine Son.

A cave below the high altar of the Church of the Nativity is now shown as the very place where this august event transpired; a little recess, shaped like a clam shell, its floor of marble wrought into a star in the center, bearing in Latin the words, "Here Jesus Christ Was Born of the Virgin Mary." A row of lamps hangs round the outer edge, the right to attend to them being a jealously watched matter, each of the ancient churches, the Greek, the Latin, the Armenian and the Coptic, having one or more of these under its care.

The evidence for this site is so strong that most persons accept it as sufficient, reaching up, as it does, to within living memory of the days of the apostles. But even if this be an illusion the fact remains that in this petty village the Saviour of the world was made man for our redemption. No wonder that we read of the anthem of the angels, for surely nothing could draw forth the interest of the heavenly population like the exceeding grace God was showing to sinful man.

The scene of the visit of the shepherds is pointed out as on a rough slope, facing the village, at some distance to the east, Bethlehem lying far above on its mountain seat. One can follow the shepherds in their journey to see the unspeakable wonder. They would go along the rich valley of Boaz and then up the terraced hill by a path still in use, nor is it uninteresting to reflect that, while simple shepherds were led by angels to the manger, the high priest and the great of Jerusalem, so near, slept through that most illustrious night of all history, quite unconscious of what had happened. But we know of it, and may God grant that if we cannot go with the shepherds to Bethlehem we may one day go to the right hand of God and worship him there, who that night lay a little child in Mary's arms.—Dr. Cunningham Geikie.

One Christmas Pudding

Perhaps the most heroic attempt to keep Christmas in conventional fashion under unconventional conditions was that made by the late Lord Wolseley, when a young officer, in the trenches before Sebastopol during the Crimean war sixty years ago. He and his comrades decided that the Christmas should be honored and that there should be a plum pudding. The "pudding" was compounded of biscuit, grease and such fruit as could be obtained, the ingredients being mixed in a fragment of a Russian shell wrapped in a cloth, it was a tied for some hours, and a tasty reminder of the great festival was eagerly looked forward to by the hungry officers. But before the pudding was considered "cooked" orders came transferring Wolseley and his tent companions to a distant part of the works.

Should they leave the pudding until their return or eat it as it was? They were hungry, and the latter course was decided upon. The "pudding" was duly swallowed, and away they went in obedience to orders. Late that night Wolseley was troubled with internal disturbances that necessitated the doctor's kindly ministrations. It seemed, said the future field marshal, as if pieces of Russian shell were rolling against each other inside. It was the only pudding, the first and last, he ever made.

"Don't Open Until Christmas!"

My Love hath sent a gift to me,
But though that gift I long to see,
The packet's label says me nay—
"Don't open until Christmas day."

Till Christmas day—how long to wait
And pine, yet hold inviolate
The ban, too strict for Adam's clay,
"Don't open until Christmas day!"

On Christmas day shall I be here
To joy in that which now were dear
And must I heed these runes that say,
"Don't open until Christmas day!"

Should Time, the chart, have power to hold
In check each word, each deed of old!
Through this decree of dread delay,
"Don't open until Christmas day!"

For these be hearts—and purses, too—
Locked fast to Love the long year through
By that same word, which fools obey,
"Don't open until Christmas day!"

Ah, Love, the sages all allow
The time for any joy is now!
Then charge me never more, I pray,
"Don't open until Christmas day!"

—Arthur Guiterman in Life.

The Golden Christmastide

UNDER the far blue Syrian sky
Was born the Conqueror of Death,
Who bore credentials from on high
In Bethlehem and Nazareth.

Then came the new and better times;
One lone star signaled far and wide,
And now we ring melodious chimes
To mark the holy Christmastide.

Come young and old from every side;
Come rosy maid and gentle swain,
It is the holy Christmastide
That joyously we meet again.

The holly hangs upon the door,
It is no time for work or woe,
Now jollity commands the floor,
And joy comes with the mistletoe,
Bring in the Yule log's ancient flame,
The soused boar's head, a rich repast.

Let sorrow go the way it came;
Let care be to oblivion cast,
The sweet clear voices sound without
Sackbuts and shawms make wholesome glee,
Twined is the boar's head round about
With garlands rich and rosy.

And now the foaming wassail bowl
Shall bring us comfort and delight,
This is the season of the soul,
From golden morn to starry night,
Naught care we for the piercing cold,
The drifted snow or raging blast,
For Christmas never shall grow old
From eons new or centuries past.

Quaint mummers mingle in the scene
Where pudding mates with Christmas pie,
The rooms are thick with evergreen,
And happiness lights every eye,
Let Fortunatus turn his horn
For on this day the One was born
Who knew no mark of class or creed.

Then welcome, merry Christmastide,
Another hour before we go,
The rosy girl close at our side
We'll kiss beneath the mistletoe,
Deep, mellow bells salute the air
With benisons sent far and wide,
Good will and joy go everywhere
Upon the golden Christmastide.

The Sweetest of All.
Christmas is a jolly day, but let us not forget that it is Christ's birthday and that to make someone else happy is the sweetest thing of all.

—Joel Benton.



To Everybody! Here's Wishing You All The Joys Of The Holiday Season!

SACRED MISTLETOE.

The druids with ceremonies of great solemnity used to collect mistletoe with a golden sickle "against the festival of winter solstice." Only the oaks bearing mistletoe were sacred to this ancient order of men.

It is recorded that the people's reverence for the priests proceeded in great measure from the cures which the priests effected by means of this curious green plant of the pear-like berries. It was collected thus ceremoniously by the druids because it was supposed to drive away evil spirits.

The reason among the druids for bringing in bits of evergreen from the woods and adorning the house is a most charming and lovable one: "The houses were decked with evergreen in December that the Sylvan spirits might repair to them and remain untroubled with frost and cold winds until a milder season had renewed the foliage of their darling abodes."—Craftsman.

Forerunner of Christmas.
The spirit of merry-making that marks our Christmas holidays had its origin with the Roman feast called the Saturnalia. This was a festival in honor of Saturn, father of the gods. It lasted for a week or two, beginning about the 19th of December, and was the occasion for great revelry among all classes. No business was transacted during this period, war was suspended, private feuds were forgotten or forgiven, and general good fellowship reigned supreme. Friends exchanged presents with one another, and the slaves were waited upon by their masters and mistresses.

A Wish.
I'd fain have a centipede's stockings
To hang by the fireplace tonight
And then have an octopus Santa
With eight arms to fill them tight.
—New York Sun.

A Long Drawn Out Christmas

In many parts of Switzerland the Yuletide customs and festivities still have their beginning on Dec. 6, which is the anniversary of St. Nicholas. Markets and fairs are then held in villages and cities, and, seeing that the old traditions prescribe for this day the purchasing of presents for the children, it is an event of utmost importance to all youngsters. In some districts St. Nicholas parades around in person in an attire very similar to that of our American Santa Claus, generally carrying a big bag filled with apples, pears, nuts and homemade cookies, which he distributes among the children who have been obedient during the year.

The next and in modern days the most important festive day of the whole Yule season is Christmas day. History relates that it was only in the year 554 A. D. that the Roman Bishop Liberius regarded this particular day as the birthday of Christ, and as they were furthermore desirous of giving a more religious importance to two important Roman festivals which also fell due in the same period. With the observation of Christmas day the Christkindl, described as "a lovely angel with wings," gradually started to take old Santa's place in many sections of Switzerland, Christkindl, the Christ Child, is said to come from the far north and always brings a wonderful Christmas tree, decorated with all the glittering things associated with fairyland and heavenly laden with manifold gifts.

Christmas Gifts of a Century Ago

In a New York newspaper of 1814 Christmas gifts were advertised as follows:

"An assortment of Books, well calculated for the amusement and instruction of Young Persons, among which are—Barton's Lectures on Female Education and Manners; Foster's Essays on various subjects; Russel's Chateausm of Nature, an excellent little book, price 3s.; Burder's Village Sermons; Mrs. Chapane's Letters on the Improvement of the Mind."

"A. T. Goodrich, No. 121 Broadway, corner of Cedar street, has just received an extensive assortment of fancy articles, Books, Prints, Medallions, Landscapes and small books for children, that are well adapted for purchase or gift, at this season of complimentary presents."

"By the last arrival from Europe, were also received several of the latest and best Novels, Poems and Miscellaneous Works;

"Fine letterpaper; visiting cards; Ladies' and Gentlemen's Pocket Books; Wallets and Memorandum Books; Fine Penknives; Cases of Best Silver Eyed Needles; Opera Glasses and Snuff Boxes."

The Christmas Story

HERE was peace on the lone Judean hills,
And the shepherds watched their flocks by night,
When there came from the silent, starry sky
A burst of glory, a dazzling light,
And the angel choir from far away
Sung "Peace on earth, good will to men,"
And we hear the song o'er lapse of years
As it echoes in our hearts again.

They sang in notes of heavenly joy;
They brought a message from God to men,
For the Prince of Peace had come to earth
And a child was born at Bethlehem.

The Christ had come, the King of kings,
That we might God in his beauty see
And hearts be light in blessed hope
That death should be swallowed in victory.

And they left their flocks and hastened on
To the city of David to see the babe,
The Saviour of men and the Son of God,
The humble child in a manger laid,
And they marvel at that which had come to pass
And return with glory and praise to God.

While the chorus echoes within their hearts
As back to the lonely hills they plod,
As the shepherds of old, let us hasten on
This Christmas day to Bethlehem town,

To be with him through the whole of life,
To bear the cross and to gain the crown,
No more shall we find him a lowly child,
But there forever with God above
He watches and guides our feeble steps
Till he bears us home with his infinite love.

How sweetly, how gladly to all the world
There comes a message of hope today,
For Christ is born and man is free,
And pain and sorrow must pass away,
How sweetly and silently into the heart
The Christ Child comes this blessed night
To make us noble and good and true,
For the light of the world is a wondrous light.

Dear Christ, may we follow with willing hearts
The path of duty, where thou hast led,
That sin and shame may have an end
And that joy may fill our souls in stead,
And on this thy glorious natal day
We shall catch the sound as the glad bells ring
Till we hear thy summons to come away
And in heaven above thy praises sing.

—Rev. Norman Van Peil Lewis in Philadelphia Public Ledger.



When the Angels Sang

WHAT an interest centered in that babe, wrapped in swaddling clothes, lying in a manger at Bethlehem! Prophets were interested, angels were interested, the ages have been most deeply interested since. The shepherds had perhaps some premonition. The seventy weeks of Daniel's prophecy were about fulfilled. It may be at that very time they were talking of the coming of Christ.

Suddenly their attention was arrested by a strange sight in the heavens. It grew brighter and took the form of an angel, and then they heard a voice announcing the birth of Christ as glad tidings for all people, not to the Jews only. Then suddenly the air was filled with angels singing as if they had come right out from the air.

We know not their wonderful song, but part came to mortal ears, "Glory to God in the highest," etc. We know not who those angels were, but we fancy they were the redeemed. Adam was there; Eve was there. Eve, who in her maternal earnestness declared at the birth of her firstborn, "I have got a man from the Lord," hoping that that was he who should bruise the serpent's head. Now, in the fullness of time she had come to witness the birth of the babe who was to be the Saviour of her race. David, Elijah, Moses, the patriarchs, we believe, were with the heavenly host.

This song reveals three things: First.—The glorification of God through the incarnation. God has glory through his vast work in nature, his providence building up and casting down nations, etc.

In the incarnation there was special glory. It was glory to God in the highest—highest, in that it was above all other glory, in that it extended to all time and in that it wrought such wondrous good.

Second.—The great results to the earth. It would result in peace. Strifes, thorns and thistles were abounding. The earth was torn and bleeding by constant contention. With Christ came peace. The result would be universal peace.

Third.—The effect on the individual man. "Good will toward men," from one another, from God. Out of this good will would finally spring peace on earth and glory to God in the highest.—Dr. Matthew Simpson.

To Make a True Christmas.
Don't forget the lonely, the suffering, the poor, on Christmas. Remember that the first and greatest Christmas gift was sent not to the rich and powerful, but to the poor and needy. Give to those who are near and dear to you, but somewhere, somehow, in your ordinary life find some one who is near and dear to no one else and make Christmas for him or her.

Some Christmas Legends

There is a Bosnian legend that the sun leaps in the heavens and the stars dance around it. A great peace comes stealing down over mountain and forest. The rotten stumps stand straight and green on the hillside. The grass is beset with blossoms, and the birds sing on the mountain tops in thanks to God. In Poland the heavens open and Jacob's ladder is set up between earth and sky. In Austria the candles are set in the windows that the Christ Child may not stumble when he comes to bless the home. In north Germany the tables are spread and the lights left burning for the incoming of the Virgin Mary and her attending angel.

The English superstition is admirably voiced by the myriad-minded Shakespeare in "Hamlet":

Some say that ever against that season comes
Wherein our Lord's birth is celebrated,
The bird of dawn singeth all night long.
And then they say no spirit can walk abroad,
The nights are wholesome. Then no planets strike,
No fairy takes, nor witch hath power to charm.
So hallowed and so gracious is the time.

The Beautiful Bethlehem Bells

Over the roar of the cities, over the hills and the dells,
With a message of peace to the nations, ring the beautiful Bethlehem bells,
Bringing joy to the souls that are sighing in the hotels
Where poverty dwells—
There is life—there is life for the dying, in the beautiful Bethlehem bells.

Far off in a land that is lovely, for the tender sweet story it tells,
In the light of a glorious morning rang the beautiful Bethlehem bells;
And still in the hearts of creation an anthem exultingly swells
At that memory sweet of the ringing of the beautiful Bethlehem bells.

They ran o'er the hills and the valleys, they summoned the glad world that day,
From regions of night to the radiant light of the cot where the Beautiful lay,
And forever and ever and ever a wonderful melody dwells
In the tender sweet ringing and singing of the beautiful Bethlehem bells.

For they sing of a love that is deathless—a love that still triumphs in loss;
They sing of the love that is leading the world to the Calvary cross;
Ring sweet o'er the sound of the cities—ring sweet o'er the hills and the dells
And touch us with tenderest pity, oh, beautiful Bethlehem bells!

—Frank L. Stanton.

CHRISTMAS CHILDHOOD.

Christmas is, perforce, a winter festival, a family and fraternal reunion. "Suffer little children to come." Lo, they have come. And the music of their child voices! The concert of the morning stars, what were they to the natural untrained melody of innocent childhood in its joyous expectations?

A brief, bright morning picture with fervid expectant fancy attuned to "peace and good will to men," a sacred, solemn, confident, joyous, "peace," a "good will" and fraternal friendship that shall fill and fructify and sanctify the year to come.

Ah, childhood, Christmas childhood! See how for one day it mocks the poet's lines, "Some traces of Eden ye still inherit, but the trail of the serpent is over them all." Its own gift is always the best, and it rejoices that Bill and Jim and Lizzie and Sara fare as well. "Peace on earth," but not of earth; "good will" that shall inform the coming year and mold the man and woman of the future.

First Christmas Celebration.
The birth of Christ was not originally observed at this time of the year. It was not until nearly 100 years after his death that there was any attempt at a celebration of the event at all, and then for 300 years or more it was celebrated at various times in the year by the Christians in different parts of the world. Some chose the 1st and some the 6th of January, others the 29th of March, the time of the Jewish Passover, while still others observed the day on the 29th of September, the feast of the tabernacles. The 10th of April and the 20th of May were also kept as the birthday of Christ. By the fifth century, however the 25th of December was the day generally adopted.—Pittsburgh Dispatch.

An Old Anglo-Norman Carol.
Lordings, listen to our lay—
We have come from faraway
To seek Christmas;
In this mansion we are told
He his yearly feast doth hold:
'Tis today
May joy come from God above
To all those who Christmas love!

Lordings, I now tell you true,
Christmas bringeth unto you
Only mirth;
His house he fills with many a dish
Of bread and meat and also fish
To grace the day.
May joy come from God above
To all those who Christmas love!

Lordings, through our army's band
They say, Who spends with open hand
Free and fast,
And oft repales his many friends
God gives him double what he spends
To grace the day.
May joy come from God above
To all those who Christmas love!

Lordings, wicked men eschew,
In them never shall you view
Aught that's good;
Concords are the rabble rout,
Kick and beat the grumblers out
To grace the day.
May joy come from God above
To all those who Christmas love!

Lords, by Christmas and the host
Of this mansion hear my toast—
Drink it well,
Each must drain his cup of wine,
And I the first will toss off mine;
Thus I advise,
Here, then, I bid you all wassail,
Cursed be he who will not say Drink-Nail.