

CHRISTMAS DAY IN BETHLEHEM.

At this season of the year probably no city of the ancient world presents a more picturesque or attractive aspect than Bethlehem, whose population is many times multiplied by the presence of a vast army of pilgrims from every part of the globe. Meantime, in the height of the great annual Muslim festival, or Hurdwar, in upper India, at the season of the sacred festival, may have much greater but they cannot be said to have more devout or more cosmopolitan crowds than those that flock to the city of David in the Christmas week. Shaped wonderfully like a crescent, yet the only thoroughly Christian town in all Syria, Bethlehem puts on its gayest garb as Christmas approaches. At all times a pretty and attractive place, it is then a thousand fold more so. The thrifty townspeople, their handsome wives and dark-eyed daughters, prepare for the festivities weeks in advance and are ready to welcome the first arrivals.

No words can adequately describe the grandeur of the Christmas services at the Church of the Nativity, which is the center of interest for the pilgrims. These services are kept up the entire week. On the way to church the visitors are beset by peddlers, who push under their very noses little ornaments of silver and gold, and mother-of-pearl. The Church of the Nativity is one of the oldest structures in existence, and although it has been repeatedly repaired, it still retains much of its original form and character. In the side aisles at different altars priests chant the service in tones that swell and die amid the tall columns that support the roof.

At the various groups of pilgrims kneel in reverent adoration, while still other groups are guided around the church by monks, who point out the rich relics and sacred places, the most venerated of all being the shrine of the manger, beneath the choir in which, it is claimed, incloses the actual birth place of the Saviour. During the Christmas festivities this sacred shrine is resorted to by great multitudes, who crowd each other in their pious eagerness to kiss the marble slab on the floor with a silver star in the center.

So fervid and enthusiastic are these worshippers that the marble slab has been repeatedly kissed away in places, rendering a new slab necessary. The same experience has occurred with the stone covering of the crypt in the Church of the Holy Sepulcher in Jerusalem.



MARKET PLACE IN BETHLEHEM ON CHRISTMAS MORNING.

which has had to be renewed several times in consequence of its out-crusting surface being literally kissed away by pious devotees. The tradition is that Christ was once laid in this manger. A few feet distant is the chapel of the Magi, where the wise men of old, Melchior, Caspar and Balthazar, came worshipping with rare gifts.

A subdued, rich light is diffused throughout the grotto by the soft glowing lamps over the star, and the swinging censers lend an agreeable odor to an otherwise close and musty atmosphere. All worldly thoughts are banished as the kneeling pilgrims listen spellbound to the melodious chanting of the sacred office or the full, sturdy, noble singing of the grand looking, bearded priests. The low roof, the "living rock," the censers, the music, the lights, all seem to dissolve, and in their stead there appear to the moist eyes of the adoring pilgrims the manger cradle with the babe, the Virgin mother and Joseph, the mean surrounding, the oxen and their litter of straw, and the gentle, wondering sheep.

CHRISTMAS REUNIONS.

How many families whose members have been dispersed and scattered far and wide in the restless struggles of life are on this day reunited and meet once again in that happy state of companionship and mutual good will which is a source of such pure and unalloyed delight and so incompatible with the cares and sorrows of the world, that the religious belief of the most civilized nations and the rude traditions of the roughest savages alike number it among the first joys of a future condition of existence provided for the best and happy! How many old recollections and how many dormant sympathies does Christmas time awaken! — Charles Dickens

THE LEGEND OF THE MISTLETOE.

The hanging of the mistletoe at this coming Christmas, in various ways, is a very old custom, and its origin is shrouded in mystery. This branch of the holiday's decoration treasures within it sweets that to the young people are most tempting. It was the same ten centuries ago, and so it will be for centuries to come.

While their ladyships were waiting And their lordships were debating There were other gentlemen going on it in a hurry who were stating That as usual one evening

Baptized that British Christmas before dawn The sacredness of the mistletoe has always been respected, particularly by the Britons and the Scandinavians. It was a part of the religion of the druids, and they regarded it with the utmost veneration, but restricted their worship of it to the plant when found growing on the oak. The oak was the favorite tree of their divinity, Tutane, which the books say appears to have been the same as the "Triton" of the Gauls, or the sun, was prayed to under different names by the early pagans.

At the period of the winter solstice, which was about Christmas time, a great festival was celebrated in honor of Tutane. When this anniversary arrived the Britons, accompanied by their priests, the druids, went forth with glorious pomp and jolly to gather the mistletoe, which they believed to possess wonderful curative powers. With them they took two white bulls, and sometimes human beings to be sacrificed.

Upon finding the oak with the mistletoe clinging to it the chief druid, clad in white, the emblem of purity, ascended the tree and with a golden knife cut the vine. As it fell it was caught in the folds of the robe of another priest. Then the bulls and sometimes the humans were offered to Tutane, and various festivities followed. The mistletoe thus gathered was cut into small portions and distributed among the people, who hung it over the entrances to their dwellings to notify the evil spirits that they were welcome to shelter during the season of frost and cold.

These rites were retained throughout the Roman dominion in Britain and for a long while under the Jutes, Saxons and Angles.

The most beautiful legend regarding the mistletoe and the elf from which it derives its mystic powers is of an Almyran origin. Balder, the god of poetry and eloquence and second son of Odin and Freya, had a dream in which it was intimated that he would be killed in battle. He commemorated this dream to his mother, who was very fond of him, and she, to protect him, invoked the powers of nature—fire, earth, air and water as well as animals and plants and obtained an oath from them that they would do Balder no harm. With his invulnerability assured, as he thought, he entered the combats of the gods and was very successful in slaying all who came forward to engage him. They struck him with their arrows, but he plucked them out and derided his antagonists as they fell mortally wounded before him.

It was about time for Loki, his arch enemy to challenge him or suffer the ignominy of cowardice but Loki was a schemer. He disguised himself as an old woman and, determining to discover the secret of Balder's invulnerability from death, called upon Freya. He addressed the mother with complimentary remarks upon the valor and good fortune of her son, and the goddess replied that her son was safe from harm, as all the productions of the world had sworn not to injure him. Loki was very much discouraged and was about to go away when Freya added that there was one plant she did not care for because of its insignificance. With well feigned indifference Loki inquired the name of it, and Freya said it was the mistletoe.

The designing Loki procured a shoot of the mistletoe, made an arrow of it and then sought the assembly of the gods. There he met the blind Heda and concluded that the humiliation of Balder's family would be more complete if Balder should be killed by a sightless god. So he asked Heda, "Why do you not contend with the arrows of Balder?" Heda replied that he was blind and unsupplied with arrows, whereupon Loki gave him the mistletoe arrow and said, "Balder is in front of thee." Heda shot, and Balder fell pierced and slain.—Cincinnati Enquirer.

Christmas Eve.

Dream, little child! The shadows fall,
Over the land the mystic veil
That hides the morrow from our eyes
Is swaying in the starlight pale.
Dream, little child! 'Tis Christmas eve,
Dream while the magic hours glide by,
Each wind that blows the snowflakes wild
Is laden with sweet mystery.



Dream, little child! The glowing coals
Are painting pictures on the wall,
Out from the quivering shadows there
You almost hear the thrilling call
Of "Merry Christmas, little maid!
I hope I've brought your heart's desire,"
And Santa's shadow just above
Grows lifelike by the leaping fire.

Dream, little child! The Christmas air
Is glowing with your visions bright,
And all the joys tomorrow holds
Are shining on the page of night.
Dream, little child! And may the years
To you their richest treasures leave,
And may all happy dreams prove real
That come to you this Christmas eve!

Christmas Morning



The Joy of Christmas.

Religion is not an austere thing. It is all joy the moment we hear the Christmas angels chorusing until we swing into glory to the music of the redeemed throng about the throne. The service of Christ is gladness and peace. He means that his every disciple should live in a perpetual Christmas.

Christmas Don'ts.

Don't try to pay debts or return obligations in your Christmas giving. Don't give trashy things. Many an attic could tell strange stories about Christmas presents. Don't make presents which your friends will not know what to do with and which would merely encumber the home.

BORN ON CHRISTMAS DAY

Some Famous People Who First Saw the Light on or About Dec. 25.

There is some uncertainty about the year and date of the birth of Clara Barton, founder of the Red-Cross and famous philanthropist, who died this year, more than ninety years old, but it is generally believed that she was born on Christmas day in 1820 or 1821.

Lord John Morky, the celebrated British author and statesman, Gladstone's lieutenant and secretary of state for India—in the Asquith cabinet, was born on Christmas eve, Dec. 24, 1838. Seven years later to the day King George I. of Greece first saw the light.

Lord Marcus Beresford, brother of the famous British admiral, was a Christmas day baby, as were also Lady Grey-Egerton and the Countess of Rothes, one of the survivors of the wreck of the Titanic.

Among those who were born on Dec. 25, "just too late for Christmas dinner," were Admiral George Dewey, the Earl of Leicester Sir James Linton, the printer; the Duchess of Leeds, Sir James Rankin, member of the British parliament, and James D. Stephens, representative from California in the American congress.

CHRISTMAS WITH THE TOILERS OF THE SEA

LANDLUBBERS that you are, did you ever reflect that there is a world where Christmas is as meaningful a day as the 24th or 25th of December? Did you ever think far enough beyond the spicy vapors of your own plum pudding to realize that the "submarine folk" were living their Christmas day as if they knew naught of its fame? They do know what it means, however, as well as ever do you, but winds lash and waves thump on the 25th as on every other day, and it's a foolish sailorman who counts on turkey or holly berries. The chances are he'll see little of them.

Christmas is disobliging enough to come in the very beginning of the maddest weather, and the weather never gives way one inch. The pilotboat people and the life savers make these little attempts at holding hold day, but ten to one they will be nothing more than attempts. If the sea chooses to make merry in its own way the sea-commands and must be obeyed.

The captains of the life saving stations along the beach try each year to celebrate with their men. A turkey is always brought to the headquarters and a good meal prepared around it as a star attraction. But anywhere from drumsticks to nuts and raisins may come the signal from the coast guard. Perhaps a crab-fishing boat has capsized; perhaps it is a big ship going down the result is the same. The Christmas turkey is left to grow cold, the mince pie is forgotten, and it's off to launch the lifeboat and then to the oars and away. Night or day the summons may come. If at night there are a flashing of lights on the beach and a fight, man against storm, in the blackness of the surf.

On the life ship provision is made for a good dinner, but there the pleasure ends. Day and night the ship rides at anchor ten miles off shore. Always the clanging of the fog bell is heard and the lights are watched, and break in the monotony there is none, save for a better bill of fare than usual and an extra glass of grog, then back to the belt and the lights again, and men forget what Christmas celebrated or that it was celebrated at all.

It was during the carrying of the last turkey that the bells rang fiercely, for a fog was driving in past the heads, and lights were being enveloped in it. Two new men were among the crew, and they sprang, frightened, away from the table. The old sailors assured them that it was no trouble out of the ordinary, but they could not be induced to come back to the dinner. They are blue now and are laughing at other new men, but their companions have not forgotten to mention the dinner that they missed by gazing absurdly into a winter fog and expecting the death of themselves or some one else every moment.

Christmas is a lottery to the pilots. No man of them knows when his turn is coming to guide a ship into port, and ships must be guided when it is their captain's will. Some of the pilots may have a snatch of the day at home in the midst of Santa Claus gossip and tin horns and stuffed stockings. Whoever the other pilots may be, they are on the water with a good dinner stowed away awaiting its opportunity, which may or may not come. If a ship is suddenly sighted, then—never mind the dinner.

The life on the great steamers and sailing vessels is more systematic, and it is worth while to prepare for as much merriment as the homesickness of empty sea view will permit. There may be a Christmas tree and music and dancing; but, be you a seagull or a landlubber, it's all the same—you would rather be at home over a table that does not roll and spend a good Christian Christmas with all its traditional nonsense.—San Francisco Call.

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