

Christmas, 1473.

A Mystery Play of the Nativity

IT was early morning of the sixteenth of December, in the year of our Lord 1473. There was a sprightly freshness in the air, yet a touch of ardor, too, for France, even in its northern parts, as in the neighborhood of Rouen, where this scene is laid, is favored with sunshine and pleasant warm breezes until the early months of the new year. Shops were closed, the tools of the mason and the shoemaker and the carpenter lay where they had fallen from the hand of the owner or where they had been put the night before. But every square of Rouen all the way from the massive portal of the cathedral to the cloisters of St. Maclou was thronged, and every window threatened to burst outward from the press of heads and shoulders seeking a point of vantage. In the streets the royal archers had difficulty in keeping a little way clear, and were forced often to threaten and sometimes to prod into order the crowding masses. Something of unusual nature was evidently toward.

Promptly at eight o'clock a herald stepped from the arch of the cathedral and sounded long and loudly on his trumpet. For some moments he remained standing there, as though waiting for a signal from behind. Then he began slowly to pace forward. With a grotesque caper another figure sprang into life from the darkness of the archway. On its head were horns, in its hand it carried a horrid spear, in the girdle at its waist hung smoking firebrands, and sharp implements like the tools of a tinmith, while its entire body was covered with long hair, and hideous talons armed its long black fingers. No doubt of its identity could be left: it was Lucifer. Rapidly others of his band emerged and surrounded him, merry devils playing pranks, raging devils with forked tongues, serene devils disguised as vintagers, as artisans, as magistrates, yet all displaying in some fashion the cloven hoof or spoked tail. Close pressing on the heels of this boisterous crew came a long bearded patriarch, mounted on an ass. From time to time a celestial figure clothed in white, bearing a shining long sword, stepped from beside him and blocked the way. The chronicles of the time fail to mention whether the ass spoke or not, but the spectacle made it plain beyond peradventure to every onlooker that this was Balaam who was riding in review before them.

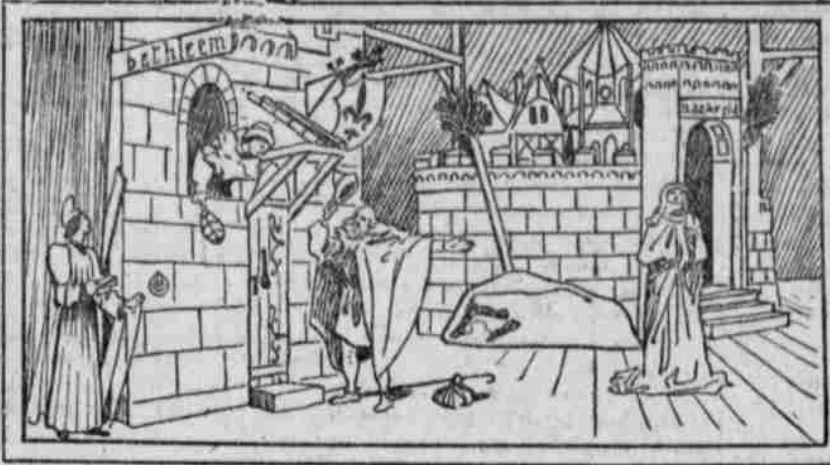
After Balaam came other of the prophets, David, Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, Daniel and the Sibyl. These were they who had foretold the coming of the Messiah. Shepherds followed them, playing upon bagpipes and singing lustily:

"Dome from heaven, from heaven so lie,
Of angels there came a great company.
With mirth and joy and great solemnity
They sang terly, terlow:
So merrily the shepherds their pipes can
blow."

Queerest of all was the manner in which these various personages were accoutered, Balaam



PORTAL OF ROUEN CATHEDRAL.



JOSEPH AND MARY ARRIVE AT BETHLEHEM.

some 10,000 verses, and had rehearsed the actors in their parts, so that all was in readiness. On the morning of the twenty-fourth the play would begin, in the market place of the city, and by the grace of God it would be finished by evening of the day following. Let all attend! The crier then made proclamation for the mayor that all shops save those of the victualers should be closed on those two days. Citizens need have no fear at leaving their houses unguarded, for special troops of the archers would patrol the city, and furthermore the gates of the town would be closed against either ingress or egress. Let all attend!

Now let us turn our attention to the market place. It is a large square in the center of Rouen, into which the principal thoroughfares of the city debouch. On all of its four sides is confusion. Along one entire dimension is being erected a row of private boxes for the mayor and other dignitaries of the town, and for such of the clergy as are not impersonating parts in the mystery. The two abutting sides are given over to the victualers, whose booths will feed the hungry throngs during the entire acts of the play. And the fourth side, that facing the private boxes, is allotted for the stage. In all, this structure compasses some 10,000 square feet; but this small space for the time represents two countries, Palestine and Italy—to say nothing of two realms not to be located with so much geographical certainty—paradise and hell.

On its extreme left is Nazareth, and the house of Joseph and Mary. In fact, the house is all there is to the town, except a sign board inscribed with the name of the place. Next is Bethlehem, typified by an inn and a stable, and just beyond Bethlehem lies a "mansion," or curtailment square. At the appropriate moment the screen here will be withdrawn, disclosing to the eyes of the onlookers the band of shepherds, watching their flocks by night, and incidentally making the welkin ring with the sound of song and shrilling of the pipes. The field of the shepherds lies betwixt Bethlehem and Jerusalem, that is to say, betwixt the inn and stable and the house of Herod, which stands for the holy city. The next few feet leap oceans, for at the side of Herod's house stands the temple of Apollo in Rome, the chamber of the Roman emperor and the capitol, besides the haunt of the Sibyl, that strange figure of medieval church lore, who, pagan though she was, ranked with the Hebrew prophets, and was celebrated in the greatest of church songs, the "Dies Irae," along with David:

"Dies Irae, dies illa,
Solvet saeculum in favilla,
Teste David cum Sibylla."

Adjoining the house of the Sibyl is limbo. So close are they that during the course of the play their inmates can reach across the intervening space and exchange the courtesy of a sip of wine from the flask. Limbo is merely a square tower, with a front strongly grated. It serves to hold the materialized souls of such of the worthy departed as dwell on earth during the old dispensation. Here will reside, during the two days of the representation, the prophets, the patriarchs and a select few of the pagans. Their lot is not an unhappy one—they live only in unsatisfied hope. They may well be content with their fate when they look upon their neighbors to the right, at the end of the row of spectacles. For here is hell-mouth. Of all the grotesque and impressive spectacles of the mystery play, hell-mouth took precedence. The most skillful carpenters and mechanicians were employed in its fabrication, and the art of the most expensive painter was none too good for its adornment. When completed, hell-mouth stood 12 or 15 feet high, and as

many broad, grinning like the head of St. George's dragon. Its jaws opened cavernously when proper levers were put in operation at the back, and from its eyes and throat issued flames and gusts of smoke, from branters filled with pitch and blown upon with bellows. Through this smoke sallied out the devil and his aides, to drag in the souls of the lost; and the agonized screams of the damned, punctuated by the roar of cannon,

the crashing of stones in the thunder barrel, and the shrieking of pipes, was calculated to instill into the most obtuse heart a wholesome fear of what the hereafter might have in store for the unrepentant.

The final spectacle of the stage the carpenters were erecting was paradise. High placed above everything else, it dominated all the scene. Its occupants, God the Father, God the Son and the blessed angels, were hoisted up into it by mechanical lifts, and when the angels wished to descend, as for instance on the night of the nativity, over the fields near Bethlehem, they did so suspended on ropes. It was hard being God or an angel, for there was little chance to get down and stretch one's legs. With these heavenly characters abode four others—Peace, Mercy, Justice and Truth, in imitation of Aristotle's four cardinal virtues.

Such were, in the main, the "mansions" and the characters for which the carpenters had to provide, and the eight days succeeding the "monstre" or grand parade were especially busy ones for these artisans.

Early on the morning of December 24 the long-awaited representation began. The vast market place was thronged. Every box was filled with the gentry; the roped-in space in front, out to within some yards of the stage front, had been covered thickly with straw, and here on the ground sat thousands, while the open stretch immediately in front of and rather below the level of the stage was filled with crowds parading back and forth. Altogether it was a glorious and eager gathering.

The learned doctor whose midnight toll had prepared the doggerel, and whose weeks of labor had rehearsed the players in their parts, appeared first in a short prologue. After exhorting his listeners to silence, he described for them briefly the substance of what was about to be presented on the stage, and admonished them to take to heart the lessons of the mystery. As he retired to a convenient angle of the wall of Herod's house, whence he might advantageously be in position for prompting the actors, a deep lamentation broke out within hell. It was Adam grieving over the sad and fallen state of man.

Thus the play goes on for two days, passing now to limbo, whence the prophets issue to foretell to mankind the coming salvation, to Nazareth, to Bethlehem and throughout the whole cycle of the nativity. When Christ is born in Bethlehem, hell redoubles its efforts, and Lucifer rolls about the stage in a mighty orgy of blind fury. The images of the idols in the temple at Rome fall crashing from their pedestals, and, high above all, the angels in paradise, or hovering on their ropes above the fields of Palestine, chant majestically the praises of the Creator and proclaim the "Pax in terra."

Curious is the final scene. It is placed in Rome, in the chamber of Augustus. The emperor, dressed like a French duke, is seated on a fancy chair loaned by the mayor of Rouen. Evidently he is ill at ease. He is reading a scroll of the Sibylline writings, wherein he finds a distinct prophecy to the effect that a Messiah is to be born in Palestine, in Bethlehem of Judea. More and more disturbed he becomes, and as he paces the floor of his chamber he recites his woes in doggerel French, accompanied by a wealth of gesticulations. The sun is already down beyond the gables to the west of the market place ere his monologue comes to an end. With a sudden inspiration, he falls to his knees and worships a figure of the virgin that miraculously appears on the wall. Satan and his crew give a final salvo, and the crowd rises stiffly to its feet and wends its way back to the homes and taverns of the city, much moved by the spectacle it has been a witness of for two whole days.



AN ENTRANCE FOR DINNER DURING THE TWO DAYS PLAY.

wore a flowing gown of richest silk, borrowed from the bishop. On his feet were long pointed-toe shoes of doeskin, turned up and fastened to the knees with fine chains. His neck was encircled with a piece of costly lace, and to give a touch of the Oriental, a turban was wound about his fifteenth-century hat; and about the turban was fastened a necklace borrowed for the occasion from the goodwife.

The shepherds were attired quite as sumptuously. They wore slashed doublets and gorgeous colored trunks, and the pipes upon which they played were of the latest fashion in French instrumentation. But the magi, who journeyed in the shepherds' company, far outshone their pastoral companions. Beneath their gowns they gleamed resplendent in bright armor. From top to toe they were encased in mail, and, since they could find no camels in Rouen, they rode on donkeys, that groaned beneath the burden. Each magus was accompanied by a page.

And so the procession wound on and on out of the portal of the cathedral of Rouen. Joseph and Mary, the surly innkeeper bearing a lantern, to designate that his part was played in the night, King Herod, the Roman emperor, and lastly God the Father, God the Son and a numerous band of angels, who distributed amongst themselves the costliest of the albs, stoles, dalmatics and copes loaned for the occasion by the clergy of the cathedral and the cloister of St. Maclou. Seventy-eight of these principal actors there were in this procession, and their attendant squires and the lesser figures in the drama numbered a hundred and fifty more. By the time they had passed from out the cathedral and arrived at the cloister it was well on the way toward noon of this sixteenth of December, 1473.

At intervals during the course of the parade the crier who headed it stopped and blew a prolonged blast. The procession halted, and from its midst emerged a long-visaged man in the dress of a university doctor. In his hand he held a fat scroll. Waving this aloft, he made proclamation:

"Silent! silent! Silentium habeatis.
Et per Dei filium, pacem faciat."

And when he had finished his peroration in Latin he announced in the vernacular the purport of the celebration. It was to be a great mystery play in honor of the nativity of the Savior, "Incarnation et nativite de nostre sauveur et redempteur Jesuschrist." The sheriffs of the town, the clergy of the cathedral and St. Maclou, many of the rich burghers and the bishop himself had given of their time and money without stint, in order that the dear townspeople might refresh their souls with a spectacle of holy events. And he, the doctor, had composed a mystery play of

IN THE PUBLIC EYE

WANTS STATE TO AID WIDOWS



"Every widow who has been left with little children and in straitened circumstances should receive a pension from the state."

Such is the declaration of Mrs. Clarence O. Burns, president of the Little Mothers' Aid Society of New York, who is firm in her belief as to the advisability of this plan. The important question is being brought forward in women's clubs all over the United States, and any discussion of it is timely. The opinion of Mrs. Burns, especially, is one to carry weight, for she is well qualified to speak forcibly on the subject. She says in part:

"A man carries a gun for his nation. If he is injured in war he receives a pension in recognition of the service he has rendered to his country. He feels no humiliation when the money is preferred him, and in many cases is only too ready to apply to the state for it if he has not been recognized."

"Now, a woman risks her life for her country, her children grow up to serve their nation, and why, when this woman gives so much to the world, should she not, when left in destitute or straitened circumstances, receive as much as the man who goes to war?"

"By no means do I believe that every mother in need should be given a pension or money when the husband is alive and able to work. The person who deserves and should be given such a pension is the woman who is a widow and has little children. This woman has probably never worked, save in her home. She has always been provided for, and knows absolutely nothing of the battle of the world, and she is thrown onto the world with two or three little children. What shall she do? Where shall she turn to get bread and butter for them?"

"Now, if this woman were supplied with a certain amount of money by the state for the care of these children until they attained a working age, think what a difference it would make in the home, in the community, in every possible way."

"This pension for the widow would give both the child and the mother a chance for life—a thing which neither can have now."

CAPTURED FAMOUS PEG LEG



Of all the innumerable relics on exhibition in the Illinois Memorial hall in the state house, none attracts more attention from tourists than the cork leg of General Santa Ana, the Mexican commander, which was captured by a company of central Illinois soldiers. The finding of the cork leg was one of the most interesting incidents of the Mexican war. An extraordinary fact, recently brought to light by investigations conducted by the McLean county historical society, is that the soldier who first caught sight of the leg took possession of it and sent it to the rear for safe keeping while a battle was in progress, is yet living, in the person of Edward Elvin Elliot, formerly of Bloomington, Ill., and now of San Rafael, Cal.

In a letter confirming the statement that he was the captor of the cork leg, Mr. Elliot relates the incident connected therewith, the story being of interest to the student of history. Mr. Elliot states that he enlisted in Company B of the Fourth Illinois infantry when war was declared with Mexico. He left the printer's case to take up arms. The first engagement of consequence for the regiment of which Mr. Elliot was a member was known as the battle of Cerro Gordo, April 18, 1847. The Mexicans retreated when their batteries were attacked and the Fourth regiment coming up found the coach of General Santa Ana standing in the road where it had been abandoned, due to the killing of one of the mules hitched to it. General Santa Ana was mounted upon the other mule and fled. His departure was so hurried that he was forced to leave behind in the coach his cork leg, a bag of gold doubloons and a basket of lunch. Elliot reached the coach first and with a soldier's curiosity jumped inside, handing out the cork leg, the chest of gold and basket of food to his companions.

There was \$10,000 in the chest and this money was placed in the possession of General Twig and eventually turned into the United States treasury as a prize of war. The Fourth regiment kept the cork leg in their possession until after the close of the war and it was later sent to the Illinois state house.

NOTED IRISHMAN REACHES 80



One of Great Britain's grand old men, Justin McCarthy, recently celebrated in London his eightieth birthday anniversary and was the recipient of congratulations from every part of the English-speaking world. His career has been an active and a useful one, part of it in the turmoil of political strife and part of it in the quietness of his library, from which have issued many works of exceptional merit.

Mr. McCarthy, former leader of the Irish Nationalists, comes of a family devoted for many generations to the cause of Ireland. He was born in "rebel" Cork, November 22, 1830. He had literary tastes as a youth, but his chief desire was to be a barrister. Academic degrees were then denied to Roman Catholics and to Protestant dissenters. Thus debarred from entering the legal profession through the university, and unable to afford the costly training outside the university, young McCarthy turned his attention to journalism and became a reporter on the Cork Examiner. He was a youthful sympathizer with the Nationalist movement, and was deeply impressed by the trial of Smith O'Brien and the elder Dillon and Thomas Francis Meagher, who were sentenced to death, but reprieved by Queen Victoria and transported to Van Diemen's Land. Young McCarthy was sent to report the trial. He was a patriotic youth of nineteen and received his baptism of fire as he filled his notebook in the courthouse at Ballingarry. During the succeeding years Mr. McCarthy followed journalism in Liverpool and in London and published several novels.

Mr. McCarthy's parliamentary career extended over 17 years and he was chairman of the Irish parliamentary party from 1890 to 1896. His speeches in parliament were in fine literary form and were full of historical allusions and poetical quotations.

FROM POORHOUSE TO SENATE



The rise of a man from the lowliest station to one of the highest in his state is not among the events that belong exclusively to the past, nor is it confined solely to the realm of fiction. John J. Dunnegan of Shenandoah, Iowa, who has been elected to the Iowa state senate, passed three years of his early childhood as an inmate of a North Carolina poorhouse, being left at the age of three without either father or mother.

When six years of age he was bound out to a family who treated him with the utmost cruelty. Misery and hardship gripped him from the cradle and robbed him of all the joys of childhood. From the poorhouse, without education, or aid from others, John Dunnegan has risen by his own efforts to affluence and high official position. He has worked as a section hand on a railroad at \$1.10 a day, as hired man on a farm, has dug wells and cisterns with a spade, and performed many other kinds of hard work for small pay. He was married when twenty-nine, being at that time the owner of a livery stable in Milford, Neb. Shortly afterward he lost everything in a fire, came to Shenandoah "dead broke" and grasped eagerly the first job offered him—digging a well. Later he started in the plumbing business in a small way, but his business did not long remain small. It grew rapidly until it extended into a dozen different states.