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Christmas at Christ's Birthplace

At last I am come to the market place, at one end of which stands the Church of the Nativity, marking the holy, lowly birthplace, says a writer in Army and Navy Life. There is only one entrance from the street, and it is so low that in entering one is forced to bow the head and assume a posture of reverence. When once inside I raise my eyes I feel the lashes wet.

The ceiling is lofty, the walls white-washed and bare, while the ancient dark beams and rafters add to the air of extreme simplicity. There are long rows of marble pillars, once adorned with paintings, that are all but faded now, and of the once glittering mosaics of the clerestory only fragments remain. Coming into the choir and apse, the scene is suddenly changed. There are numerous altars of diverse ownership under a constant and jealous guardianship of Latin, Greek and Armenian. Over these various claims there has been much and bitter dissension; blood has been spilled more than once. In fact, as all the world knows, the Crimean war began with a mob riot in the Church of the Nativity—sacilege of sacrilege!—and here was born the Prince of Peace!

Down the dark and winding stairs, slippery with the drippings of count-



BEND LOW AND KISS THE GROUND FOR CHRIST'S SAKE

less candles, I make my way to that lowly place into which first came the light of the world. The grotto of the Nativity is a cavern beneath the church, long, narrow and low ceiled, with pendent lamps of precious metal and rare workmanship lighting the gloom. The floor is marble, and wonderful old tapestries, pictures and silk hangings cover the walls. A marble cradle in one corner commemorates the manger, and in a recess on one side a dozen or more hanging lamps are ranged around in a half circle.

Before the altar there all men bend low and kiss the ground for Christ's sake, for it is here a silver star is set to mark the birthplace of him whom his mother called Jesus. The center of the star is glass, and through it one may see the original rocky floor of the stable. To the north of the grotto underneath the floor one may also see the cave in which St. Jerome spent many peaceful years translating the Bible into Latin.

The effect of the whole is impressive, but in an unfamiliar way. I am conscious of a feeling that is almost resentment against the lamps and tapestries and the marble floor. They seem to level to the cheapness of worldly riches a spot that, of all places on earth, should have been allowed to remain tranquilly humble and dimly sacred, true to the character of its holy, transcendent memory.

I close my eyes for a moment, while mind and heart rebel against the present, until it vanishes and the atmosphere of the past, in all its deep and wondrous mystery, returns to envelop my soul. "I am here, in Bethlehem," I whisper to myself, and beyond closed lids I see the Virgin mother with her gentle face as the old masters loved to picture her and a "light that never was on land or sea" in her beautiful mother eyes, while the glory from one low hanging star touches a Baby's hair. The fragrant scent of new hay is in my nostrils, I hear the soft breathing of nearby cattle, and above the murmur of pilgrims' prayers the voice of the Magi is saying, "Lo, we have seen his star in the east and are come to worship him."

To Light Yule Log Properly. There are thousands who still firmly believe that to light the Yule log with the charred remains of its predecessor of a year ago means twelve months of good luck for the provident household and his family. But it has always been considered an evil omen if a squinting person, a barefooted person or, worst of all, a flat footed woman enters the room while the log is burning.

THE ETERNAL QUESTION "WHAT SHALL I GIVE HIM?"

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HEALTH HINTS

In case of poisoning. First send for a physician; second induce vomiting by tickling throat with leather or finger; drink lots of water, or strong mustard and water; swallow sweet oil or white of egg. Acids are antidotes for alkalies and vice versa



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CHRISTMAS HYMNS

The earliest Christmas hymn was undoubtedly the "Gloria In Excelsis," which was probably one of the hymns which the Christians were singing in church at Christmas in Nicomedia, when Diocletian, the emperor, ordered the church to be closed and the whole congregation, young and old, burned to death.

It is strange that while we know that Christmas and the Epiphany were celebrated by the singing of hymns, no ancient carols have come down to us.

There is an old carol dating from the fifteenth century which has the "Gloria In Excelsis" for a refrain. It begins:

A babe was born all of a maid To bring salvation unto us. No more are we to sing afraid Veni creator spiritus.

One of the best carols of the Elizabethan period is that by I. Bert Southwell, a Jesuit priest who was sent to convert England, but who was seized by her Protestant Majesty Elizabeth and imprisoned in the tower for three years, and then, after suffering the torture of the rack, was executed Feb. 2, 1594. It begins:

Behold, a simple, tender babe In freezing winter night; In homely manger trembling lies, Alas, a piteous sight!

During the protectorate of Oliver Cromwell the observance of Christmas was forbidden, and yet there is a Christmas carol from the Puritan pen of George Wither, who was enriched and promoted by Cromwell and thrown into prison by Charles. It begins:

As on the night before this happy morn A blessed angel unto shepherd told.

Bishop Christopher Wordsworth of Lincoln has given us the hymn beginning "Sing, oh sing, this blessed morn!" James Montgomery, who was considered one of England's most eminent poets by no less an authority than Lord Byron, is the author of the carol beginning "Angels from the realms of glory." Montgomery was born of Moravian parents and dedicated to the ministry, but he took up newspaper work instead and became eminent in general literature as well as in poetry.

Paul Gerhardt, to whom we are indebted for the Easter hymn, "Jesus Lives," has also given us a spirited Christmas carol beginning "All my heart this night rejoices."

In the midst of the warlike strife between King Charles and his parliament in the year 1629 John Milton found both leisure and repose to write his hymn, "On the Morning of the Nativity," in which there are evidently references to the disturbed condition of things at that time—for example:

No war or battle sound Was heard the world around.

Christmas Eve

The blacklog's flame has died away; The embers into ashes drift. Outside the snows are eddying, gray, And piling fast in many a rift. White robed is now the cedar tree Where once the catbird nightly sang, And from the eaves by two and three The icicles like arrows hang.

The shadows on the somber wall Flit, cross and dance amid the gloom, And streaks of ghostly color fall In changing hues about the room. The spiders in the corners dim Within their webs the closer cling, And from the mantel's oaken rim A pair of children's stockings swing.

O'er field and forest, lane and road Fast and still faster swirl the snows, And in the barn loft snugly stowed A drowsy rooster wakes and crows. The clock strikes twelve, and midnight wanes, While winter skies stretch cold and drear.

Frost flowers blossom on the panes, The snows float by and disappear. And then across the rooftree swells, Borne by the winds that fall and rise, A sound of many hurrying bells, A sound that ebbs and peals and dies. And next adown the chimney creeps The children's saint in all the lands, And, true to all the trysts he keeps White bearded on the hearthstone stands.

—Ernest McGaffey in Ladies' Home Companion.

A Christmas School.

Some of the very best dolls are made in Sonneburg, Germany, which has an academy of design.

This school was established in 1851, and its model room contains many excellent pieces of sculpture and rare old prints. Modelling dolls is no easy task, and it is remarkable what perfect figures the students of this school are able to turn out. Molds are made from the models and from these leaden patterns the heads, arms and legs are turned out, a special machine being used for stamping the hands. The factories, especially the kneading room, are hot and filled with steam, and for this reason the big, brawny Germans who knead the mixture wear as few clothes as possible while at work.

Holiday Greetings

ALTHOUGH we live in Gungy-wamp, Which isn't on the map, An', though our town hez settled down To take its winter nap, Our thoughts go out to friends afar, Friends north, south, east an' west. We hope an' pray this Christmas day Will be their happiest.

We live here quiet on the farm, Irene an' ma an' me; We have two pens uv noisy hens An' cats, no less'n three! We raise our garden sass an' sich, Make cider ev'ry fall; Wish we could git a cask uv it Out to you, one an' all.

We ain't no hands fur style an' sich, But we jest wanter say We'll use you white by day or night Ef you should come our way. Accept this greetin', which is full Uv good ol' Gungy cheer. An' peace, good will an' joy until We see you all next year!

—Joe Cone.

An Austrian Christmas Delicacy. The Austrian affects at Christmas time a delicacy known as fruchtbrod, made of raisins, currants, figs and chopped dates. This constitutes a sort of cake, baked hot.

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