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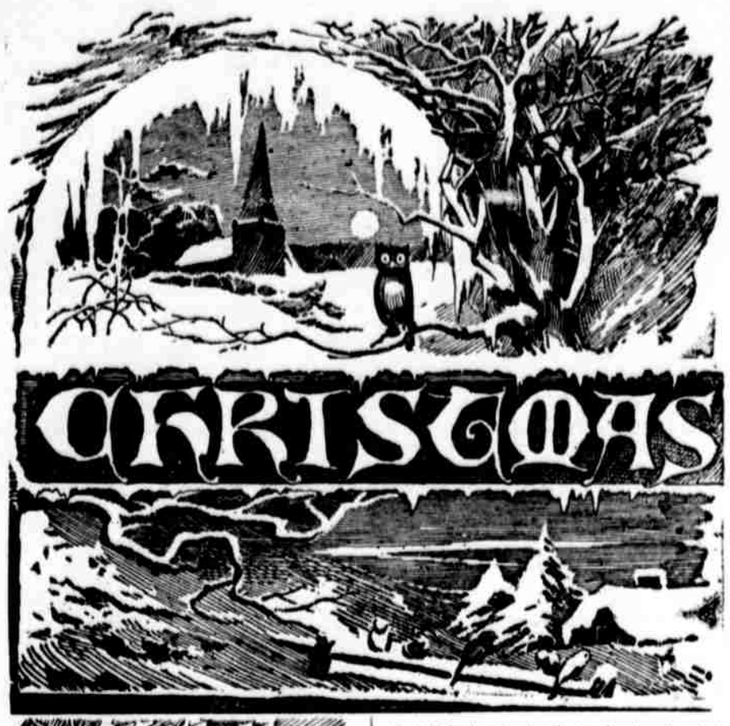

CHRISTMAS is here;
Winds whistle shrill,
Icy and chill,
Little care we;
Little we fear
Weather without,
Sheltered about
The mahogany tree.
—Thackeray.

FAIRY FANCIES OF THE EMERALD ISLE.

BY PATRICK EGAN.

Of all the people of Europe the Irish, under ordinarily favorable circumstances, are the most light hearted and most romantic. Nowhere can there be found such fun and frolic as at an Irish country dance, nowhere so good natured a being as the Irish Peasant.

"Oh meet him in his cabin rude,
Or dancing with his dark haired Mary
You'd swear they knew no other mood
But mirth and joy in Tipperary!"

Other peoples, blessed with better opportunities, may, perhaps, cultivate a more classical standard of music but none have a keener appreciation and love for the melodious and the beautiful than the sons and daughters of the green isle; while for legandary lore, romance, poetry and pathos they exceed all others.

During this holy and happy Christmas time, in every part of Ireland, around the fireside of the humblest homestead as well as around the yule log in the stately mansion, the imagination of the young will be filled and their blood warmed, or mayhap curdled, by the recital of thousands of fairy tales. For Ireland, of all places on earth, abounds in fairy fancies.

Many of the fairy tales of Erin have come down from generation to generation for over three thousand years and have had their origin in the magical and supernatural powers attributed to the Tuatha, deDanaans, the old inhabitants of Ireland, by the milesian invaders of that time, because of the wonderful civilization and knowledge of the arts and sciences possessed by the former:—

"Long, long ago, beyond the misty space
Of twice a thousand years,
In Erin old there dwelt a mighty race,
Taller than Roman spears.
Like oaks and towers they had a giant grace;
Were fleet as deers,
With wind and waves they made their 'biding place,
These western shephard seers.

* * * * * *

Great were their deeds, their passions, and their sports,
With clay and stone
They piled on strath and shore those mystic forts,
Not yet o'erthrown;
On Cairn-crown'd hill, they held their council courts."

For long ages before the christian era those legends and romances were transmitted through the bards who stood only second, in popular estimation to the kings. During the Ossianic period—in the early centuries of christianity—those traditions were amplified and verified, and the voluminous ceitic manuscripts preserved in the various universities of Europe abound in legends of great beauty from those times, many of which have never yet been published.

The scenery of Ireland, in places partaking of the wild and weird, in others of the wooded glen, the singing river and the lovely lake, and yet again of the fragrant meadow, the fruitful orchard and the waving fields of golden grain, has much to do in farming the romantic nature of the people;—

"Taere is a green island in lone Gougane Barra,
Whence allu of songs rushes forth like an arrow;
In deep-valleyed Desmond a thousand wild fountains
Come down to that lake, from their home in the mountains.
There grows the wild ash; and a time-stricken willow
Looks chidingly down on the mirth of the billow,
As, like some gay child that sad monitor scorning,
It lightly laughs back to the laugh of the morning.

And its zone of dark hills—oh! to see them all brightening,
When the tempest flings out its red banner of lightning.
When the waters come down 'mid the thunders deep rattle,
Like clans from their hills at the voice of the battle;
And brightly the fire-crested billows are gleaming,
And wildly from malloc the eagles are screaming;
Oh! where is the dwelling, in valley or highland,
So meet for a bard as this lone little island?"

Its ruined castles and monasteries, scattered all over the land, great ivy-clad, hoary old piles, many of them standing there for over one thousand long years, have helped to keep these old traditions green in the hearts of the people; and especially inspiring have been these glorious old monuments which rival in antiquity the pryamids of Egypt—the round towers of Ireland.

"The pillar towers of Ireland, how wondrously they stand
By the lakes and rushing rivers through the valleys of our land;
In mystic file, throughout the isle, they lift their heads sublime,
These gray old pillar temples—these conquerors of time!

Beside these gray old pillars, how perishing and weak,
The Roman's arch of triumph, and the temple of the Greek,
And the gold domes of Byzantium and the pointed Gothic spires—
All are gone, one by one, but the temples of our sires!"

* * * * * *

"Around those walls have wandered the Briton and the Dane;
The captives of Armorica, the cavaliers of Spain,
Phœnician and Milesian, and the plundering Norman peers,
And the swordsman of brave Brian, and the chiefs of later years.

How many different rites have these grey old temples known?
To the mind what dreams are written in these chronicles of stone!
What terrors and what errors, what gleams of love and truth,
Have flashed from these walls since the world was in its youth?"

Fairy legends have given names to hundreds of places throughout Ireland. Have we not, all who were born in the old land, in our younger days, on every hallow-eve gone to bed in fear and trembling least the dreaded Pooka would pay us a visit before the next morning's dawn? And were we not kept constantly in mind of his Pookaship when ever we visited, or heard of, the wild and lovely Poolaphuka (the pool of the Pooka) in the country wicklow, Boheraphuka, (the Pooka's road), County Tipperary or Carrigaphooca, (the Pooka's rock), County Cork? Then there are Castlepook (the Goblin's castle) County Cork, Rathpuca (the Pooka's rath) County Kerry and numerous other names of fairy origin.

In their every action of life the people bring into play this sentiment of romance, and the fairies or "good people"—as they are reverentially called—do incessant duty. The young mother lulls her first born to balmy slumber with something like the following:

'Sleep my child! for the rustling trees,
Stirred by the breath of summer breeze,
And fairy songs of sweetest note,
Around us gently float."

And looking back from manhood's toils, struggles, ambitions, and triumphs, the happiest recollection is that:—

"There was a place in childhood that I remember well,
And there a voice of sweetest tone bright fairy tales did tell,
And gentle words and fond embrace were giv'n with joy to me,
When I was in that happy place—upon my mother's knee."

The harp, emblematic as it is of Ireland's national music, is supposed to have been of fairy origin.

"'Tis believ'd that this harp, which I wake now for thee,
Was a syren of old, who sung under the sea;
And who often, at eve, thro' the bright water rov'd
To meet, on the green shore, a youth whom she lov'd.

But she lov,d him in vain, for he left her to weep,
And in tears, all the night, her gold tresses to steep;
'Till heaven look'd with pity on true love so warm,
And chaange'd to this soft harp the sea-maiden's form."

Every rath and mound, and wooded glen, and flowery glade, in Ireland has its quota of "good people." The children when bold and unmanageable are threatnened with the dreaded Pooka, and if good they are delighted with tales of fairy dances and frolic, and elfin laughter and merrymaking; and many is the housewife throughout the land who would not on any account lie down to rest without leaving everything in and around the house cleaned and tidied least the "good people" would be offended by any uncleanness in case they should visit the domicile before morning.

Ireland abounds in great mounds of earth, the origin of which has been lost in antiquity, but which were probably raised as places of defence and also elevations upon which to light signal fires. They are called raths or forths and are regarded with awe and veneration. There, it is believed, on each fine summer night, the fairies hold high carnival; and the man would be brave indeed who who would have the hardihood to cut a bush in one of these forths. The penalty of such a crime is supposed to be the death, within a year and a day, of the one who committed it or of some one of his family.

The romantic associations of the raths always make them a favorite resort for the waundering footsteps of the lovers.

"We'll look through the trees at the cliff, and the eyrie,
We'll tread round the rath on the track of the fairy,
We'll look on the stars, and we'll list to the river,
Till you ask of your darling what gift you can give her.
Oh! she will whisper you, 'love as unchangeably beaming,
And trust, when in secret, most tunefully streaming,
Till the starlight of heaven above us shall quiver,
As our souls flow in one down eternity's river."

Again when the dark shadow of death hovers around the home, the fairy plays an important part. It is a strongly grounded superstition in Ireland that the Banshee follows many of the old families, and gives warning of the approach of the death of any of its members, by a weird and unearthly wail.

"How oft has the Banshee cried.
How oft has death untied
Bright links that glory wove,
Sweet bonds entwin'd by love!"

Among the thousand traditions that surround the lakes of Killarney there is one which must interest the many who have visted that charmed spot. It is told that the O'Donohue of the lakes—one of the chieftains of that line—for many years after his death, might have been seen on every May-day morning gliding across the lakes, on his splendid white charger, to the sweetest of music, surrounded by groups of nymphs who strewed his path with choicest flowers.

"While white as the sail some bark unfurls,
When newly launch'd, thy long mane curls,
Fair steed, as white and free
And spirits, from all the lakes' deep bowers
Glide o'er the blue wave scattering flowers,
Around my love and thee."

Then the legend of Innis Eogan, County Donegal, must make the blood of every Irish nationalist course more quickly. It tells of a goodly troop of Hugh O'Neil's horse which lies in magic slumber in an enchanted cave under the Hill of Aileach; and that the gallant troopers, who are lying beside their horses fully armed and holding the bridles in their hands, only wait for the removal of the spell to rush forth and strike a supreme blow for Irish liberty.

"When they tell us the tale of the spell stricken land,
All entranced, with their bridles and broad swords in haud,
Who wait but the word to give erin her own,
They can read you that legend in proud Innis-Eogain."

In the ancient Irish imagination the "good people" or fairies, had a lovely country of their own, situated out westward in the great Atlantic ocean, where all were free from disease, suffering and sorrow and where youth and life were perpetual. It was called by various names. Tir-fa-tonn or the land beneath the waves, Tir-na-mbeo or the land of the everliving, but, most generally by the name of Tirnangoe, the land of the ever-youthful; and from those they paid their nightly visits; but they sometimes resided in their palace caves beneath the pleasant green hills of Ireland.

The marvel is that the the people of Ireland, considering the terrible trials through which they have passed, and the wondrous struggle which they have maintained for nearly seven hundred years for their nationality, should have been able to preserve so much of the old Celtic romance and so much of their native lightheartedness as they still display.

May it not be that the people and the national cause of the Emerald Isle are still under the guardianship of the "good people" of the fairy land of Tirnanoge and may not Ireland's sons entertain the hope that the long trance of the occupants of the enchanted cave of Aileach may one day be broken and that before long those gallant mailclad troopers of Hugh O'Neil will get a chance to strike a blow for home and native land?

Seizing a Christmas Chance.

Do you blame him?

A MOUNTAIN MAIDEN'S LOVE,

A Reminicence Of The Kentucky Foot Hills.

BY A. B. HAYES.

It was a gloomy Christmas eve. So, at least, thought the only and lonely occupant of the bar-room of the little hotel—if it might be dignified by that name—of the town of Hazard. The young man sat by the open fire place where a few smouldering logs sent out occasional tongues of flame to add to the discomforts of the day. It was nearing four o'clock in the afternoon. A cold drizzling rain which had been falling intermittently since morning, was becoming mixed, here and there, with a flake of snow, giving promise of a white Christmas on the morrow. The wind, in what the noveiist call "fitful gusts," drove the rain, harshly against the small, dirty window panes, shook the loosely hung door and wailed around the corners and through the crevices with a dismal moaning sound. It was indeed a day of discomfort and gloom. fit for the reading of tragedies and harrowing tales of disaster to give the mind its naturally craved and congenial companionship. Young Lyndon sat busily engaged with his thoughts. A tall, slender man of probably twenty-four or twenty-five years of age, with heavy masses of wavy, dark brown hair that in their negligent array concealed somewhat the broad white forehead. He might have been a bandit in disguise, he might have been the representative of a wealthy southern family, he might have been anything that the interested observer might imagine—but he was only a newspaper man, a true Bohemian, such as is rarely found outside the larger cities of our eastern states, and hence no lingering thoughts of greatness or of romance could be connected with him. His presence is this out of the way Kentucky village was in response to an invitation from an old college chum to undergo an experience, dangerous but novel, such as the true Bohemian delights to encounter. So with the permission of his of his paper, he had started on a ten day's semi vacation and was on hand at the appointed rendezvous before his friend had arrived.

For many years the range of foot hills and mountains that forms the boundary between Kentucky and Virginia had been known as the favorite resort of "moonshiners," and many a brave mountaineer had paid the penalty for his crimes, suffering death from the Winchesters and Colts of United States revenue officers. That section of country had a bad reputation. Mysterious disappearances of government officers now and then, who had been sent to ferret out the doings of the outlaws (so called) added to the uncanny character of all that region and especially of the town of Hazard. A very recent occurrence of this sort came into Lyndon's mind as he walked impatiently backward and forward across the floor, waiting for the expected arrival and while not by any means a coward, his face expressed an anxiety that was plainly noticeable, for his presence there was to join a party of officers in a raid on one of the "mountain dew" factories that had been located by a secret service officer in a lonely wild ravine near the foot of one of the most pretentious peaks in the range, some twenty miles east of the village.

At about five o'clock, just as the dusk was beginning to deepen Lyndon heard the patter of horses' hoofs, splashing through the gradually stiffening mud of the street leading past the hostlery, and in a moment more a huge form had pushed open the door and entered the room followed by the forms of three other men, all heavily coated and armed. As the leader shook the water from his great coat and advanced toward the fire he recognized Lyndon and gave him a hearty greeting.

"Glad to see you, my boy, hope you havn't waited long for us," and with these words Col. Winters laid aside his coat and arms, seated himself by the fire and calling loudly for the landlord ordered supper for the party. After dispatching the ordinary supper of corn bread, bacon and coffee dosed with the "long sweetening" for which the south is famous, preparations were made for the perilous ride of the night.

"It's a long and wearisome ride and a dangerous undertaking we have on hands tonight and if you are the least bit timid, Lyndon, you had better stay here till we return, for we want no men with us who quail at danger."

"Never fear for me, old classmate," said Lyndon, "for although I am not overburdened with bravery, I think I can stand one night of danger simply for the sake of the experience which will be more to me, probably, than anything I have yet encountered, and you know Winters, that my life has not been altogether of the humdrum sort. I have been through some experiences, even the recollection of which loosens my hat; through storms at sea, with the redskins of western Nebraska and the territories, where men with more formidable appearance even than yours played the chief part, but this is something new and will probably make the foundation of a neat bit of a story. You know we fellows are always on the lookout for something new and startling to ring in on the innocent public. Oh, no, don't have any fear for me; a man has only once to die, and if I find a resting place among the Kentucky hills, I shall sleep as peacefully as if I laid to rest among the massive oaks and stately shafts of old Oakview."

So this man, without any object in view other than to minister to the cravings of the reading public for something new and novel and startling, and with the prospect of seeing something new and strange, with the prospect of an opportunity to study a new phaze, to him, of human life, took his own life in his hands and with the appearance of perfect indifference began to prepare for the ride.

"Well said my boy, I had judged your mettle from what I knew of you at old Princeton, and on that judgment brought with me an extra saddle horse and full complement of arms, so that we may lose no time in starting on our journey. The ride is long and tiresome, but if you are now the man you used to be, I have no fears that our progress will be hindred by extra care for you."

The horses were brought to the door. The officers buckled on their arms, enveloped themselves in their heavy outer garments and were soon ready to mount. Young Lyndon arrayed himself in a similar manner which so transformed him that no one could distinguish him from one of the officers whose business it was to hunt out and possibly to kill the men who struggled along among the mountain fastnesses for their scanty support. Brave men they were, these men of the mountains who spent their lives in constant danger, trying to evade the officers who hunted for them like for beasts of prey. Wives and sweethearts these men had, whom they loved with a love, uncouth though it may have been, yet honest and true and tender, and returned as devotedly as ever woman returned the love of man. Not with the love of the petted birds of fashion, but with a love so strong, so deep, so passionate, that its possession would startle into new life the flippant beings whose God is dress and whose passion is adulation.

It was long after six o'clock when the little detachment of troops, it might be called, started from the hotel and plunged rapidly into the gloom. The guide, the detective who had located the still, rode in front closely followed by Winters and Lyndon riding abreast, the other two in the rear. It was not by any means a pleasant night to be out for the elements seemed conspiring to protect the ones whose shelter and whose refuge were the distant hills, toward which the little cavalcade was moving as rapidly as the rain, the darkness and the roads would permit. The night was dark. The blackness of the night which Egypt knew thousands of years ago seemed to have settled once more upon the earth. Not a sound could be heard, except the splash of the hoofs of the five horses as they galloped onward through the night. The rain continued, now a cold, uncomfortable drizzle, relieved occasionally by a rush and torrent of almost icy water, as if the clouds had parted with their burden and that none remained. Occasionally a gust of wind came through the pines, groaning and wailing like a soul in bitter agony.

After some four hours of hard riding, with frequent stops to rest and find out the road, the leader suddenly slackened his pace and began to proceed with caution. About eighteen miles had been passed over and Winters' chief concern was the sentinels which might have been thrown out from the distiller's retreat, to warn them of approaching danger. The last five miles had been through the lower foot hills which skirt the range of mountains and the country was becoming wild and rocky. The rain had ceased, or rather changed to snow and the hill sides and road were already covered with a heavy mantle of white. The party had stopped for consultation. They were probably within a couple of miles of the place where the illicit still was located and where lived the little community of men and women which was engaged in the illegal business. While the leader and his companions were arranging the plan of attack and the details of the work for the balance of the night, which was likely to be the chief work of the expedition, the detective left his horse in Lyndon's care and proceeded cautiously ahead to see if any evidence could be seen that the outlaws had been notified of the intended raid. For a half mile he plodded along in the snow and failing to hear any unusual sound or observe anything to indicate the presence of danger, returned to the little group impatiently awaiting him. By this time the snow had almost ceased falling and the air had grown decidedly chilly.

From this point forward the company moved with extreme caution, in single file, every ear alert to catch the faintest sound or indication of danger or discovery. A mile had been traversed without a word being spoken. Not a noise had been heard and it seemed that the moonshiners were to be taken completely by surprise, when a flash in front and the clear, ringing report of a rifle, caused the riders to involuntarily sink down in their saddles, and then to pull rein strongly and suddenly. Without a word and as if by instinct, the riders dismounted and stood in a body, pistols in hand, ready either for defense or attack. They had not long to wait, for as the leader discovered the form of a mounted man emerge from a clump of trees at the side of the road, he gave the command to mount and follow. Despite all the precautions that had been used the intended raid had been discovered and the shot from the sentinel warned his comrades above of the near approach of danger. For a full mile the officers gave hot pursuit until the moonshine horseman seemed to ride straight into the side of a mountain that lifted its twin heads blackly and foroiddingly skyward, the huge mass dimly outlined against the sky from which here and there a star shone out from the parted and flying clouds. Closer inspection revealed the fact that a cross canon or ravine branched here from the main defile, a mountain rising on either side like grim sentinels guarding the entrance to the gloomy retreat.

Here the company dismounted and held a hurried consultation. The cabins of the moonshiners lay only a mile down the ravine and it was decided to leave the horses at the opening of the ravine and proceed the balance of the way on foot. Accordingly one of the number was selected to guard the horses while the others cautiously felt their way forward. It was nearing twelve o'clock, when a slight noise in front caused Col. Winters to stop and listen intently. It become evident to him that the moonshiners had massed their little force outside their cabins and that the two bodies of men were close together. Whispering to his men to prepare for close and dangerous work, the Colonel led his little party out of the cowpath they had been following to the shelter of a clump of trees to the side. Here they waited for a few minutes for developments. Soon noises a hundred yards in advance located the party of mountaineers and in a moment more six stalwart forms were seen to take the path, and proceed cautiously toward the place where the officers were concealed. When they had approached within a hundred feet of the waiting men, a stern voice called a halt and surrender, but the only answer was a volley from a half dozen Winchesters. The reply came almost instantaneously as four pistols cracked simultaneously, the ten shots echoing and rebounding from the mountain walls of the ravine almost as one shot. A fusilade followed, the mountaineers holding their ground bravely until their amunition was exhausted. No damage had been done to either side up till the last shot from the officers when the leader of the little band of outlaws was seen to throw his hands above his head and fall headlong to the ground. Their leader gone, his comrades declined to continue the fight and with many savage curses surrendered to their fate.

When they had been disarmed and secured, Col. Winters and Lyndon turned their attention to the fallen chief. He was not dead, but a stream of blood from his breast which streaked his shirt and dyed the snow upon which he lay showed plainly that his wound was beyond the power of human aid. Carefully, almost sadly, the two men lifted the prostrate form, bore him to his cabin and laid him tenderly upon the rude bed. Then came a scene which can never be forgotten.

Poets have sung of woman's love, and troubadors have chanted of its fierceness and passion. Novelists and dramatists have immortalized the names of Octavia and Cleopatra as the representatives of the two extremes of love—one the pure, steady glow of a wifely affection; the other the fierce passion which knows no bounds, no restraints, no rules. Love forms the sweetest and the most bitter experiences of life, Heaven and hell, with only a space between so narrow that a single step takes one from the light, the glow, the beauty of the one to the darkness, the horror, the despair of the other. The modern world seems to know but little of the love of which the poets speak. It seems to have been covered up beneath the debris of the past. Our modern social system makes love often impossible, often ridiculous—seldom the true yearning of the soul. The minister who joins the hands at the altar knows many times that while he joins the lives no power on earth can bind the hearts together. In a world so full of sham and pretense, where the natural feelings are so often held in check and curbed by the decrees of fashion and the laws of society, the scene witnessed by Lyndon was a revelation of nature such as he had never dreamed of before. It was wild and rude, and yet through it all nature ruled so completely that the sickly sentiment of fashion burned as a quivering, dying flame before this mighty outburst of love, of devotion, of pain and passion.

As the wounded man lay upon the bed moaning out his life, the door of the cabin slowly opened, and an old man and his daughter came within the radius of the dim light cast by the tallow dip upon the rude pine table. The girl was apparently about seventeen years old, a perfect woman, not of the usual southern type for her shoulders were covered by heavy masses of golden brown hair. A queen she would have been among women, an object of devotion among men; but even among these mountaineers, as wild and uncultivated as they, she seemed to possess that which, aroused, would make the object of her anger quail and tremble. An instant only the young girl stood with startled face looking around the room and at the officers and men. A low moan from the bed caught her ear and as she quickly turned and saw the prostrate form, the flowing blood carrying away the life she cherished more than her own, a wild shriek of agony filled the room and echoed out on the frosty air of the night. She knelt down by the bedside, all the girlishness and shyness and roughness gone, with wonderful tenderness raised the head of the dying man upon her own and with southern passion pressed kiss after kiss upon the lips of the man she loved.

"Jack, oh Jack! speak to me; speak just once to me. Speak!—oh Jack, my own"—but the bitter sobs repressed her words and for a moment she lay, her form convulsed with the great wave of grief that had broken so rudely upon her life.

Suddenly she rose almost roughly and turned upon the officers with the tiger light shining from her eyes and seemingly forgetful of the dying man poured out her wrath and anger upon them, her words full of burning hate and passion. Almost as suddenly she seemed to realize again the condition of the dying man and bending over him gave passionate utterance to her love and sorrow, entirely oblivious of the presence of any.

"Wilfred, my little love," and the words came slow and painfully, "Wilfred, my own. Tomorrow our lives would have been made one. I had nothing to give you except my love—but it is not so to be. Oh God! that this must be. I loved you my little girl, not with the love that other men know, but oh such a love; to live for you would have been so dear, but to die—I'm getting cold and the pain here is so hard—to have our lives cut in two just when they were going to be united—to spoil your life"—and the once strong man broke down in convulsive painful sobs.

* * * * * *

After hours of watching and waiting the life went out. Little Wilfred—and she could hardly be called by that girlish name since that night of agony—still knelt by the bedside. Not a word escaped her lips. Her eyes were dry. The outburst of emotion and passion had left her weak and outwardly calm, but the sorrow had gone deeper into her soul. The night saw her a child; the morning found her a woman. Ever and again her hand would smooth the forehead and her lips touch with love almost to reverence the lips of the dead, but she moved not.

Wearied, and saddened by the scene, Winters and Lyndon passed from the cabin into the open air. The sun, just rising on that Christmas morn lighted with a wondrous brilliance the snow covered mountain tops which sparkled as if crowned with tiaras of diamonds. That holy morning brought to the world tidings of peace and joy, but to the lonely one within the cabin Christmas brought neither peace nor joy.

Beautiful and right it is that gifts and good wishes should fill the air like snow flakes at Christmas tide. And beautiful is the year in its coming and in its going—most beautiful and blessed because it is always the Year of Our Lord.

Here is an old Scotch verse concerning Christmas:

Yule's come, and Yule's gane,
An' we hae feasted weel;
Sae Jock maun to his flail again,
An' Jennie to her wheel.