

Christmas in Bethlehem

THE little city of Bethlehem is set upon a hill which is crowned by the church and entirely covered by light upon artificial means. A silver star is set into the pavement of a semicircular niche above which is an altar adorned with the usual church symbols. By the light of fifteen colored lamps suspended under the altar we read the inscription in Latin: "Here Jesus Christ was Born of the Virgin Mary."

The long line of pilgrims prostrated themselves, one by one, and kissed the star, some with dropping tears—all, silently—some beyond the range of speech. It did not add to our solemnity to be shown the manger, decorated with lace and an embroidered altar cloth and defended from sacrilegious fingers by a gilded railing. The really impressive things were occasional glimpses of the rough stone walls and roof of the ancient stable, visible here and there between the gaudy decorations.

The service of Christmas eve began at half past 10 at night and concluded at half past 2 in the morning. At midnight a full-voiced organ preluded the supreme moment of the occasion—the sudden folding back of a curtain above the altar, revealing a manger-cradle and a big wax doll. The exultant outburst of organ and choir in a magnificent Gloria in Excelsis accompanied the stately procession of the entire staff of priests and acolytes, chanting and swinging censers who, with their high altar and down another, back to the high altar, the same doll, dressed in cambric and lace, and nesting in the embrace of the richly apparelled bishop.

Every incident of our last night in Jamma's camp in Bethlehem recurs to me with peculiar distinctness. How, as the darkness deepened the red, blinking eyes of the charcoal craters of the wonderful portable stove presided over by our accomplished chef in the door of the kitchen tent—the night being breezeless—shone upon the under side of the olive boughs over our heads, while our quiet talk went on of what had happened in the old town behind us.

We spoke longest of David's Greatest Son, and of the birth that was to draw the eyes and thoughts of all nations to the little city on the hilltop in the land of Juda.

At midnight, kept awake by the rush and burden of thought, I arose to look from the tent door upon the watchful stars that here have a conscious majesty I had never recognized elsewhere, and wondered anew, amidst the glittering hosts "marshalled on the nightly plain" had flashed the Star of Bethlehem. For the last time in our eventful series of Journeys we saw the dawn redden the Mountains of Moab, the thin crescent of the waning moon dying, while we gazed, before the brightness of the coming sun.

I shall always be grateful that that night of ineffable calm and the beauty of the new day are prominent among the pictures conjured before my mental vision, as at the wave of an enchanter's wand, by the name of "Ephrath—which is Bethlehem."

Through the kindly offices of our incomparable dragoman, David Jamal—who, Mrs. M. O. W. O'Brien, Special Correspondent of The Bee,—I have been traveling for the past week through the new Ontario. This is the wild north-west of the Ontario we know on the opposite sides of Lakes Ontario, Erie and Huron. The country near those lakes is about as thickly settled as Ohio. It has some of the best farms of North America, and enough of them to be worth \$500,000,000 and to produce grain, vegetables and fruits to the amount of \$200,000,000 a year. Old Ontario has good cities every few miles, with street cars, electric light, and all the surroundings of our best settled districts. It is cut up by railways and the country roads are such that one can go in an automobile through any part of it. Great factories are springing up in some of the towns, and the whole region is one of industry and thrift.

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Great Clay Belt.
Until within a few years this vast territory was looked upon as valuable only for its timber. It was thought to be all rock and swamp covered with less the greater part of the year. Its only inhabitants were the Indian hunters, Hudson's bay fur traders and lumbermen, who have been cutting down the trees along the streams and floating them down to the great lakes. Then the Canadian Pacific railroad was put through, the great nickel mines about here were discovered, other mineral regions were opened up and the Canadian and provincial governments began to look upon the country as an available asset.

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bay and along the shores of Lake Superior. About five years ago exploration parties were sent out by the Ontario government to investigate the country from Quebec to Manitoba. They have reported that there is a wide strip of fertile soil running from one end of this wilderness to the other, about 100 miles north of the Canadian Pacific railroad. This region is of a different formation than that farther south. The land is a clay loam which will raise wheat, and it is now known as the great clay belt. The belt is several hundred miles wide and altogether is estimated to contain in the neighborhood of 16,000,000 acres or about as much as our state of West Virginia. It is covered with timber, which will have to be cut off; but this may be done by the lumbermen when the country is opened. Otherwise the settlers will have to undergo the same hardships and difficulties which were common to the clearing of our eastern states.

Railroads Through New Ontario.
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Christmas Day

DECEMBER

At Christmas play and make good cheer, for Christmas comes but once a year.

Thomas Tusser.

—By Especial Courtesy of the Metropolitan Magazine.

The First Christmas Tree

IT IS difficult to trace the origin of the Christmas tree and almost every mythologist has a little different manner of explaining why the evergreen was chosen for this great festival day.

A Scandinavian legend tells of the "Yule log tree," which sprung from the blood-soaked earth where two lovers were killed by violence, and that mysterious lights, which the wind could not extinguish, were seen at Christmas in the tops of the forest trees.

In old Egypt there was a common custom of decorating the houses at the time of the winter solstice with branches of the date palm. The date palm was the emblem of immortality and also of the star-like firmament. This tree puts forth a shoot every month and a branch of it containing twelve shoots was a symbol of the year completed.

It has also been suggested that this may be the revival of the pine trees of the Roman Saturnalia, a December feast, during which pines were decorated with images of Bacchus.

The most plausible explanation, however, is that its earlier significance arose from the pagan worship of trees, and that later Christian ideas gave a loftier meaning to its use. When the apostles preached the gospel in pagan lands, instead of inviting the idolatrous feasts they permitted such festivities as were not intrinsically sinful, but sought to change their idolatrous nature by giving a Christian interpretation to the various rites and ceremonies.

Thus, when Pope Gregory I sent St. Augustine to convert Saxon England in 596, he directed him to make the change of religion, so far as ceremonies were concerned, as gradual as possible so that the people might not be startled. The Saxons called the feast of the midwinter solstice Yule, and on that occasion the British went in solemn procession to cut the mistletoe from the sacred oak tree. This ceremony, an old chronicle tells us, took place "on the sixth day of the moon nearest the new year." The evergreen, which they call all-hail, was afterward sold at a high price to their credulous followers. The people signified their joy at the cutting of the mistletoe by feasting on roasted oxen and by dancing. In the December following St. Augustine's arrival he permitted his converts to join in the feasting, but forbade them mingling with pagans in the dance, and judging from his success in planting the faith, it was probably but a short time ere he had weaned them from their barbaric orgies to a sinner celebration of the great Christian festival occurring in the same month.

An old German legend makes St. Winfred the inventor of the idea. In the midst of a crowd of converts he is said to have been hewing down a great oak which had formerly been the object of Druidic veneration. As he chopped a whirwind passed over the forest and tore the tree from its foundation. Behind it stood a young fir, unharmed, pointing its spire toward the stars. The priest, dropping his axe, turned to the people and said:

"This little tree, a young child of the forest, shall be your holy tree tonight. It is the wood of peace, for your houses are built of fir. It is the sign of an endless life, for its leaves are ever green. See how it points upward to heaven. Let this be called the tree of the Christ-child; gather about it, not in the woods, but in your own homes; there it will shelter no deeds of blood, but loving gifts and rites of kindness."

Some writers on ancient customs tell us that among the early pagan superstitions of the Germans was the belief that the world was a great tree, whose top touched Paradise and furnished food to a goat upon whose milk fallen heroes restored themselves. This tale was well

known in Germany long after the introduction of Christianity, and much of its symbolic character was transferred to the celebration of the birth of Christ "the resurrection and the life." The evergreen is a fitting emblem of the eternal spring; the burning lights suggest Him who is the light of the world; and the gifts remind us of the priceless gift of God to humanity—the Saviour.

The Christmas tree, in its present style of usage, can be traced back only as far as the sixteenth century. During the middle ages it appeared at Strasburg. For 200 years the fashion maintained itself along the Rhine. Suddenly, at the beginning of this century, it spread all over Germany, and fifty years later had conquered Christendom. In 1853 the tree was introduced into Munich by Queen Caroline. At the same time the custom was spread through Bohemia and Hungary.

In 1840 the Duchess Helena of Orleans brought it to the Tuilleries. Twenty years later German residents of Paris could only with great difficulty procure a Christmas tree. Today Paris uses almost 100,000 about one-fourth being brought by Swiss, Germans and Alsacians. The French plant the tree with its roots in a tub so that it can be preserved until New Year, when it is shorn of its decorations.

The marriage of Queen Victoria to a German prince augmented the Christmas tree's popularity in England. German immigrants brought the tree to America and it was soon adopted by all classes—James M. Voss in Men and Women.

The White Lie Season

The hardware merchant carefully "hid up" a pair of old-fashioned skates—wooden body, solid steel blade, screw in heel, straps in front, about three pounds to each foot—and deposited them among a number of tagged parcels behind the counter. He smiled broadly as the regular caller entered.

"Some people call this the Christmas season of the year," he remarked. "I have another name for it. I call it the white lie season. I was thinking of it just now as I was doing up a pair of skates made way back in the early history of the colonies. I didn't suppose I had them in the shop until a charitable customer inquired for something of the kind, and wouldn't condescend to cry. He hoped he'd get the new-fangled sort that clamp on with a twist of the wrist; but his father doesn't draw a McCall salary and he'll have to make those clumsy things do, poor lad."

"A few days more and everybody'll be telling white lies. They'll be standing around trees covered with cotton and tinsel or the baskets that hold the presents and they'll clap their hands and exclaim, 'This is just what I've been wanting!'"

"Yes, it is," enquired the hardware merchant. "It makes no difference what the bundle contains. If you gave a blind grandmamma a little red sled or a foot ball she'd show it proudly and say it's just what she's been wanting. I tell you, there are a good many heartaches go with Christmas, especially among the young folks in the houses of the poor. They don't get what they want by several dollars' worth; but they don't let on; and probably it's good discipline for them."

"But," he concluded, "I'll be doggoned if I'll send those skates to the minister's son. I'll give him an up-to-date pair myself and I'll make no noise over it, either. That'll be one white lie headed off, anyway."—Providence Journal.

Discovery of a Valuable Strip of Wheat Land in Canadian Forests

(Copyright, 1905, by Frank G. Carpenter.)
SUDBURY, New Ontario, Dec. 14.—(Special Correspondent of The Bee.)—I have been traveling for the past week through the new Ontario. This is the wild north-west of the Ontario we know on the opposite sides of Lakes Ontario, Erie and Huron. The country near those lakes is about as thickly settled as Ohio. It has some of the best farms of North America, and enough of them to be worth \$500,000,000 and to produce grain, vegetables and fruits to the amount of \$200,000,000 a year. Old Ontario has good cities every few miles, with street cars, electric light, and all the surroundings of our best settled districts. It is cut up by railways and the country roads are such that one can go in an automobile through any part of it. Great factories are springing up in some of the towns, and the whole region is one of industry and thrift.

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about the latitude of Lake Abitibi, and going thence on to the Atlantic, giving a short haul for the wheat to the seaboard and Great Britain.

The Ontario provincial government is building a railroad northward from Lake Nipissing, a few miles east of Sudbury, which will cross the Grand Trunk Pacific in the neighborhood of Lake Abitibi. It has already laid its tracks for about 120 miles, and it is now within a few miles of the clay belt. Its surveyors are working farther northward, and they will continue their survey of the line to James bay.

Another project is the James Bay railroad, to run from here, at Sudbury, to about the same point, and a third is the Algoma Central railway, from the Canadian Soo to Hudson's bay. The Algoma Central was begun by F. H. Crozier, and is now the property of the Lake Superior corporation, an American company which owns vast properties about Sault Ste. Marie, Canada. The road has already been built seventy-five miles from the Soo, and it has been graded for about ninety miles.

The distance is much shorter than by the lakes or farther south along the Atlantic, the chief difficulty being that the straits which lead into Hudson's bay are open for vessels only about four months in the year. This might perhaps be remedied by larger steamers or ice breakers which could penetrate the ice floes.

Climate.
The Canadians claim that they have as good a climate as the United States. They say their winters are not as bad as ours and that the long, steady cold makes better wheat and better men. I am told that the country grows warmer a hundred miles or so north of the great lakes. The cold increases until you reach the height of land which divides the waters which flow into the great lakes from those which flow into Hudson's bay. When you get over that ridge the weather moderates all the way down to Hudson's bay.

The clay belt is just beyond the height of land. At midsummer it is as hot there as in lower Canada or in the United States. Everything grows faster than in the states, for the days are fifteen or sixteen hours long, owing to the high latitude; the sun rises a little after 3 and setting between 8 and 9. Wheat has been grown, I am told, by the Hudson's Bay company agents about James bay, and the people here predict that this clay belt will be one of the wheat regions of the future.

In talking the other night with a man who had been through the country, he spoke of the immense herds of caribou which roam there, saying that the existence of these animals is an evidence of good land, as they need rich vegetation to support them. The caribou are seen in droves of hundreds and sometimes thousands. They have, he says, cut trails across the country and the droves are sometimes as

large that you can hear their rush as they go by your camp at night. Moose are found in great numbers in the forests farther south. They are browsers rather than grass eaters, their rocks being so short that they have to get down on their knees when they eat grass.

Colonizing Plans.
The Ontario government is now planning to open up the clay belt to settlement. It will give 160 acres free to settlers on certain conditions, and they can buy 160 acres more at 50 cents an acre. I am told that some tracts have already been taken, but these are along the streams which give an outlet to the south. No real colonizing or settling can be done until the railroads have opened up the country.

It is different in the Rainy river region and in the Thunder bay districts. They lie across the way from Minnesota and are already accessible by the Canadian Pacific and the Canadian Northern railroads.

As to the colonization of the clay belt itself, one should take all the statements concerning it with a grain of salt. Much of the land is probably good, but the cutting off of 160 acres of trees to make a farm is an enormous undertaking, and without it can be done for the timber upon it the pioneers expected will not speedily appear.

Vast Areas of Swamps and Rocks.
Much of the country between here and

the height of land is, barring the timber, not worth 10 cents an acre. I rode all day through the woods going north from the Canadian Pacific line to Cobalt, on the Ontario government railway, which has recently been put through. The road winds its way in and out among lakes, sloughs and swamps. The country is covered with pine and hardwood, and is so cut up by water that you can go almost all over it in a canoe. Even along the railroad it is so swampy and boggy that the telegraph poles have to be propped up, and outside the swamps it is so rocky that deep holes cannot be made. In such places great piles of rock are built up about the poles to support them.

Some of the country is made up of bogs known as muskeg. This is a bottomless swamp covered with a thin coating of vegetation, through which one sinks down as though in a quicksand, and if not speedily rescued is liable to drown. Hunters in traveling over it have to jump from root to root, making their way by means of the trees that grow here and there. There is said to be much muskeg in the region of Hudson's bay, and almost everywhere throughout this north land. I am told it can be drained, and that, in this case, a country somewhat like that of northwestern Ohio, which was once known as the Black Swamp, may be produced. This might be a possibility in the clay belt, but it certainly would not be so in the region I

passed through on account of the rocks.

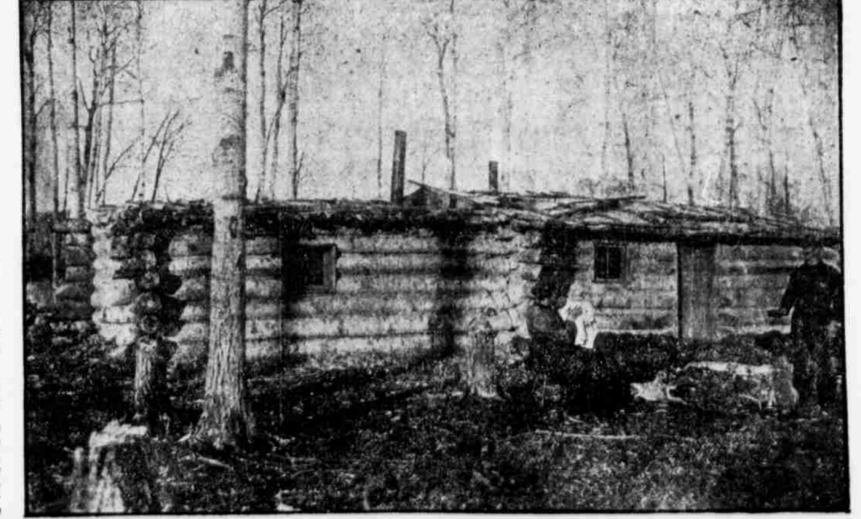
Top of Our Continent.
This great clay belt is just about on the roof of the North American continent. It is near the dividing of the waters and on the Hudson's bay slope. There are seven good-sized rivers flowing through it, which are about 500 miles long, and it is well watered throughout. The streams on this side of the ridge flow down into the great lakes, and a little west of Lake Superior to the Gulf of Mexico. On the other side they flow into Hudson's bay or by the Mackenzie and other rivers into the Arctic ocean.

The country here seems high. It looks as though it were the crown of mother earth's head, and here about Sudbury and all the way along Georgian bay and Lake Superior the old lady's head is covered with gigantic wens in the shape of rocks. There are some farms, but they lie between the stones. The same character of country extends for many miles northward, save that the rocks are in the woods.

Ground Smooth as a Glacier.
The soil is so thin in most places that it can be ripped off like a strip of carpet and almost everywhere the scoured rocks show out above. Half the rocks are ones as big as boulders; some the size of an elephant and others approaching that of a great apartment house. Even the flat rocks are ground



SURVEYING CAMP ON ONTARIO GOVERNMENT RAILROAD.



SETTLERS' HOMES—ONTARIO CLAY BELT.