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WONDERFUL CHRISTMASES



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CHRISTMAS CAROLE.



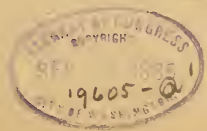
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WONDERFUL CHRISTMASES OF OLD.



IT had been a day of Rome in her glory,—the Saturnalia. Through the imperial streets had passed grand pageants. Aurelian had returned from his conquests. The Temple of Janus was closed; banners of peace filled the air. Aurelian feasted in the Capitol. At the table sat nobles and peasants; all were equal on that one day.

Let us turn to the gloomy quarries under the Campagna. Along the Appian Way of monuments and palaces, in removing the stone for building, there had been created countless caverns, where from early periods criminals had taken refuge. Latterly these cells had been secretly used as chapels by the persecuted Christians; and here to-night, hard by the blazing and drunken city, these proscribed men and women were gathering to celebrate the birth of the Lord. Torches flamed on the damp walls, revealing the rude inscriptions on many a martyr's tomb.

After the Feast of Charity, an old man rose in their midst,—the venerable Alexander. His name was on the list of the condemned for whom the Roman officers were seeking. He pointed upward: “The roof of stone hides the stars, but they shine; and they that turn many to righteousness shall shine as the stars of heaven. I know that when the Saturnalia passes, I shall be given to the beasts. But the hosts of the righteous shall increase, shining in their beauty, and Bethlehem’s Star shall never set.”

Even so. When the Saturnalia came again, and the Christians gathered again in the stone chambers to celebrate the birth of Jesus, on the martyrs’ record along the smoky walls were set new names, among them the aged Alexander’s.

But a clear and holy light, as from the remembrance of the unshaken faith in which their brethren died, rested upon every face. The places of the martyrs were filled. Men, women, and consecrated youth, swelled the host that gathered to keep the birth-night of the Christ. The Star of Bethlehem shone steadily over heathen Rome.



IN THE CATACOMBS, A.D. 176.

ROME has suffered mighty changes. It is no longer the Rome of Aurelian, no longer the temple-place of heathen gods.

But the Bethlehem Star still shines.

More than three hundred years have now passed away since its mysterious ray led the Magi to the Redeemer's cradle. Constantine, Rome's emperor now, has seen the failure of the gods of Rome and Athens. He has been forced to ponder, forced to believe that the faith of the persecuted Christians in a God, one and invisible, and in his Crucified Son, may be the true faith of the world.

In this year, 312, he had seen the Vision which was to change the state of the world. That ancient historian who received the narrative from Constantine's own declaration, thus describes this most wonderful event of Christian History:

The army arriving near Rome, the emperor was employed in devout ejaculations. It was the twenty-seventh of October, about three o'clock in the afternoon, the sun was declining, when there suddenly appeared a pillar of light in the heavens in the form of a cross, with this plain inscription:

IN HOC SIGNO VINCES. [In this sign thou shalt conquer.]

The emperor was amazed. The cross and sign blazed before the eyes of the whole army.

Early the next morning, Constantine informed his officers that Christ had appeared to him in the night, with the cross in his hand, and commanded him to make the cross the royal standard. The officers were ordered to construct a cross, and a standard. The standard was made thus :

A long spear, plated with gold, with a transverse piece at the top, in the form of a cross, to which was fastened a four-square purple banner, embroidered with gold, and beset with precious stones which reflected the highest lustre ; above the cross was a crown overlaid with gold and jewels, within which was placed the sacred symbol, the two first letters of the name of Christ in Greek.

Under this standard, October 29, 312, Constantine defeated the Roman Emperor, Maxentius, on the banks of the Tiber. He entered Rome in triumph, bearing aloft the cross. The Christians hailed it with acclamations, and a joyful public Christmas followed.

The Saturnalia became the Festival of the Nativity.

The ancient pagan shrines vanished, or they glowed with the holy lights of the new and triumphant faith—the beautiful Bethlehem Star shining over all.



THE VISION OF CONSTANTINE, A.D. 312.

NEW temples have arisen in Rome. They uplift the cross. The golden season of the Saturnalia comes and goes; but the Festival of Christ is celebrated instead. Rome is filled with holy rejoicing, the Roman children sing of the Star of Bethlehem, masses are chanted—the heathen festival has become Christmas.

The Church, mighty in its faith, is praying for the conversion of the world. Missionaries go forth into all the provinces of the vast Roman Empire.

About the year 432, St. Patrick made a holy journey. He came to Ireland. He found the people idolaters, worshipping under the oaks, their bards and poets ignorant of the true God; and as St. Patrick was a singing prophet and teacher, the simple folks of Ireland, ever deeply stirred by song and eloquence, listened to him. They were moved by the beautiful story of Christ, and the hope of an eternal life. Thousands were baptized into the new faith. Churches sprang up over the green land as if by magic. St. Patrick preached in Ireland for some thirty years, and we cannot wonder that the Irish people still recall his mission with love, and speak of him with reverence.

The scene of his greatest triumph was Tara. There he instituted the wonderful Christmas festivals of Rome. There his grand missionary anthems were inspired. According to tradition, he first sang his memorable hymn, *Christ be with me*, on one of the religious Christmases, in the royal halls of Tara. It is a rapture of devotion and consecration: —

To Tara to-day may the strength of God pilot me,
May the power of God preserve me;
May the wisdom of God instruct me;
May the eye of God view me;
May the ear of God hear me;
May the word of God make me eloquent;
May the hand of God protect me;
May the way of God direct me;
May the shield of God defend me;
Christ be with me,
Christ on my right hand,
Christ on my left hand,
Christ in the heart of all to whom I speak,
Christ in the mouth of all who speak to me,
Christ in the eye of all who see me,
Christ in the ear of all who hear me.



ST. PATRICK AT TARA, A.D. 432.

THERE lived in Geneva, near the close of the fifth century, a most beautiful Christian girl. She was called the loveliest woman in the world. She was also beautiful in character, and spent her time in works of charity.

Clovis, King of the Franks, heard of the beauty of Clotilde. According to the old story, he sent a noble Roman, Aurelian, commissioning him, if he found her loveliness as great as her fame, to woo her for him, and bring her to Rheims, the Frankish capital. Aurelian went to Geneva clothed in rags. He appeared before the fair Clotilde as a beggar. She received him with pity. Kneeling, she began to wash his feet.

“Lady,” said Aurelian, “I would speak to thee. I am no mendicant,” said he. “I am a king’s ambassador. King Clovis desires to make thee his queen. Wilt thou take and wear this ring?”

Clotilde put upon her finger the jewel of Clovis; and by the act she made the France of the future one of the Christian empires of the world.

In 496, a German army crossed the Rhine, warring upon Clovis. The great battle of Cologne was fought. At a point of the battle, the

Franks were in much peril. Clovis called upon his gods. But the danger of defeat grew—the Franks were hard pressed. Then Aurelian, who had won for Clovis his beautiful wife, cried: “Call on the God whom the queen preacheth, my lord King!”

Clovis lifted his face toward the sky. “Christ Jesus, thou whom my queen calleth the Son of the Living God, if thou wilt help, I will proclaim thy name, and be baptized!” prayed this king.

The Germans were beaten, their king slain.

There was a grand Christmas in Rheims, 496. It celebrated the conversion of the Franks. The way from the palace to the baptistery was hung in silk and gold. The clergy led the way with crosses and standards, reading the gospels and chanting psalms. Then came the bishop, leading the king by the hand, and followed by the meek and beautiful queen. The king and royal household were baptized, and an army of three thousand Franks, and a multitude of women and children. The stars beamed brightly that night over Gaul and the Rhine. The Star of Bethlehem shone in its holy place. The kingdoms of earth were becoming the kingdoms of Christ.



THE BAPTISM OF CLOVIS, RHEIMS, A.D. 496.

IN the ancient cathedral of Aix-la-Chapelle, France, there is a tomb of wonderful historic interest. The traveller thinks of it as he enters the solemn edifice, and beholds in the dim distance the chancel oriel burning with mysterious splendors.

“CARLO-MAGNO,” reads the inscription. It is the tomb of an emperor, one of the greatest who ever wore the crown of the Cæsars — Charlemagne!

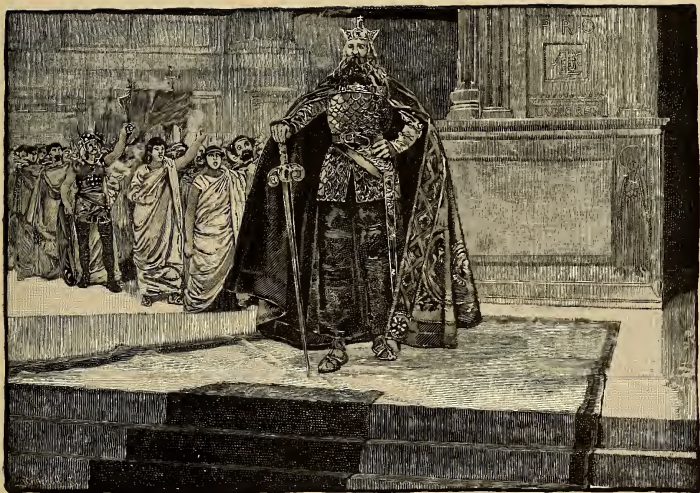
He was King of the Franks, of the peoples of Middle Europe and the nations of the North; he conquered the Saxons, and in tremendous struggles defeated all foes, until at last the Alps and the Baltic, the Rhine and the Rhone, were alike parts of his splendid empire. He conquered the Saracens of the South; he added crown to crown, kingdom to kingdom, until Europe lay at his feet.

At the Easter Festival in 774, he visited Rome in splendor. A great procession came out to meet him, headed by the Pope. The people hailed him with hallelujahs, the children waved green branches, the clergy in princely vestments sang: “*Blessed is he that cometh in the name of the Lord!*”

In the year 800 he was summoned to Rome. The cardinals said: "Let us honor this most powerful Defender of the Faith with a grand Christmas gift—the crown of the Roman world."

The Pope and clergy prepared for Christmas ceremonies of the most joyous and imposing character. It was arranged that though Charlemagne should reach Rome before Christmas, he should have no knowledge of the coronation that awaited him. The clergy, nobles, and people were to assemble. When he should come into the church to attend mass, and should bow his head to receive the wafer—then he should be suddenly crowned and hailed Emperor of the World.

It was one of the most poetic events of history. The Christmas day came, a beautiful day out of the skies of Italy. The Emperor entered the church in humility, and bowed before the altar. Suddenly, Pope Leo uplifted the crown of the Roman world, and set it upon his head. There arose then a great shout of joy. Clergy and nobles exclaimed in unison: "Long live Charles Augustus, Crowned of God, Emperor of the Romans!" Christianity possessed Europe now. The Bethlehem Star, shining its eight centuries, lighted all the lands.



THE CHRISTMAS CROWNING OF CHARLEMAGNE, A.D. 800.

CHRISTMAS has been an eventful day in English history.

English life and literature are alike full of reference to William of Normandy; to-day proud English nobles boast that their ancestors came over with the Conqueror. The conquest of England by William reads like romance. He left the fair-skied duchy of Normandy in September, 1066. His fleet, gay with pennants and gonfalons, numbered a thousand sails. His own ship had silken sails of many colors, made by his duchess and her Norman maidens. On its prow a gold boy pointed towards England. Its banner was three Norman lions.

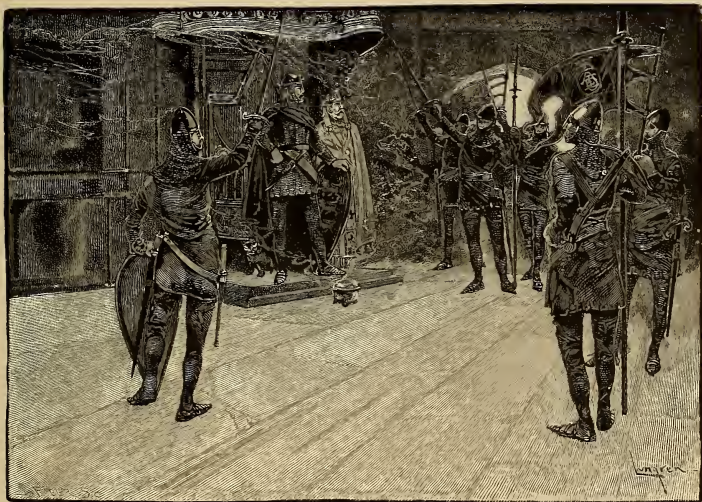
Young Harold, the English king, prepared to resist the invasion. William landed his army and marched to Hastings. Here the two armies met. The English forces, all-confident, passed the night before the battle in feasting, young Harold little dreaming that this revel under the October moon would be his last banquet. In the morning Duke William rode forth from the Norman camp on a beautiful Barbary horse. The standard of the Three Norman Lions was borne after him. His army advanced, singing the great war-song of Roland.

The fight began early on that golden October day. William's beautiful horse was killed. His soldiers, supposing their king wounded, wavered. "I am living," cried Duke William, "and I will conquer!" And that night the standard of the Three Norman Lions waved over the field. Young Harold was found dead. His body was identified by one who loved him, the swan-necked Edith. "*Infelix Harold,*" they inscribed on his tomb.

William hastened to Westminster to be crowned while the conquered people were helpless through fear. It was a Christmas Day. The English in London had expected to celebrate the festival in the Abbey, but the Conqueror demanded the church for his coronation. He surrounded it with battalions of Normans. He entered it with his barons, and the coronation rites began. The ceremony was interrupted by a tumult without that ended in a slaughter of his new English subjects.

But the Christmas crown of England did not bring joy to the Conqueror. He is said to have been a most unhappy and remorseful man.

Dark were those days; but the Star of Peace and Good Will was still shining.



THE CORONATION OF WILLIAM THE CONQUEROR, A.D. 1066.

THROUGH the darkness the Christmas Star still breaks its way onward. For England there was a long, gloomy period. King John—that Herod who doomed Prince Arthur, that English Innocent, to be murdered because the boy had the right to the throne—was ever an oppressive and bloody man; and at last the English barons agreed to compel him to give a promise that their rights should be recognized and protected. This revolt of the barons against their king was the beginning of English liberty. They met on November 20, 1213. They placed their hands upon an altar and solemnly swore, one after another, that should King John refuse to grant a Charter of Rights, they would not only withdraw their allegiance, but they would wage war against him. This act was the English Declaration of Independence.

The king was soon shown a sign of their feeling. Christmas Day came. King John waited in vain at his royal hall in Worcester for the barons to come and pay him the customary Christmas homage. It was a day of dark moment to him. At night glad Christmas lights blazed in many an old baronial castle, but the glory had departed from the halls of the tyrant king. He read his impending fate in the silence

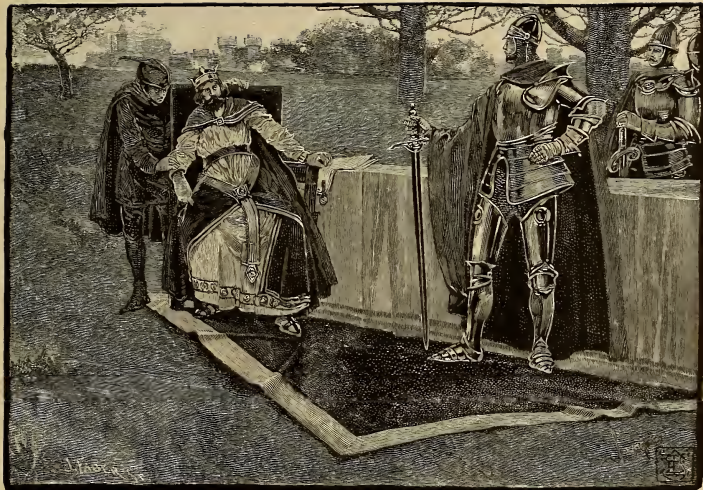
and gloom. He fled to London. He shut himself up in the fortress of the Templars. But the barons followed him there. On the day of Epiphany, they haughtily presented themselves—not with allegiance, but with demands for the Charter. “Give me until Easter to consider this,” the king said at last with paling face.

At Easter the barons again appeared before him. “Why do they not ask for my crown?” he said. “I will not grant them liberties that would make me a slave,” he added angrily.

The barons summoned their knights. The king found himself deserted alike by his nobles and his people. After gloomy delay, “I will grant the Charter,” he said sullenly; and he grudgingly named time and place, Runnymede, June 15.

That day became famous in English history, for King John, however grudgingly, kept his word.

Four centuries later, on another Christmas Day, 1688, the English Parliament called the wise and good William, Prince of Orange, to accept the English crown. So, through the years, light and gladness were growing for the people.



AT RUNNYMEDE, A.D. 1213.

THE first "Still Christmas" in England occurred in 1525. Henry the Eighth was king, and he had not yet forfeited the respect of his subjects; but great political events were at hand.

In December the King was sick. The nation was filled with anxiety. It was decided that the Christmas should be a silent one; there were no carols, bells, or merry-makings.

Silent Christmases were proclaimed in the Protectorate of Cromwell. The festival was altogether abolished, and the display of the emblems of the Nativity was held to be seditious.

The change was most notable in London. There was silence on the Strand. The church bells were still. St. Paul lifted its white roofs over the Thames, and Westminster Abbey its towers, but the tides of happy people in holiday attire no more poured in and out of those ancient fanes. The holly and ivy no more appeared in the windows of the rich and the poor. The Yule fires were not kindled, nor the carols sung.

Bells indeed rung out on the frosty air, but how different from the chimes of old! They were the hand-bells of the heralds, in simple

garb, passing from street to street, and smiting the air and crying out: "No Christmas! No Christmas!"

Heads filled the windows and figures the doors. Crowds stopped on the corners of the streets and in the squares. The cry went on: "No Christmas! No Christmas!"

It smote the hearts of those who loved the old ways and customs. But the spirit of the time was not lost. In the silence of the long procession of English festivals, the law of Christ was not the less obeyed. It was a period of great morality and fruitful piety. A period when the nation was conscientious and strong. The Star of Bethlehem was still shining.

A great change followed the Restoration. The Christmas bells rung out once more. The waits again sung their carols at the gates of the old feudal halls. There were merry-makings under the evergreens. It was at one of the Court Christmases of these years that Charles knighted a loin of beef, and gave it the name of "Sir Loin." The festival in the days of this "merrie monarch" became a revel, after the Puritan silence.



"NO CHRISTMAS! NO CHRISTMAS!" — IN THE SEVENTEENTH CENTURY

A GENOESE mariner believes himself born to carry the gospel of Christ to an unknown people and an undiscovered world, a world lying in the mysterious waters of the West. He travels from city to city seeking a powerful patron, until at Santa Fé, in the South of Europe, takes place the memorable meeting with the king and queen of Spain.

With an equipment of three ships he looses from Palos, and sails to the mysterious waters whose secret shores no eye has seen. Golden days come and go; nights of calm, and new stars. Near midnight on the 11th of October, 1492, he sees a light in the far horizon, knows his destiny accomplished, is sure God has fulfilled the prophetic meaning of his name — *Columbus*, the seeking dove. Morning comes; the New World stands revealed; he leaps on shore, unfurls the banner and cross of Castile, and sings *Te Deums*.

The missionary mariner sails away again. He discovers Hispaniola, and here he and his followers offer the first Christmas devotions in the New World. Santa Fé, on the Rio Grande, was probably the place where the first Christmas anthem was sung in our own land. Coronado

visited the region in search of the Seven Cities of Gold almost one hundred years before the *Mayflower* sailed into the Christmas-tide storm of Provincetown Bay. The Franciscan missionaries soon followed Coronado.

How poetic must have been the first Christmases in the new-born town! The mission church is surrounded with mountains whose summits are covered with eternal snow. The sun of the fitful December day goes down, leaving every peak a colossal monument of light and splendor. Evening's curtains fall. It is vespers. Down the light ladders of the pueblos come the descendants of a race unknown, and make their way to the church. Music tells the tale of the Virgin and the Child. Then arises the *Gloria*, and it floats out, like a breath from the Bethlehem angels over the mighty solitudes that are to become the habitations of the dominant race of the world. The moon rises over the mountains, and turns into whiteness pueblos and chapel. In the bright air stands the mystic sign of the cross like a shadow, and there ascends heavenward in the silence the sweet words, in the Latin tongue, "*On earth, peace.*" The Star that shone over Bethlehem and the nations of the East, has risen upon the West.



CHRISTMAS EVE AT SANTA FÉ.—IN THE SIXTEENTH CENTURY.

SO the Christmas Days of the New World begin. Champlain died in the Castle of St. Louis, Quebec, on Christmas Day. The French Christians celebrated the day at Port Royal, Canada, and in all the settlements of New France.

The Christmas of the *Mayflower* was a doubtful and dreary day—a day of toil and hardship. Christmas night brought a storm of high wind and rain, the vessel tossed, and although Puritans in sentiment and life, the Pilgrims must, at the evening Bible-reading, have thought of the sweet chimes of Lincoln, the white-crowned towers of the brightly-lighted English fanes, and the glad household festivals of the home-country.

In the *Chronicles of the Pilgrims* may be found the following extract :

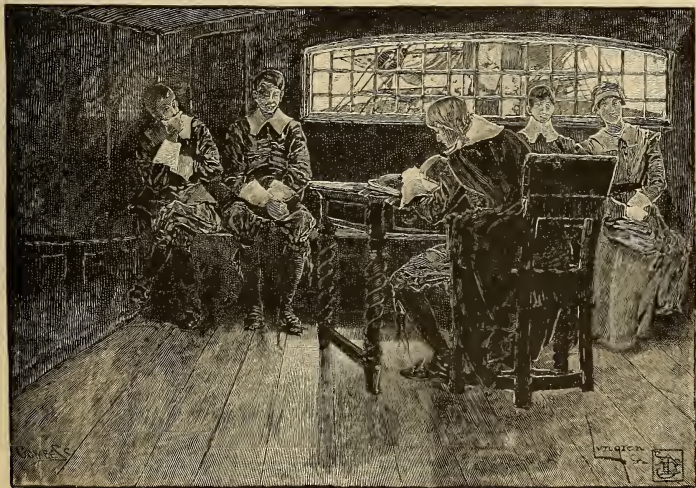
Munday the 25th day we went on shore to fell some timber, some to rive (hew), and some to carry. So no man rested all that day.

Munday the 25th, being Christmas Day, we began to drink water aboard, but at night the Master caused us to have some Beere, and so on board we had diverse times now and then some Beere, but on shore none at all.

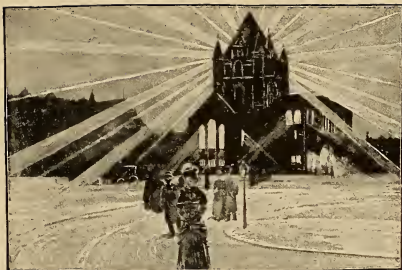
The Pilgrims were severely temperate, but on the rocking ship, with the wind beating against, and the rain freezing upon the masts, the Master of the ship, his heart warming with the memory of the merry Christmases of Old England, proffered to his stern and sorrowful passengers the best cheer he had at command. To this, it would seem, Carver, Bradford, Winslow and Standish did not object, although they would not allow their men to pass the Christmas in idleness and ease, when some of the men asked for a rest on the ancient holiday. We may imagine the scene under the swinging ship-lamp of that tempestuous night, and we must feel a thrill of friendliness and gratitude towards the Master of the vessel in whose heart stirred the Christmas sentiment, even if it could find no other expression than a draught of "beere."

There were dark and silent Christmases in the times of the Puritans. But the natural joy and glad observance of the gladdest event in the annals of earth soon began to grow; and now, under the light of the Bethlehem Star which rose eighteen centuries ago, all we in the wide West keep Christmas.

Shine on forever, O Star!



IN THE CABIN OF THE MAYFLOWER, A.D. 1620.



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