

"When I could bring you, Bobby," Stuart said.—"Thank you, madam, you are alive and have found your boy!"

"So you are the man who took my desolate son into your home and cared for him," said Mrs. Churchill. "Ah, how can I ever thank you!"

"I want to, thank you, madam," said Stuart dutifully. "The boy was sent to me—by Heaven, I think—just in time."

"I do not understand."

"No. Better you should not. He is the only ray of sunshine this dingy place has ever seen. I love him," he faltered. "Oh, you are not going to take him away?"

"I never could leave Billy, mother," cried Bobby, rushing over to Stuart.

"Billy, I won't go away from you."

"Billy—Billy—Stuart!" cried Mrs. Churchill, half-crying, half-bawling. "In the name of Heaven, take off that nose!"

Stuart tore off the mask and whiskers, flung off the buffalo robe and stood before her, bronzed, powerful, vital.

"Dorothy, how did you know me?"

"Why, you simpleton," she cried, putting her hands in his, "I knew you the moment you spoke."

"But I am dazed," he said, looking down on the radiant creature before him. "How is it you are alive?"

"Why," she gaily cried, "because I am not dead."

"Say," announced Bobby, "I'm going outside to try my sled. I'll be back in a few minutes. Now, Billy, you want to get that gobble in the oven?"

He banged the door behind him, and the two stood alone, looking in each other's eyes. "It's a simple story, Billy," she said, "and one as old as the hills. I divorced Robert. He then stole the child from me and brought him out to this country. I have been searching for him for years and at last I find him just where I could wish, Billy, in your home."

"Such a home!" he said bitterly.

"It has been the home of my child for a year," she tenderly replied, "and it will always be sacred to me."

"And you will carry him away?"

"I must have my boy."

"Ah!" Stuart turned dejectedly away, but a light touch on his arm arrested him.

"Billy, why—why can't you come too?"

"Do you mean that, Dorothy?"

"Yes," she said, with her heart in her eyes, "I have often regretted the past, bitterly. We were both to blame perhaps; but I did not treat you well."

With an inarticulate exclamation Stuart went toward her.

"Wait a moment," she said gently. "I can see that you have suffered privation and hardship here. Never mind, Billy, if you haven't made your pile. I have enough for both."

"Dorothy!"

"She was in his arms now, her silken head against his heart.

"Well," said Stuart with a gleam of mirth in his eyes, "we are not so blanked poor. My partner and I have just sold our claim to an English syndicate."

But she started from his arms, rosy and smiling, as Bobby burst in, dragging his sled.

"Say," he called, "and's grea... Is that turkey in the oven yet?"

"In one moment, kid," responded Stuart. "Come here and tell your mother how much the mine is going for."

Bobby approached them. "Two—hundred—thousand—cold—hard—plunks," he said in great importance.

"Plunks?" in pretty bewilderment.

"Dollars," solemnly.

"Two—hundred—thous—" she repeated slowly.—"Why, why, you are rich!"

"Yes," said Stuart in the most matter-of-fact fashion, "and so is my partner."

"Who is he, Billy?" with great interest.

Stuart took Bobby by the shoulders and stood him directly before his mother. "My partner, Dorothy," he said.

THE SUPERSTITIONS OF CHRISTMAS

A great Christian festival has its penumbra. Usually it shines through a haze of Pagan myths, which it was at first unable wholly to disperse, and which formed a halo, fantastic in colour, around the central fact. This has been specially the case with Christmas in Northern Europe, where it coincided roughly with the Teutonic and Scandinavian Yule. Indeed, in Norway, King Hakon Athelston's foster son deliberately altered the day of the beginning of the northern feast so as to make it coincide with the Christian festival, and imposed a fine to the Crown on every householder who did not brew a vat of ale against December 25th. There were three holy nights to Pagan Yule, and so at Christmas the Church had, after the Nativity, St. Stephen's, St. John's, and Innocents' Days. The Pagan Yule began with slaughtering cattle for the festivities and sacrifices; a kettle of blood was taken into the Temple and splashed over the images of the gods. During the Yule season, especially during the three holy nights, it was thought risky to go abroad, as then the gods and the dead raced about the world on the wind. Odin, the wild huntsman, with fire-breathing dogs, snaring souls and putting them in his huntsman's pouch, and the moon-eyed Tutusel, a white owl flying before him; Thor, also, in his chariot drawn by goats, whirling his hammer, and with his red beard streaming as auroral lights athwart the sky; Freyr, as well, riding on a boar; there were goddesses also, hunting with their hounds through the clouds, and in the train followed all the souls of those who had been hanged for crimes, and all the souls of little children, piping, waiting at the windows and in the chimneys.

The wind blows cold on waste and wold,
It bloweth night and day,
The souls go by, 'twixt earth and sky,
They tarry not nor stay,
They fly in clouds, and flap their shrouds,
Edging with the rattle sail,
At dawn of night, when lacketh light,
We hear them sob and wail.

And many a soul with shout and howl,
Both rattle and rattle at the door,
Or rave and rant, with dance and shout,
Around the lonely tower,
And eke a soul, 't' the chimney growl,
Edging with the rattle sail,
To wring the wet from winding sheet,
And gather warmth were fain.

To the present day, in the North of England, it is supposed that the waiving of the wind at the window, mainly at Christmas and New Year, is due to the souls of unbaptised children drifting on the wind, who sob when they see the fire flicker and the candles burn in Christian homes, to which they cannot enter to obtain light and heat, eye, and rest from driving with the gale.

It was probably to travesty the Pagan gods and their Yuletide ride that mummers were associated with Christmas. These were disguises, and an invariable concomitant is the old white horse that snaps its jaws. Sometimes a horse's skull is used, sometimes a hobby-horse is ridden.

This white horse at Yule is Odin's steed, Sleipnir; but all this is forgotten, and now the mummers sing a song about the poor old hunter neglected and left to die.

Oh, once I lay in stable, a hunter, well and warm,
I had the best of shelter, from cold and rain,
But now in open meadow, a hedge I'm glad to find,
To shield my sides from tempest, from driving sleet and wind,
Poor old horse, let him die!

But, apparently, before Christianity had laid hold of the Northern and other peoples of Europe, some sort of Yuletide mumming went on. Perhaps there was an idea that men must represent the gods in masquerade, for we find in two or three of the lives of early saints that they were nearly frightened out of their wits by having their cells invaded by parties of mummers representing the gods of the heathen world. In Yorkshire, the mummers insist on entering

the house, and they invade the kitchen, and brush the hearth, and see that all is clean and in order.

The heathen festival was to commemorate mid-winter, the solstice, the pause before the sun returned in fresh strength and light and warmth. The Icelandic Sagas teem with ghostly stories of the murderous power possessed by the dead who were free to walk and do all the evil they liked during the Yuletide nights; and the waits and carol singers owe their origin to the efforts of Christian people to ban the evil spirits, the wandering ghosts, and prevent them from doing injury in those nights when they have power. A curious custom exists in a good many Yorkshire towns, that of ringing the devil's knell at midnight at Christmas. There it is usual to toll the passing bell, giving a stroke to each year of life, then separately, after an interval, three, three, three for a man; three, three, two for a woman; three, three, two for a boy; and two, two, two for a girl.

Now, one Christmas Eve when I was curate at Horbury, near Wakefield, the first time I had been there, I had tumbled into bed at midnight, when I was startled by hearing the bell knell one hundred, then three, three, three. My bedroom looked out on the churchyard opposite the town. So I threw up the sash of the window, leant out, and awaited the sexton, in dismay at the idea of some parishioner having been allowed to die unvisited. When the ringer issued from the belfry door. "Joe!" I shouted, "who is dead?" He sniggered, and gave no articulate reply. "He must have been very old," said I. "Eh?" replied he; "I reckon 'twere 'fowd chap.'" "Fowd chap" is a delicate and expressive sobriquet for the devil.

The Christmas tree is an introduction from Germany—that is to say, the tree loaded with presents for children. But something like it existed formerly in England, but postponed to Twelfth Night. Home, in his "Table-Book," describes the custom as brought in Westmoreland, and gives an illustration. A holly or an ash tree was prepared with a torch attached to every bough. At eight o'clock in the evening it was carried through the town flaming at the end of every branch, attended by the town band.

To every branch a torch they tie,
To every torch a light apply;
At each new light send forth huzzas,
And the tree is to a blaze;
And then bear it flaming through the town
With minstrelsy and rockets thrown.

The Yule tree is really a reminiscence of the Pagan World-tree, called Ygdrassil, that had its roots in hell, and whose boughs reached to heaven, where they were hung with golden apples—the stars. The Fates sat at the root of the tree by a well spinning, and cutting short the lives of men.

The usual method of recalling Ygdrassil in England was the reverse of that employed in Germany and Scandinavia. There the tree was consecrated. The Star of Bethlehem was placed above it, and the cradle of the Holy Child, with ox and ass, was set at the foot. But in England the great World-tree was typified by the ashden faggot or Yule log; it was cut down as a figure of Paganism, destroyed, and was brought into the kitchen or hall and there burnt.

Nevertheless, the old mysterious tree could not be got so easily out of the minds of men. It thrust its way into every home, and, aye, into every church, as the holly with its scarlet berries, symbols of the branches of Ygdrassil, hung with the stars of heaven. The mistletoe has the same significance.

Another Christmas custom, now confined to a few college halls, is the bringing in of the boar's head, "bedecked with holly and rosemary," for the Christmas feast. This was universal in baronial and squirearchical halls. It is now replaced by the roast beef. But that head had its meaning, as the song

attending it shows plainly enough. That, like the ashden faggot, represented the triumph of Christianity over Paganism, for the head was that of the sacred beast on which Frayr rode through storm and snow at Yule. It was more—it was the head of the slaughtered beast offered in sacrifice in the temple at Yule, but now brought in "reddens laudes Domino," no longer to be the food of the gods, but for the delectation of men.

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