out merrily again, but his finger held in warning silenced her. He waited and listened. No sound. Again he listened, then he heard. What a different tread was this, so stealthy, so wary. Vice on tiptoe, of a truth. It came nearer. There was a whole world of meaning in each step. For this was a maiden crime, and it seemed as if the man's heart failed him, as if at the eleventh hour some good in him were fighting for supremacy and he were undecided whether to heed or no. Still he came on. Approach, pause, recoil! Then a despairing rush forward, and a mental oath to do or die, and the final step which brought him into the light of the doorway.

Still Amyot stayed behind the screen. There was a hole in it through which he could see. It was as he had surmised—the black bearded tramp, whom the week before he had seen in converse with Mrs Jee. But the tramp was white faced now, and shaking and silent. He stood transfixed at the sight of the child enshrined there, a very virginal image amid the radiance and the glitter of it all.

"Dod sees 'oo, dadda," she said.

"Dolly!" he gasped. "Dolly, Dolly, how did you come here?"

"Old 'ooman," she said, slipping from off the chair. "See, dadda, these pitty tings. Be kind old man div dis to Dolly."

The thief threw a terrified glance around. He looked at the gold and silver lying there in all profusion. Then he looked at the child, and again at the gold and silver. And then the child stepped up to him and placed the cup within his hand. He caught her up in his arms and pressed her to him with all the love he bore her. The silver cup fell to the ground. The child's eyes followed it. Her lip was pouting.

"Come, Dolly dear, come with dadda."

"Dolly want de pitty ting."

He hesitated. She begged him.

"No, dear child; the pretty thing belongs here. Dolly must not have it. Dadda must not take it."

"I am glad you have to come to that conclusion, Mr Jee."

With an exclamation the man turned. He hugged the child more closely to him. He saw the squire before him. He made as if to rush from the room, but he seemed powerless to move. And Dolly buried her little face in his shoulder, and cried, oh, so bitterly!"

"Had you not better finish what you came to do? Is that all you would take from here?" The squire was pointing to the child.

"Yes, all. I want nothing more."

"Yet I think you came for more, Mr Jee."

"Yes, I came for—for those things; but they are as nothing to me now. I have not touched them. How do you know my name? How came my dear child here?"

"Ask your mother. She will tell, unless I am much mistaken. This is your first crime—"

"I have committed no crime," said the man fiercely.

"Ah, a casuist, I see. But come, consider; I am alone in this house, and I am old; you had better complete your work."

"No." He hung his head.

"Dolly's so tiredy tiredy, Dadda." She nestled close in to the shoulder of her father. "Dod sees 'oo," she murmured, and murmuring it she went off to sleep.

The tears were rolling slowly down the lean face of the man. Still he held tight to the child. She was breathing so softly, sleeping so sweetly. He feared almost to move lest he should wake her. Yet he must go. How had she come there—whoever could it be? But thank God she was still his. And the awful thought came upon him—oh, the horror of it—that he was to lose her. They would take her from him, imprison him, punish him for crime, for crime; he, her father, a criminal! Oh, what had he done?

"My God," he said, as he realised it, "you will not send me to prison? Say, sir, speak, say you will not send me to prison? You will not take her from me. I have been starving, I am starving. God help me."

"God has helped you, man—helped you through that sweet child. Thank Him, thank her. I would not punish her- you can go."

"God bless you, sir."

"You had better follow me."

He extinguished the lamps in the strong room, and closed the door to, and led the way to his own room. At the end of the passage he paused. Dolly was still sleeping soundly.

"Now you can call your mother."

"My mother, sir!—my mother is at home."

"I think not. Call her, I say—or I will. Mrs. Jee, Mrs. Jee. . . ."

There was no answer. Yet he felt certain that she was there. He called again. Then slowly from out of a corner of the dark passage, the old woman emerged, her handkerchief was to her face, and she was crying bitterly. She laid one hand on the arm of her son.

"It was to save you from yourself, dearie—to save you from yourself. The dear, sweet child. I knew you could not do it wth her there."

"Come in, Mrs. Jee. You—" (turning to the man) "you had better eat."

"Sir, I—I—"

"Eat, man, I say, and drink."

He sat down to the table. But he did not let go the child. The woman took her from him, and laid her gently down. Tehn he ate and drank, oh, so gratefully. For he had starved—starved that the little one should feed when it had been that there was not for both.

For some minutes, silence. Once or twice little Dolly sighed. The Squire was in his chair, a very tumult in his heart—that heart they said was of stone. Oh, but he knew it was not, now more than ever he knew. Even though he should prove the direst ingrate he must look after this man henceforth. And his good mother, too, she must never want. What a good soul she was. And dear little Dolly, perhaps she had saved his life. Who knows? Dear little Dolly. If she had not been there. He did not like the thought, and banished it.

The clock on the mantel shelf struck twelve. How different it had all been two hours ago. It was still snowing and howling outside. They must not go into the bitter night. Hark: those were the bells. It was Christmas morn. The wind was that way: they sounded out so clear. He went to the window and looked out, the snow was ceasing, there was a rift in the sky. Was this night to mark a change in his life? He almost thought it was. There were dark figures there on the lawn standing all in line.

The carols, of course. So they had come in spite of what he had said, in spite of his revolver. Well, let them stay, let them sing. They were singing, he could hear them. They saw him at the window, and were coming nearer. What was it they sang?

> Mother Mary meek and lowly,
> Nurses now the sleeping Child;
> He is come, so pure and holy,
> To save us from temptation wild.

He looked at his dear little child—she should be his now to care for. How peacefully she slept. "Dod sees 'oo." Would he ever forget those words? The man, her father, was on his knees beside her. His arms were round her.

"For this and all His mercies to me a sinner, thank God," he cried.

And Gilbert Amyot said "Amen" to that.

A Christmas Hymn

No tramp of marching armies,
No banners flaming far;
A lamp within a stable,
And in the sky a Star.

Their hymns of peace and gladness
To earth the angels brought,
Their Gloria in Excelsis
To earth the angels taught;

When in the lowly manger
The Holy Mother Maid
In tender adoration
Her Babe of Heaven laid.

Born lowly in the darkness,
And none so poor as He,
The little children of the poor
His very own shall be.

No rush of hostile armies then,
But just the huddling sheep;
The angels singing of the Christ,
And all the world asleep.

No flame of conquering banners,
No legions sent afar;
A lamp within a stable,
And in the sky a Star.

Margaret E. Sangster.

In Cornwall Christmas eve is a special holiday with children, who are allowed to sit up till midnight and drink to the "Mock"—as the Yule log is called there.

Queer Rites of Yuletide.

PECULIAR MINGLING OF CHRISTIAN AND PAGAN CUSTOMS IN THE EAST.

PAST LIVES TO-DAY.

When a search is to be made for something new in the way of Christmas legends and observances, the best plan, though it may appear paradoxical, is to look for something old.

There are many Yuletide practices which in nearly all parts of Christendom fell into disuse centuries ago, but which are still in vogue yearly in certain remote places. The majority of the ancient observances have lived in story if not in fact, and to readers of Christmas lore they have become much more than a thrice-told tale. Others of the rites have been forgotten in western Europe and America; yet if the steps be turned at this season to the region of the Black Mountain, just beyond the Adriatic, there will be found a primitive condition of Christmas ceremonial that will delight the antiquarian.

The vicinity of Petrovatz in Bosnia is an ideal place for a debtor's residence. There, once a year at Christmastime, all debtors and creditors must come together and kiss one another. The debtors are supposed to pay their creditors if they can, but if they can't they make excuses to the creditors and the matter is declared off for another year. This seems to be a sort of pleasing "stand-him-off" arrangement that could be possible nowhere save among the guileless Easterners. This custom has prevailed in the countries to the east of Austria from a time to which man's memory runneth not.

A BLACK MOUNTAIN CHRISTMAS.

Lest any should suppose that the peasants of Bosnia and Montenegro, and especially those of the "Black Mountains" proper, do not earn their Christmas feast, it should be known that for six weeks before the anniversary of the Nativity the people do not put meat of any kind into their mouths. Perhaps nowhere else in the world can be found so curious an interningling of Christian and pagan rites at Yuletide. The peasants even mingle relics of ancestor worship with their observance of Christ's birthday. One of their practices at this season dates from a time when iron was unknown by their forbears.

The night before this Eastern people begin their six weeks' fast prior to Christmas day all the meat dishes in every house in the land are put upon the tables. When supper is ready each member of the family takes a bit of each kind of food and proceeds with it to the roof of the house, where it is placed as a potent charm against witches and uncanny spirits. This custom is traceable directly to a practice of extremely ancient times, when food was placed on the housetops as an offering to certain household spirits.

At the supper all the meat in the house is eaten, and if this prove to be a physical impossibility at one sitting the members of the household must needs rise in the middle of the night and finish the repast. After the meat has disappeared each partaker must rinse thoroughly his mouth, lest a bit of meat adhere to the teeth. The next day no one eats anything. If the fast be broken the culprit certain'y will be shot with arrows by the spirits. It is the duty on this day to pick out a pig, a sheep, or a goat to be fattened for the Christmas feast. The animal is killed the third day before Christmas, and no more terrible misfortune can happen to a peasant than not to have a "bloody knife" in his house on that day.

THE YULE LOG CUSTOM.

About the only Christmas practice which these Easterners seem to have in common with the peasants of western Europe and England is the cutting and burning of the Yule log. They carry the thing much further, however, even to-day, than the Saxons, the famous lovers of good Christmas cheer, ever did. In the Black Mountain there is a "great log for Christmas," and smaller logs for each member of the family.

The Yule log idea is traced to the fire worshippers. The wood must be cut before sunrise Christmas morning. The head of the house, followed by his family, goes to some standing stump and cuts it down. He then takes off his cap to the log, turns toward the east, crosses himself, and offers up a prayer: "Give to me and to Christmas abundantly, O God."

If a log falls the wrong way another must be cut, unless the family wishes to be unlucky for a year. Smaller logs are then cut for the members of the family. The wood is drawn to the house and leaned against the wall, with the cut ends uppermost. If one by mistake is reversed the whole thing must be done over again or else misfortune will come.

When the fire is lighted there is great joy in the household, but no one on any account must speak of witches after the great log is put on the fireplace, for they are supposed to be flying around on Christmas night as "plentiful as sparks."

THE FIREPLACE CHAIN.

There is a legend, and in fact a belief, in the Black Mountain, of which research shows no trace elsewhere. Every fireplace has hanging in it, directly over the blaze, a great kettle chain. When a fire is started it takes but a few moments for this chain to become highly heated. On Christmas night, however, no matter how briskly burn the great logs, the iron chain remains cool and pleasant to the touch. There is no Montenegro peasant but will tell you that this is a fact, and he knows it to be so for he has made a test of it on many succeeding Christmas nights. The coolness of the chain is accounted for by the statement that a similar chain hung over the fire built on the floor of the stable in Bethlehem, and that at the birth of Christ the Virgin Mother grasped it for support. It became cool at her touch lest it burn the saintly hand, and from that day to this there is no fire hot enough to heat the fireplace chain on Christmas.

The fire is lighted by means of kindling, bits of which are placed under the log by each member of the family.

KISSING OF EWES AND COWS.

After this the head of the house and the son who acts as the shepherd of the sheep flock to the stables with candles and light up each corner of the interior alternately. Then they return to the door, and, as each holds his candle high, the animals are driven in one by one. The household wife then sprinkles a little wine over the oldest female of each of the different species of live stock, and, having done this, kisses the animal on the head. This is a unique Christmas practice, and antiquarians have been able to find no reason for it, nor have they been able to set the time when it began.

This kissing ceremony over, the family "clucks" like a hen and "cheeps" like a chicken. This is said certainly to insure a plentiful increase of the fowls during the coming year.

It should have been said that before the fire is lighted the iron shovel and the poker are hidden away. The Christmas fire must be stirred only with a piece of wood. As soon as a piece falls from the end of the burning Yule log one of the sons of the family picks the bit up in his teeth and at the imminent danger of being burned carries it thus into the yard and there drops it. Now of a certainty no witches can get in during the Christmas festivities.

The carcass of the Christmas feast—sheep, pig, or gont—is roasted whole. In carving it no rib of the creature must be broken. Otherwise a dire calamity is in store for the family. A cake is baked on the hearth, and as soon as the spot where it was cooked is cool each member of the family puts his bare foot on the place, and is thus insured against blistered feet for a year.

When writing of Saxon Christmas legends and old Christmas ceremonials one writes in the past almost wholly. In the Black Mountain region the oldtime customs are the customs of to-day, and time seems to have been unable to change their infinite variety.

Three thousand marriages are performed every day all over the world.