

the jolting—a black figure, that seemed neither to hear the insults of its persecutors nor feel the keen lash of the whip that quivered above it. It almost rolled off as they passed the herdsman's cottage, and a halt was made to rearrange the order of procession into the town. The quiet form on the hurdle was rudely seized and flung once more into its former position. Then the lanterns were flashed upon it with many curses; and, to secure it better, a rope was roughly tied across.

To his horror, Patrick O'Boyle saw the wasted, blood-stained face of Father John—whose Mass he had served but a short while before. He gave a gasp and sank back unconscious. When he awakened the gold streaks of dawn were shooting across the eastern sky, and Christmas Day had again borne its message of peace and goodwill to the world. As he rose, dazed and weary, the recollection of the tragedy he had witnessed flashed upon his mind; but his heart cried out that it could not be, this cruel, cruel deed, and refused to believe.

His wife met him beyond their doorstep, her eyes full of tears and anguish.

'Is the priest safe below, Mary?' he called as she neared him; but she shook her head in speechless grief. By degrees, as he strove to soothe her, he learned the fate that had befallen the poor old soggarth. He had been overtaken by the yeomen as he tried to cross Hamilton's Meadow, a short cut that would save him a mile's tramp by the road. They had seen him moving along in the shadow of the hedge, and gave chase. It was an easy capture; and then they tied him, buffeted and scourged, to a hurdle and dragged him over ditch and roadway. His soul had escaped before they reached the Crossroads; so it was no imaginary spectacle Patrick O'Boyle had looked upon, but the dead priest himself—dear old Father John,—beyond all earthly hurt or harm.

'I shall not pray bad prayers on them,' said Patrick O'Boyle, when the sad recital was ended; 'for I served his Christmas Mass last night, which he stopped here to say on his flight toward heaven. I saw the forgiveness in his eyes, and I'll never forget it; and, for his sake, I can only cry with him, "Forgive THEM, Father, for they know not what they do!"'

When the herdsman returned to his home on St. Stephen's Day he found it just as he had left it. There was no sign of a chalice anywhere, and up in the rafters the old priest's vestments lay safe and undisturbed.

'Oh, keep those days, those Penal days!  
Their memory still on Ireland weighs.'

—'Ave Maria.'

## CHRISTMAS LEGENDS

A French legend, observes F. W. Hackwood, F.R.S.L., in 'Christ Lore' (Elliot Stock), says that when the Infant Jesus lay in the manger, the rose-coloured sainfoin was found amongst the herbs which composed his bed. But suddenly it opened its pretty blossom that it might form a wreath around His head. In Italy there is a practice at Christmas time of decking mangers with moss, sow-thistle, cypress, and holly. Another legend, of English origin, informs us that by the fountain in which the Virgin washed the swaddling clothes of the Sacred Infant beautiful bushes sprang up miraculously on either hand.

It was an old English belief that on Christmas night all evil spirits were rendered harmless. If any spirits were abroad they were sure to be good ones, and these have even been known to ring the church bells, and, in imitation of the angelic choir, render the 'Gloria in Excelsis.'

'When Christ was born of Mary free  
In Bethlehem, that fair citie,  
Angels sang there with mirth and glee  
In Excelsis Gloria.'

From the song which the angels sang to the shepherds at the Nativity, commonly called the Angelic Hymn, is derived the custom of singing Christmas carols.

The unreasoned mirth and jollity of Christmas in the olden time were permitted by the sway of the Lord of Misrule—called in Scotland the Abbot of Unreason—prohibited in 1555. The fun was promoted by the pranks of mock dignitaries, aided by maskers as dragons and hobby horses and bands of musicians (who all went to church first), with as much noise and confusion as possible.

Among the more popular customs of Christmastide are those of eating mince pies and plum puddings. In some parts of Christendom it is believed that cocks crow all night to scare away evil spirits. In other places bees are said to sing, and yet in others cattle are believed to receive for the time being the power of speech.

'Some say that ever 'gainst that season comes  
Wherein our Saviour's birth is celebrated,  
The bird of dawn singeth all night long;  
And then they say no spirit dare stir abroad;  
The nights are wholesome; then no planets strike,  
No fairy takes, nor witch hath power to charm;  
So hallowed and so gracious is the time.'

In many parts of England it was thought that at midnight on Christmas Eve the oxen went down upon their knees as if in the attitude of adoration.

The period of Christ's birth happening to take place when (in the northern hemisphere, at least, where all these ancient legends originated) the vegetation was under the sway of winter, the rare and occasional occurrence of certain trees and shrubs throwing out their leaves at this unseasonable period was accepted by early Christians as a sign of holy joy in the commemoration of the great anniversary. An oak of the early budding species enjoyed the reputation for two centuries of shooting forth its leaves on Old Christmas Day, although no leaf was to be seen either before or after that day in winter. Similar is the legend of the Glastonbury Thorn, which tells that Joseph of Arimathea, after having landed at no great distance from Glastonbury, walked to a hill about a mile from the town. Being weary, he sat down here with his companions, the hill henceforth being called Weary-all Hill, locally abbreviated into Warral. Whilst resting Joseph stuck his staff into the ground, and it promptly took root and grew into a beautiful flowering thorn, which blossomed every Christmas Day. Previous to the time of Charles I a branch of the famous thorn was carried in procession with much ceremony every Christmas Day. It developed two stems exactly identical. During the Civil War a Puritanical Hewedown thought the thorn savoured of Popery; so he sallied forth with his hatchet to cut it to bits. One stem was soon hewn to pieces, but at the first blow he aimed at the other the axe glanced from the bark and cut off one of the tree-feller's legs. In this miraculous manner was the Glastonbury Thorn preserved, and its offspring has continued to flower on or about Christmas ever since.

## CHRISTMAS EVE IN A BRETON VILLAGE

I remember in particular a midnight Mass which I attended one Christmas Eve in the church of an old Breton village, where we were spending the holidays (says a writer in the New York Tribune). The sacred and storm-beaten edifice, when we entered it shortly before midnight, was filled to overflowing with kneeling and picturesquely-arrayed peasants. On the right side of the altar a bower had been made of fragrant pine and fir branches, with great bunches of crimson-berried holly and waxy mistletoe glistening among the verdure. Under this canopy there sat on a low stool a young girl of great beauty, with her long black hair falling in silky masses on her loose white garments. In her arms she held an infant. Beside her stood a young man, wearing a gold-embroidered robe and leaning on a heavy staff, while an ox, a donkey, and four sheep were quietly munching corn from a couple of mangers.

The celebration of the Mass began. A small chorister chanted the 'Puer natus est nobis.' (For to us a child is born.) The deep bass voice of another grown-up chorister, hidden somewhere in the fir-branches bower above described, gave the response of 'Ubi?' (Where?) A tenor chorister concealed near the sheep added the word 'Bethlehem,' and then a baritone voice answered 'Eamus.' (Let us go thither.) Thereupon the priest, his acolytes, and the entire congregation formed into a procession and marched to the fir-tree bower, where the representation of the Nativity had been arranged. The priest, having sprinkled both the mother and child as well as the animals with holy water, we all followed the kindly old rector to the chief entrance of the church. The scene there was one which I shall never forget. All the cattle and flocks of the village had been driven into the old churchyard, and stood there crowded together in the silvery light of a full moon, around