

CHRISTMAS LEGENDS

Christmas morn, the legends say,
Even the cattle kneel to pray;
Even the beasts of wood and field
Homage to Christ the Saviour yield.

Horse and cow and woolly sheep,
Wake themselves from their heavy sleep,
Bending heads and knees to Him,
Who came to earth in a stable dim.

Far away in the forest dark
Creatures timidly wake and hark;
Feathered bird and furry beast
Turn their eyes to the mystic East.

Loud at the dawning, Chanticleer
Sounds his note, the rest of the year;
But Christmas Eve the whole night long,
Honoring Christ he sings his song.

Christmas morn, the legends say,
Even the cattle kneel to pray;
Even the wildest beast afar
Knows the light of the Saviour's star.

And shall we, for whom He came,
Be by the cattle put to shame?
Shall we not do so much at least,
As the patient ox or the forest beast?

Christmas morn, oh, let us sing
Honor and praise to Christ the King;
Sheltered first in a lowly shed,
And cradled there where the cattle fed.

the mention of a story Tom's eyes glistened. He looked around the group of expectant listeners, and probably revolved in his mind that each of us had a good distance of lonely road to cover in order to reach our homes. 'No,' he said, as if regretfully, 'I won't tell you the story of the adventure I had one Christmas Eve night in the Australian bush. Most of you would be afraid to venture out of the house to-night if I did.' If Tom really meant so that he could possibly have adopted, but probably he only meant to sharpen our curiosity by this preamble. At any rate, we coaxed, pleaded, and insisted by turns, until in the end he relented. Before commencing, however, he advised any of us who were timorous when travelling by night to take our departure at once. Some of the younger visitors who lived far away along the lonely road through the moss' looked at one another, but no one stirred.

Tom's story was indeed weird and awe-inspiring. When he finished you could have heard a pin drop in the cottage. Some of the audience shifted uneasily on their chairs, and glanced furtively at the old 'wag-o'-the-wall,' which now pointed to 11.30. I fancy that most of them were sorry that they had not made an excuse to take their departure before Tom commenced his story. The lull that followed was broken by Jim Bryan, who had spent a few years in America, and since his return had affected a superior air and a Yankee accent.

'I guess it must have been a hyena or wandering kangaroo,' he drawled, 'and you imagined it was a ghost because you were frightened.'

Tom looked across the hearth at Jim with a contemptuous pitying smile. The rest of us also looked at Jim,



A CLUMP OF FERNS, POUNAWEA.

A CHRISTMAS EVE ADVENTURE

'Twas a wild night, even for Christmas Eve. From early morning a blinding snow-storm had been increasing in force and violence, and now at late bedtime we gathered round the pleasant fire in Tom Connor's kitchen to await the fairing' before venturing homewards. When I say 'we,' I mean the dozen or so of the young men of Drumnadarragh that were regular nightly visitors to Tom Connor's of the Cross Roads. On this particular night there were several extra casuals, as Tom's was a noted house for Yuletide games and amusements, and Tom himself was one of the finest story-tellers in the country. Though now a staid and settled country carpenter, making gates and doors and wheel-barrows for the homely neighbors in Drumnadarragh, he had been a rolling-stone in his day, and had seen life and experienced strange adventures in many foreign lands. He never was known to tell the same story twice, and yet his stock was never exhausted. This fact set some of the sceptics a-whispering—behind Tom's back, of course—that, perhaps, not all of our host's alleged adventures were real. But whether real or imaginary, they were, at any rate, always interesting, and no one dared to openly question their reliability.

At the usual time for dispersing, someone suggested that we should stop till twelve o'clock and visit the stable where Tom kept his donkey, in order to prove or disprove the popular belief that donkeys always go down on their knees at midnight on Christmas Eve. And so we ranged ourselves in a large semi-circle round the fire, and requested Tom to fill in the interval with an appropriate story. At

and marvelled at his audacity to hint at such a thing before Tom.

'You don't believe in ghosts, then?' said Tom quietly. 'Well, I rather guess not,' replied Jim. 'I've never yet seen one, though I have seen some strange things in Chicago in my time.'

'You wouldn't be afraid of one, I suppose,' said Tom, with a note of sarcasm in his tone.

'Not at all,' boasted Jim; 'I guess I'd rather enjoy meeting a real live ghost.'

'To-night?' persisted Tom.

'Yes, to-night,' said Jim, with perhaps a shade less enthusiasm in his tone.

'Then, it's a bargain. Now, boys,' said Tom, turning to us, 'you all know that since the old squire died the Hall is deserted. No one can live in it on account of the unearthly noises that in the dead of night are heard in its rooms and corridors. I heard them myself the night I ran for Father John to attend old Mrs. Boyle—God rest her soul—and when I couldn't take time to go round by the old road. If Mr. Bryan (Tom always said "Mr." when he wanted to be more than usually sarcastic) is so eager to make the acquaintance of a real live ghost, he has now the chance of his life. It is only about a mile to the Hall, and he will be there shortly after midnight—just the most suitable time for a ghostly appointment.'

Jim did not seem to relish this turn of events, but having made his boast, he could not very well refuse the challenge without being accused of cowardice. 'But,' said Jim, 'suppose I explore every room in the Hall to-night, how are you to know for certain that I did so? Won't you say that I didn't go near the place or stopped short at the gate lodge?'