



It was a stormy Christmas Eve, and the little town of Tromsø was completely enveloped in the ermine mantle of mid-winter. Snow had been falling all day, and as the night ap-

proached, large flakes were still being driven hither and thither by the furious wind, which howled and roared in the chimneys, shook the carefully closed windows, and died away in the distance like the last despairing wail of a lost soul.

In one of the most miserable houses of a wretched street, in the worst quarter of the town, a woman by the dim light of a flickering candle watched beside the sick-bed of her last remaining child. She was weeping bitterly, but strove to stifle her sobs for fear of disturbing the fitful slumbers of the sufferer. As the furious tempest shook the dilapidated tenement, she trembled as if she already felt the dread presence of the Angel of Death. No Christmas fagot blazed on the miserable hearth, the happy voices of laughing children and kind friends had for her long been stilled, and the cold, sorrow, and poverty which reigned within seemed but a counterpart of the desolation without. Behind the lowered curtains of the bed could be heard from time to time the short cough and labored breathing of the child, who at last, suddenly awakening, raised herself on her elbow, and looked across the room, where, as in a vision, she again beheld the Christmas trees of her earlier years, with their accompaniments of tapers, bon-bons, toys and golden stars, gleaming amid the darkness of that somber room. She was a young girl of twelve or fourteen years of age, and the sweet, pale face, although in the last stage of emaciation, still retained traces of delicate youthful beauty.

With her dying voice she still continued to talk of the fete-days of long ago, when she was a rosy, healthy little child, and her brothers and sisters, Eric, John, Anton, Hilda and Bertha, crowded around her with their pretty Christmas offerings; when her father danced her on his knee, and her mother sang sweet lullabies by her cradle. Those days seemed far away. Eric and her father had perished in a shipwreck; then, one by one, the others had followed, till death had left behind only the grim sisters, sickness and misery, as the sole companions of the widow and her child.

The vivid remembrance of past happiness had brought a strange light into Greta's eyes, and soon these childish reminiscences gave place to hope. She spoke of the spring which would bring back the birds and flowers, and in giving life to all else would surely not entirely forget herself.

"You know, mother, the doctor said that, when the roses came, my sufferings would be over. Will the roses soon be in bloom?"

"I have seen some already," replied the mother; "the governor's wife and daughter had them in their hair when I saw them get into the carriage, but those roses, I think, only grow in the hot-houses of the rich."

There was silence, broken only by Greta's short cough. All at once, carried away by one solitary fixed idea, such as so often haunts the brain of the sick, she began to talk again about the roses, to pine sorrowfully for their possession, and by alternate beseeching, coax-

ing and commanding she at last induced her mother to go out in search of some for her.

The poor woman left the bedside possessed with the one desire of pacifying her child, and traversed the streets with weary steps, debating in her mind what excuse she would make on her return for not having procured that which she felt was entirely beyond her reach. With bowed head and sorrowful heart she kept repeating to herself the words of the physician, so full of hope for Greta: "At the coming of the first roses she would suffer no more;" and well as she guessed the mournful meaning of the prophecy, she could not help being inspired for an instant by that spirit of hope which buoyed up her child. Quickening her steps, she took the road as if by a sudden inspiration toward the governor's house, hesitated as she reached the brilliantly lighted mansion, but at last, taking courage, knocked timidly at the door, which was immediately opened by a man-servant.

"What do you want, my good woman?"

"To speak to Madame Paterson."

"I cannot disturb madame at such an hour of the night."

"Oh! I implore you, let me see her!"

The servant repulsed the poor mother, and was about to shut the door in her face when Madame Paterson and her daughter, with roses in their hair and on their bosoms, crossed the hall, paused to question the servant, and then approached the widow, who briefly and tearfully told her pathetic story.

"O, madame! O, mademoiselle! I implore you to give me one rose, only one, for my dying child! God, who gave His son for the redemption of the world, will reward you."

Madame Paterson shrugged her shoulders with a mocking laugh, and passed on. Her daughter, the brilliant Edele, remarked that her father did not buy roses for their weight in gold, to throw them away upon street beggars.

The door closed, and the woman turned toward her home. On passing the Church of Sainte-Britta, she perceived the clergyman's wife laying large bouquets of roses on the altar, full blown blooms of rich red, as well as branches of exquisite buds of blush, orange and pink.

The lady formed a sweet picture as she bent over and arranged the floral treasures sent her by a rich parishioner of her husband's. Her blue eyes sparkled with delight, and her voice was soft and silvery. She was the mother of six lovely children, and the widow felt that she would surely pity her in her bitter grief. Full of these hopeful thoughts, she entered the church, approached the altar, and preferred her modest request for one rose wherewith to gladden the eyes of her dying child.

Madame Neils, although by no means devoid of kindly feeling, was proud in her own way, and had determined that Sainte-Britta should be the best decorated church in the town. In what she mistook for pious enthusiasm, she forgot that the only true temple of God is the human heart—that a charitable action is more precious in his sight than the costliest earthly offerings which can be laid on his material altar. In the ardor of her outward devotion, she forgot that Christ had himself declared, "Inasmuch as ye have done it unto one of the least of these my brethren, ye have done it unto me," and in her mistaken zeal she avowed that it would be little less than sacrilege to rob the altar of God of even one fair blossom. Upon so

great and joyful a festival as Christmas, it showed, she added, a lamentable lack of religious feeling to prefer such a request. She pointed out that poverty, sickness and death were sent by God himself, and that the true Christian should submit to them, not merely without a murmur, but joyfully, kissing the rod in remembrance of the gracious declaration, "As many as I love I rebuke and chasten." She offered to call on the following day for the purpose of exhorting Greta to submit to the will of God with entire resignation.

The mother had now lost all hope, and was returning to her home in a still more desponding frame of mind than that in which she had quitted it. She walked on as in a dream, scarcely noticing the fast falling snow, while longing with an intensity bordering on agony that she might have been able to procure even a few common flowers for her Greta. But none were to be found. Even the snowdrops hid themselves in the bosom of the earth, and no primrose nor violet would be seen for months. Thus sorrowfully musing, she continued her walk, and in a few minutes would have reached her miserable home, when by the light of her lantern she saw a few green leaves peeping from the foot of a hedge which enclosed a garden in the neighborhood. Stopping down, she scraped away the snow with her hand. Yes, there were leaves, large and lustrous, under which she found a few green blossoms, some full blown, others in bud, but all pale, small and without color, perfume or beauty.

"Ah!" thought she, "as there were no roses to be procured, these little flowers have been sent that my child may be spared the pain of knowing that there are hearts so cold and hard that no woes of others can soften them, and who care for no sorrows except their own!"

As she hastened onward, the deep-toned bell struck the hour of midnight and the joyous Christmas chimes broke

XMAS DECORATIONS.

We Have Copied the Customs of Now Christian Countries.

Among the votaries of the early Druids there was a superstition that the houses should be decorated with evergreens in December, in order that the Sylvan spirits might enter them and thus be kept free from the blast of the cold North wind and the frost until a milder season renew the foliage of their usual haunts. The Christmas tree is really from Egypt, where the palm tree puts forth a branch every month, and where a spray of this tree with twelve shoots on it, was used in Egypt at the time of the Winter solstice, as a symbol of the year completed.

Who does not know the poem beginning The mistletoe hung in the castle hall, The holly branch shone on the old oak wall.

Years ago over every man's door in England hung a sprig of mistletoe at this season. There still hovers a mystic charm about the mistletoe, and many a girl now, with a thrill of expectancy, places a branch of it under the chandelier or over the door. According to a former belief, when a girl is caught and kissed under a mistletoe a berry must be picked off with each kiss, and when the berries have all been plucked the privilege ceases.

Among the ancient Britons the mistletoe that grows on the oak tree was the kind held in favor. Because of its heathen origin it is not used often in church decorations, a fact which is referred to by Washington Irving in his "Bracebridge Hall," where he has the learned parson rebuke the unlearned clerk for this very thing.

In Germany and Scandinavia the holly or holy tree is called Christ's thorn, because it puts forth its berries at Christmas time, and therefore is especially fitted for church decorations.



Aunt—So Xmas Day is your birthday, Harold. What are you going to have? Harold—Well, mamma said I can have either a party or a Xmas-tree. Aunt—And which did you choose? Harold—Oh, a party, of course—because I can't hang girls on a tree.

The Christmas Tree.

Only a star! a shining star! More glorious than our planets are, But watched by wistful eyes and bright, And longing hearts, that wondrous night.

Only a manger, shadow-thronged, That to some public inn belonged, Where sweet breathed cattle quietly For midnight slumber bent the knee.

Only the light of tapers small, That on two tender faces fall, Two tender faces—one divine— That still through all the centuries shine.

From palace walls, from thrones of gold, From churches, shrines, cathedrals old, Where the grand masters of their art Wrought faithfully with hand and heart.

Only a babe! in whose small hand Is seen no sceptre of command, But at whose name, with Freedom's sword, Move the great armies of the Lord.

Only a cross! but oh, what light Shines from God's throne on Calvary's height! His birth, His life, the angels see, Written on every Christmas tree.

—M. A. Denison.

The Yule Log.

A custom at one time prevalent in England, and still observed in some of the northern districts of the old country, is that of placing an immense log of wood—sometimes the root of a great tree—in the wide chimney-place. This log is often called the yule log, and it was on Christmas Eve that it was put on the wide hearth. Around it would gather the entire family, and its entrance was the occasion of a great deal of ceremony. There was music and rejoicing, while the one authorized to light it was obliged to have clean hands.

It was always lighted with a brand left over from the log of the previous year, which had been carefully preserved for the purpose. A poet sings of it in this way:

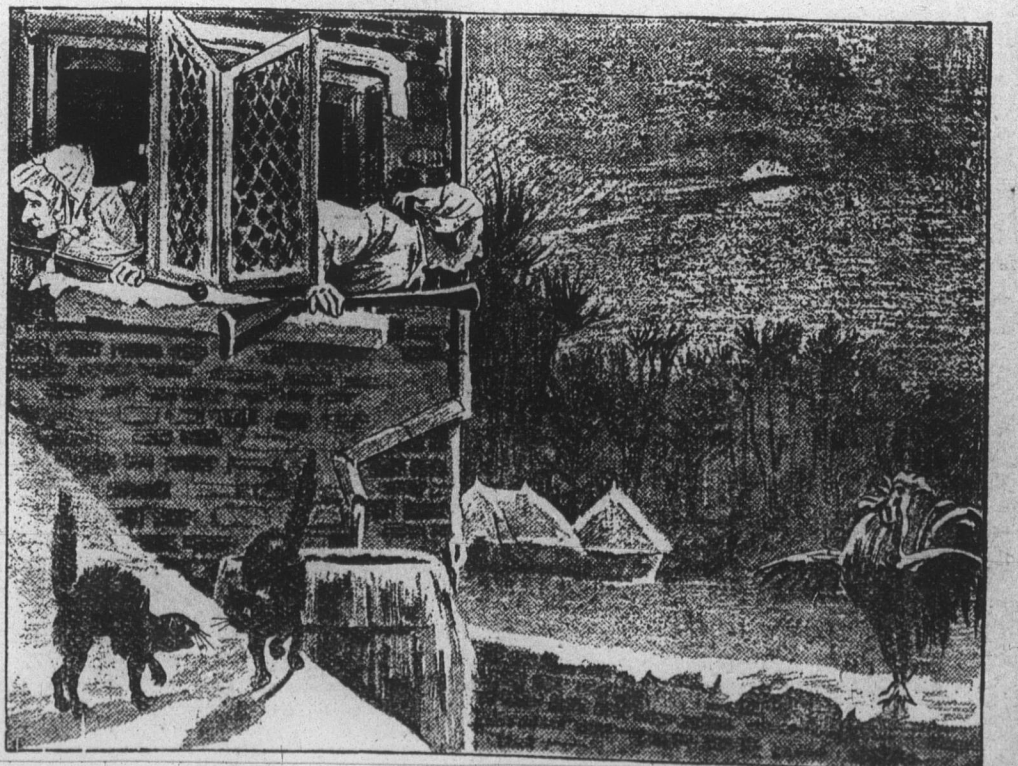
With the last yeere's brand Light the new block, and For good success in his spending, On your psalteries play, That sweet luck may Come while the log is a teending.

The Yule log was supposed to be a protection against evil spirits, and it was considered a bad omen if the fire went out before the evening was over. The family and guests used to seat themselves in front of the brightly burning fire, and many a story and merry jest went round the happy group.

Merry Christmas.

Christmas ought to be the merriest day of the year. From the busy man to the little child, let the cheerful greeting, "Merry Christmas," ring out gladly to all. Christmas is the time when, after weeks of expectancy, Santa Claus appears to the dear children. The time has come for the hanging up of stockings, and many bright eyes will look on Christmas morn up the chimney for a glimpse of Santa Claus "and his eight tiny reindeer." The days will come when belief in the beautiful myth of Santa Claus will disappear, but let it last so long as it can and gladden the hearts of happy childhood.

SOME CHRISTMAS WAITS.



The Tramp's Christmas.

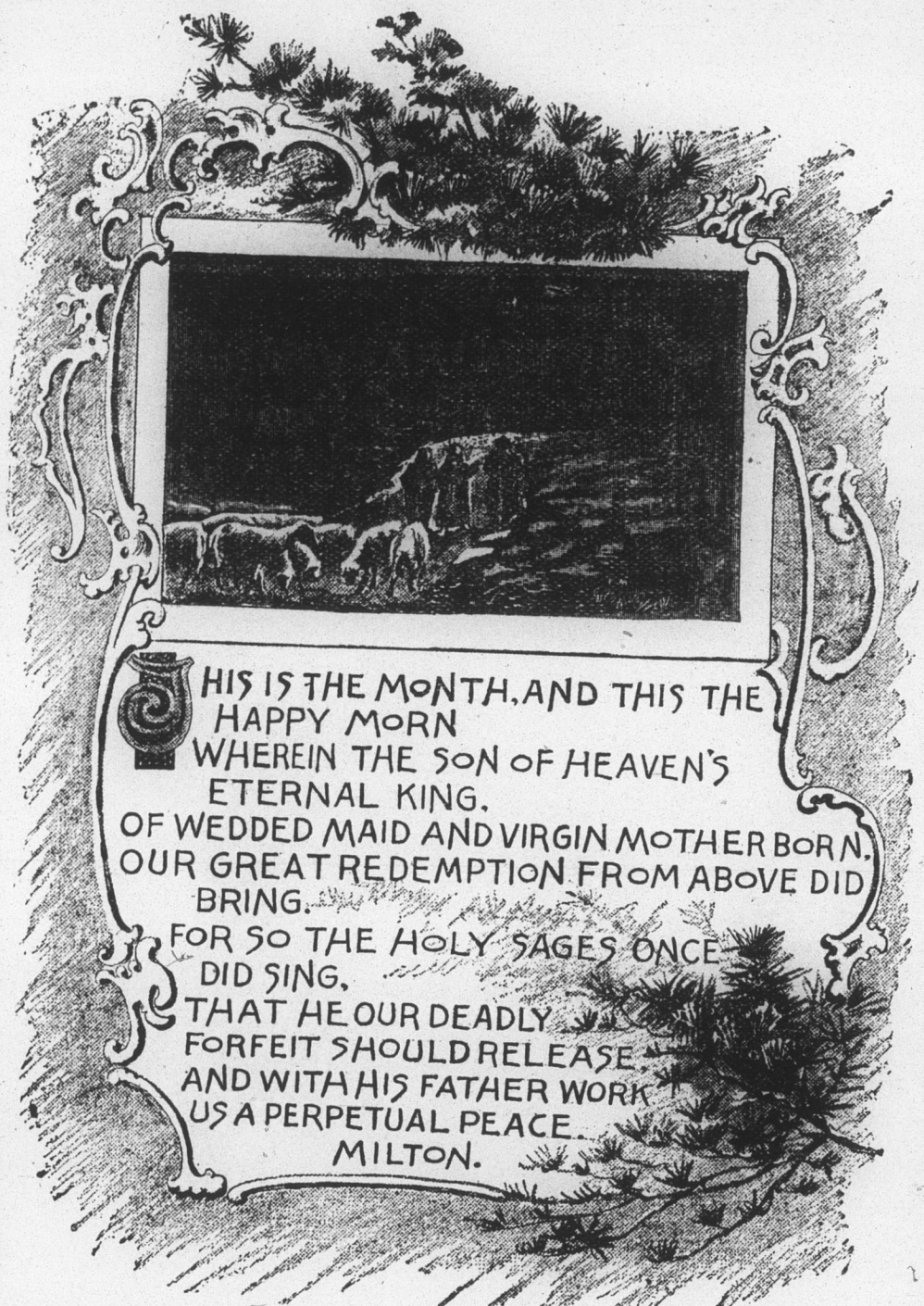
"Silas," said Mrs. Ulogue, wiping her tear-dimmed eye with the corner of her gingham apron, "this is the anniversary of the day our son William disappeared from home after you reprimanded him for staying out late o' nights playing pool or something."

"Yes," assented her husband, sharpening the carver preparatory to dissecting a nicely browned turkey. "It is exactly ten years since he went away, and without just cause, too."

"But don't you think you were a little hard on him, Silas? It was only 3 o'clock in the morning when he came home, and boys will be boys."

"He made a mistake in goin' away," replied Silas, clipping off a wing: "an' I guess no one knows that better than William by this time."

"Maybe so, but I had a strange dream about our absent boy last night, and something tells me that he is coming home, like the prodigal son, and I have put an extra plate on the table, at the place where he always sa— But



on her ear. Kneeling reverently on the snowy ground, the mother's heart went up in gratitude, and she prayed the All-Merciful One to look with pitying eyes on her sweet and cherished Greta, pressing the humble flowers to her bosom. In another moment, she had risen and passed onward with her treasure.

As she drew back the curtain to offer the dark leaves and little green blossoms to her darling, she made a discovery which startled her. They had given place to large, exquisite white blossoms tinged with a delicate pink.

"Roses! roses!" cried Greta, "O, mother, who gave them to you?"

"It was a Christmas present," replied the astonished mother.

At the sight of these lovely Christmas roses, the dying girl bowed her head, and softly kissed each precious blossom. Then she fell back on her pillow with a sigh. "The light that was never on land or sea" came into the beautiful blue eyes, and her lips half-opened with a radiant smile. The prophecy of the doctor was fulfilled. The roses had appeared, and her sufferings were ended. Her pure young spirit had passed upward in one ecstatic burst of love and thanksgiving.

Since that time (long ago) the plant which grows under the hedges, beneath the snows of winter, has continued to produce beautiful white blossoms and retained the name of "The Christmas Rose," which was given to it by the good women of Tromsø.

The Fate of a Gift.

On Christmas morning I gave her, With a reckless impulse, my heart. The gift had a loving savor, And she took it in kindly part.

But it was a present and, therefore, I'm afraid it lies on the shelf; It was something she didn't care for, And something I wanted myself.



CHRISTMAS MEMORIES.